

‘I want to tell the story again’:
Re-telling in Selected Novels by Jeanette Winterson and Alan Warner

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Abstract

This thesis investigates acts of ‘re-telling’ in four selected novels by Jeanette Winterson and Alan Warner. Re-telling, as I have defined it, refers to the re-imagining and re-writing of existing narratives from mythology, fairy tale, and folktale, as well as the re-visioning of scientific discourses and historiography. I argue that this re-telling is representative of a contemporary cultural phenomenon, and is evidence of a postmodern genre that some literary theorists have termed re-visionary fiction. Despite the prevalent re-telling of canonical stories throughout literary history, there is much evidence for the emergence of a specifically contemporary trend of re-visionary literature.

Part One of this thesis comprises two chapters which deal with Winterson’s *Sexing the Cherry* (1989) and *Weight* (2005) respectively. In these chapters, I argue that, although the feminist and historiographic elements of her work are significant, there exist further motivations for Winterson’s acts of re-telling in both *Sexing the Cherry* and *Weight*. In Chapter One, I analyse Winterson’s subversion and re-imagining of historiography, as well as her re-telling of fairy tale, in *Sexing the Cherry*. Chapter Two provides a discussion of Winterson’s re-telling of the myth of Atlas from Greek mythology, in which she draws on the discourses of science, technology, and autobiography, in *Weight*.

Part Two focuses on Warner’s first two novels, *Morvern Callar* (1995) and *These Demented Lands* (1997). In both novels, Warner re-imagines aspects of Christian, Celtic and pagan mythology in order to debunk the validity of biblical archetypes and narratives in a contemporary working-class setting, as well as to endow his protagonist with goddess-like or mythical sensibilities. Chapter Three deals predominantly with Warner’s use of language, which I argue is central to his blending of mythological and contemporary content, while Chapter Four analyses his use of myth in these two novels.

This thesis argues that while both Winterson and Warner share many of the aims associated with contemporary re-visionary fiction, their novels also exceed the boundaries of the genre in various ways. Winterson and Warner may, therefore, represent a new class of re-visionary writers, whose aim is not solely to subvert the pre-text but to draw on its generic discourses and thematic conventions in order to demonstrate the generic and discursive possibilities inherent in the act of re-telling.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Teresa and Derek Collett, both of whom made me a reader, and to my Grandmothers, Alicia and Jinx, both of whom made me a writer.

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**‘I want to tell the story again’:
Re-telling in Selected Novels by Jeanette Winterson and Alan Warner**

Beneath the sheets of paper lies my truth
[. . .]
Your hair was long, when we first met.
Samson went back to bed, not much hair left on his head
He ate a slice of Wonderbread and went right back to bed.
And the history books forgot about us
And the Bible didn't mention us
And the Bible didn't mention us
Not even once.
[. . .]
Samson came to my bed
Told me that my hair was red
Told me I was beautiful and came into my bed
Oh I cut his hair myself one night
A pair of dull scissors in the yellow light
And he told me that I'd done alright
And kissed me till the morning light
[. . .]

(Regina Spektor, “Samson”)

The above lyrics – written and performed by singer and song writer Regina Spektor – re-tell the biblical story of Samson from the perspective of the archetypal harlot, Delilah. At first glance this song, a film such as *Apocalypse Now* (1979), the animated *Shrek* series and the animated film *Hoodwinked* (2006), as well as various novels by John Fowles, Salman Rushdie, J.M Coetzee, and short stories by Angela Carter, seem to bear little relation to each other, or to the work of Jeanette Winterson and Alan Warner. Yet these songs, films and authors all share a common characteristic: a preoccupation with the innovative, and often transgressive, re-telling of existing narratives.

Re-telling – a term deployed by Winterson in her introduction to her recent novella *Weight* (2005) – refers to the re-imagining, reworking, and re-writing of narratives from literature, mythology, fairy tale, folktale, scientific discourses, and historiography.¹ Significantly, all of the above examples were produced in the last fifty to sixty years. In fact,

¹ Here historiography designates the study or textual representations of history by historians, while history refers to the actual events which took place.

the selected texts above are representative of a contemporary cultural phenomenon, and are evidence of the postmodern trend towards what some literary theorists have termed re-visionary fiction. As Peter Widdowson and Liedeke Plate contend, re-visionary fiction refers to a sub-genre of literature which involves the re-telling or revising of existing narratives within contemporary novels. My interest in contemporary re-telling has been shared and recognised by both authors and literary critics alike, and contemporary texts which utilise and re-tell narratives span from the 1960s to the current century.

Re-telling, it must be said, is not a new phenomenon. It is fairly obvious that the re-imagining and reworking of narrative is as ancient as narrative itself. In either subtle or dramatic ways, re-telling has always been employed as a narrative device in the storytelling process. It occurs in the oral traditions of many cultures when a story is passed from speaker to speaker and generation to generation. In literary tradition it takes place within specific genres such as travesty and parody, or simply in the frequent appropriation of stories from mythology, legend and folktale for the purpose of incorporating a recognised theme or human concern into a narrative. A reference to the Greek myth of Icarus will thematise hubris, while mentions of King Midas will conjure images of greed. One can note the literary use of re-telling throughout history, a familiar example being Virgil's re-telling of Homer's *The Odyssey* (itself the product of many re-told mythological oral narratives), which was again utilised to great effect in James Joyce's modern epic *Ulysses* (1922). Northrop Frye observes that the inclusion or infusion of existing texts into new works has always been an integral part of writing and literature. In *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology* (1963) he speaks of a shared awareness of re-telling when he explains how:

We know, vaguely, that the story of Cinderella has been retold hundreds of thousands of times in middle-class fiction, and that nearly every thriller we see is a variant of Bluebeard [...]. Shakespeare put a folk-tale motif into nearly every comedy he wrote [... and] some of the most intellectualised fiction of our day, such as the later works of Thomas Mann, are based on them. (29)

Indeed, as Plate notes, re-telling in this respect is “quite simply a narrative strategy” (Plate 393). It is a “tool for generating stories, a rewriting machine, as it were” (Plate 392). Plate observes:

To rewrite the classics of world literature, to retell the biblical narratives, the myths of Greek and Roman antiquity, or the Grimm brothers' fairy tales, is to tap into the huge reservoir of stories that is our cultural imaginary and to release their inherent capacity for yielding new narratives. (392-393)

Re-telling, then, is a timeless and productive narrative strategy, an invaluable tool for one such as Scheherazade in *One Thousand and One Nights*, who had to tell stories to the Persian King every night if she wanted to avoid execution the next morning.

What Frye, a Formalist, noted in the 1960s about the repeated use of myths and other stories as an integral aspect of storytelling, gains a new understanding through structuralist and post-structuralist theory. As Gerald Prince explains in the foreword to Gérard Genette's *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (1982), "the object of poetics is not the (literary) text but its textual transcendence, its textual links with other texts" (ix). Genette defines transtextuality, or the "textual transcendence of the text," as "all that sets the text in relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts" (1). He argues that texts are palimpsestuous in nature: every work of writing must be viewed as a tissue of texts which bears the imprint of what has been written before. In this respect, every text "is a hypertext, grafting itself onto a hypotext, an earlier text that it imitates and transforms; any writing is re-writing and literature is always in the second degree" (Prince ix). Genette refers to these "earlier texts," which re-visionary works transform, as the "pre-text" – a term which will prove useful in this discussion of re-telling. Importantly, although "all literary texts are hypertextual, some are more hypertextual than others, more massively and explicitly palimpsestuous" (Prince ix). In other words, although it is a truism that all texts are palimpsestuous or intertextual in nature, some are more overtly – or rather, intentionally – so. Created "as result of bricolage – of making something new with something old – the massively hypertextual work shows how literary discourse plays with other discourses (sometimes very seriously), how it uses them in surprising fashion, how it reads them in unforeseen ways" (Prince x). It is this aspect, this propensity to be more "hypertextual" than other works, that is evident in the novels under study here. Furthermore, Genette's above postulations on the hypertextuality of certain literature may be read as a precursor to the theory of contemporary re-visionary fiction in general.

Contemporary Re-visionary fiction

I am all for putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode. (Carter, "Notes from the Front Line" 69)

Despite the prevalence of literary re-telling throughout history, there is much evidence for the emergence of a specifically contemporary trend of 're-vision' in literature – a trend which I will argue is postmodernist in its impulse. Peter Widdowson, one of the critics to recently adopt the term, seeks to define and emphasise what he argues is "a relatively recent sub-genre of contemporary fiction" (496). He explains that the term comprises a

nominal adjective [which] deploys a tactical slippage between the verb to revise (from the Latin 'revisere': 'to look at again') – 'to examine and correct; to make a new, improved version of; to study anew'; and the verb to re-vision – to see in another light; to re-envision or perceive differently; and thus potentially to recast and re-evaluate ('the original'). (496)

Significantly, Widdowson argues that re-visionary fiction is not "coterminous with texts that simply take earlier works as sources for their own writing" (500). In other words, not all texts which borrow from other works are doing so for the same aims as re-visionary fiction. Unlike works which simply re-appropriate existing texts for their source, it is important to note that re-visionary novels "keep the pre-text in clear view, so that the original is not just the invisible 'source' of a new contemporary version but is a constantly invoked intertext for it and is constantly in dialogue with it" (502). Widdowson notes that in order for the re-visionary text to be successful, the reader should be "forced at all points to recall how the pre-text had it and how the re-vision reflects this" (502). This "active intertextualising," caused by a deliberate interweaving of existing narratives with alternate perspectives, allows re-visionary fictions to "not only produce a different, autonomous new work by rewriting the original [. . .] but also denaturalise that original by exposing the discourses in it" which appear natural (Widdowson 503). By this Widdowson means that the re-visionary text "recast[s] the pre-text as itself a 'new' text to be read newly [. . .] – thus arguably releasing [the pre-texts] from one type of reading and repossessing them in another" (503).

Widdowson, then, views re-visionary fiction as a "crucial component of that contemporary

‘counter-culture of the imagination’ which, in writing back to the still potent literary texts of the past, seeks to revise cultural history by way of re-visioning its master-narratives” (506).

Like Widdowson, Liedeke Plate refers to the reutilisation of existing narratives, such as those from history, literature, myth and folklore, as re-visionary fiction. As she defines it, re-vision refers to the act of “retelling the stories that make up our common cultural heritage from the [marginalised] perspective of post-colonialism, feminism, and gender and queer studies” (389). Importantly, both Widdowson and Plate cite the poet and critic Adrienne Rich as influential in coining and defining the term “re-visionary.”² In her essay “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision” (1972), Rich calls for a revolutionary revising of cultural and social metanarratives, and stresses the need for the writer to re-write and re-vision those totalising narratives which perpetuate subjugation. It is worth quoting the paragraph from Rich’s essay in full, as her call for re-vision marks the beginning of a significant trend in criticism and literature which spans the last four decades:

Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for woman, is more than a search for identity: it is part of her refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society. A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us; and how we can begin to see – and therefore live – afresh. [. . .] We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us. (18-19)

As a gender activist, Rich’s criticism is overtly feminist, and the metanarratives and canonical works she calls on the writer to re-vise are those which instate and perpetuate patriarchal culture and domination. Rich’s criticism coincided with the popularity of feminist re-writings, known as feminist re-visionary fiction or feminist metafiction, such as those by Margaret Atwood, Angela Carter, and of course, Jeanette Winterson, which emerged and flourished from the 1970s to the 1990s. Poetry and prose which engaged in what Carter termed a “demythologizing” of the “naturalized fictions surrounding gender and sexuality,” by subverting the conventions of familiar myths, tales, histories and literary styles, became popular during this period (Childs 100). The scope and success of this movement allowed

² As is evident from the extract, it is Rich who is responsible for the distinguishing hyphen in the term ‘re-vision’.

feminist re-vision to emerge “as (almost) a literary genre in its own right” (Plate 393). This thesis contends that feminist re-vision – although a form worthy of its own categorisation and study – is a sub-set of the more encompassing genre of contemporary re-visionary fiction. Motives behind feminist re-vision in the “1970s and 1980s were political and cultural” and feminist re-visionary fiction was “motivated by a desire to counter a tradition of silence and alleged misrepresentation” of women (Plate 394). As Plate observes, what this movement called for was a new range of stories, which were produced “through wide-scale and multiple retellings of mythic narratives” (394). This “retelling of the classics from a new point of view constituted a radical critique of the literary tradition and of the culture it served to legitimate” (Plate 394). It was the act of:

revealing that [these totalising narratives] are stories to begin with, myths that are passed off as timeless truths but that can be told differently, [that] was considered the first step in the process of emancipation that was to lead, through the stages of consciousness-raising and political action, to the radical transformation of the public sphere. (Plate 392)

Plate puts forward that this form of literature achieved considerable success as a “narrative strategy to re-present female experience and bring about cultural change,” and reasons that it was this success that “contributed to its booming in the 1990s” (396).

Although the genre lends itself well to feminist issues, re-visionary fiction is not confined to these concerns. The “rewritings of canonical works from the standpoint of the margins are not limited to voicing” the alternative perspectives of women, but “[e]qually important are the intersections of gender with sexuality, social class, and ethnicity” (Plate 396). In re-writing the narratives of any dominant social and cultural order, the author can provide a platform for those previously silenced by the normalised and oppressive fictions of the status quo. Definitions of re-visionary fiction are grounded in a socio-political context, and, as Widdowson argues, “re-visionary novels almost invariably have a clear cultural-political thrust” (505). This is evident in the novels under study in this thesis: Winterson re-tells narratives which complicate conventional understandings of gender and history, while Warner achieves similar ends with gender and class constructs in his two novels. The re-visionary act of ““entering an old text from a new critical direction,”” is achieved “by the creative act of ‘re-writing’ past fictional texts in order to defamiliarise them and the ways in

which they have been conventionally read within the cultural structures of patriarchal and imperial/colonial dominance” (Widdowson 497).

For both Plate and Widdowson, in order to be described as re-visionary fiction, a work must be at least in some way critical or subversive towards its pre-text. Plate echoes Rich’s sentiment and argues that re-visionary fiction should transform “not only our understanding of the past but also our understanding of how we come to such an understanding” (389). In other words, the genre investigates the epistemological and ideological power of narrative, by foregrounding, and then challenging, metanarratives.

The Road to Re-vision: Postmodernism and the Crisis of Representation

The rise of contemporary re-visionary fiction, feminist, post-colonial, or otherwise, can be located within the need to re-vise existing metanarratives. Metanarratives, also known as grand or master narratives, can be defined as those overarching systems of meaning, bodies of theory, or discourses which a society utilises to comprehend and describe itself and the world (Lyotard 15). As Lyotard notes, even “scientific knowledge is a kind of discourse;” more specifically, science is a metadiscourse or metanarrative (4). The interrogation of narrative and representation is a primary concern of postmodern theory, which is why I have characterised re-visionary fiction as postmodernist in its impulse. Behind much of the theory of postmodern novels and re-visionary fiction lies the concern with “the crisis of representation” (Jameson viii). Linda Hutcheon observes that the “impact of feminist, gay, Marxist, black, postcolonial, [. . .] poststructuralist” and new historicist theory has offered another dimension to the study of art and literature, namely, a focus on “the social and ideological production of meaning” (*Politics* 6-7). The motives behind, the intended outcomes of, and the general parameters for re-visionary fiction emerge from an understanding of this ideologically charged production of meaning which amounts to the crisis of representation.

As Frederic Jameson describes, the crisis of representation appears as “an event generally taken primarily to be an aesthetic one, although it has relatively immediate philosophical and ideological analogues” (viii). The event he is referring to is the

crisis of representation, in which an essentially realist epistemology, which conceives of representation as the reproduction, for subjectivity, of an objectivity that lies outside it – projects a mirror theory of knowledge and art, whose fundamental evaluative categories are those of adequacy, accuracy, and Truth itself. (viii)

Lyotard held that “the status of knowledge is altered as [. . .] cultures enter what is known as the postmodern age” (3). In other words, postmodernism signals an awareness of metanarratives as constructed and fluid structures of meaning. These metanarratives are influenced by many cultural and ideological factors, as opposed to representing immovably static tenets of civilisation, or the culmination of an accurate, objective body of knowledge governed by unproblematic notions of progress. Lyotard developed theories which helped to problematise the notion of representation as that which transparently communicates truth or knowledge. He defined postmodernism as a movement characterised by a suspicion of, or “incredulity towards[,] metanarratives” (xxiv). Postmodern theorists demonstrate distrust towards metanarratives as these assume to portray an absolute, authoritative and authentic representation of reality, a totalising view of the world which became unstable in light of many scientific and social developments of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Hutcheon proposes that numerous “postmodern strategies are openly premised on a challenge to the realist notion of representation that presumes the transparency of the medium and thus the direct and natural link between sign and referent or between word and world” (*Politics* 34).³ As well as being culturally and ideologically informed, representation is also a vehicle for constructing and informing ideology and culture. Therefore, “what we call ‘culture’ is seen as the effect of representations, not their source” (Hutcheon, *Politics* 7). Postmodern theorists and authors, then, read representation as socially constructed, and tend to recognise that representation, as a vehicle for producing and portraying culturally-specific ideologies, is not an objective reproduction of the real. Despite the inconsistencies and limitations within representation, however, it cannot be avoided as a method of producing and conveying experience and meaning. We can only attempt to refrain from “fixing our notion of [representation] and assuming it to be transhistorical and transcultural” (*Politics* 54).

³ At the forefront of this realisation is the notion that language itself has come to be “acknowledged as, above all, a human-made structure – never as ‘natural’ or given” (Hutcheon, *Politics* 62). This understanding has come to be known generally as the linguistic turn, which birthed the equally groundbreaking notion of the “historical turn” (Keen 167). The historical turn describes the shift in perception of history as an objective, almost scientific representation of events and phenomena, to an understanding of history as a metanarrative subject to the representational pitfalls of language and the subjective historian. As mediums which possess language as their fundamental structure, narrative, fiction, and historiography necessarily come under suspicion as means which unproblematically represent reality.

Resistance to these fixed notions of representation is exactly what the authors under study here aim to accomplish, by producing alternative narratives which, as Angela Carter describes it, have “to do with the creation of a means of expression for an infinitely greater variety of experience than has been possible heretofore, to say things for which no language previously existed” (Carter 75).

Following this crisis of representation and subsequent distrust of metanarratives, authors are compelled to undermine the totalising nature of representation in order to reveal its inherent danger and create spaces for difference. They achieve this by critically re-working and re-telling metanarratives, such as those from myth, religion, science and history, thereby revealing “that there is nothing natural about the stories that sustain social organization” (Plate 392). Postmodern authors recognise the totalising features inherent in narrative representation and attempt to unveil these by creating self-reflexive narratives which make obvious their position as fiction.

The Postmodern Historical Novel

Re-visionary fiction as a term is a fairly new designation; however, as I have shown with feminist metafiction, similar forms of fiction have operated under a number of different titles since the postmodern development of the historical novel. Although feminist metafiction and the postmodern historical novel emerged in roughly the same period, I argue that the first re-visionary fictions were those postmodern historical novels which emphasised the discursive nature of historiography. Re-visionary fiction, then, developed from a tradition of postmodern novels which made fictions of history by problematising and revising historical narratives. As Mustafa Kirca explains, “under the influence of postmodern innovations in both history and fiction, historical novels develop into a new form” (Kirca 16).⁴ Furthermore, Amy J. Elias observes that “postmodernism is obsessed with the past,” and “the aesthetics of experimentalism and metafiction, market capitalism, postcolonial [. . .] race and gender discourses, [and] fin-de-siècle anxieties – all contribute to this obsession” (535-536). These anxieties, “[p]articularly in the historical novel genre [. . .] can create both a skewed historical

⁴ Suzanne Keen defines historical novels as a “sub-genre of the English novel with a continuous presence since the eighteenth century” (167). This “historical fiction includes a wide range of works with a basis in biographical details and historical events, set in periods other than the writer’s and contemporary readers’ time, and representing characters in interaction with settings, cultures, events and people of the past” (Keen 167).

lens and a new, experimental novel form” (Elias 536). While the traditional or classic historical novel subscribed to realism and attempted to present an unproblematic representation of history, postmodern texts which “refer to historical documents and events reflect the assumption of the postmodern theory of history,” this being “that traditional approaches to historiography are no longer valid and that multiple histories are possible” (Kirca 16). Much postmodern fiction seeks to emphasise historiography as a discourse which is constructed and informed by the aims and desires of the dominant culture. Aside from the narrative nature of historiography, historical archives are “composed of texts” and are therefore “open to all kinds of use and abuse” (Hutcheon, *Politics* 80). If we only “have access to the past today through its traces – its documents, [. . .] we only have representations of the past with which to construct our narratives or explanations” (*Politics* 58), and it follows that past events are given “*meaning*, not *existence*, by their representation in history” (Hutcheon, *Politics* 82, original emphasis). As a result, the postmodern author and reader no longer view history or the past as a “distant ‘foreign’ country but a space open to multiple revisits from the perspective of the present” (Plate 390). Postmodern theory, then – including post-structuralist assumptions which entail “the idea that there are plural meanings and truths as opposed to one meaning or one ‘Truth’” – challenge the totalising and monologic “empirical concepts of history on which traditional historical novels [. . . are] based” (Kirca 2).

Postmodern literature uses novelistic structures alongside historical information in order to initiate the dissemination of the social metanarrative of historiography into individual, subjective ‘histories’. In his study of postmodern fiction, Brian McHale points out that “[a]ll historical novels, even the most traditional, typically involve some violation of ontological boundaries” (16). While traditional historical novels seek to “suppress these violations, to hide the ontological ‘seams’ between fictional projections and real-world facts,” postmodern historical novels react against their earlier realist counterparts by being overtly self-conscious, and foregrounding these “ontological seams by systematically transgressing these rules of its genre” (McHale 17). These novels achieve this by “visibly contradicting the public record of ‘official’ history; by flaunting anachronism; and by integrating history and the fantastic” (McHale 90). Out of postmodern historical novels thus emerge “histories (in the plural) of the losers as well as the winners, of the regional (and colonial) as well as the centrist, of the unsung many as well as the much sung few, and [. . .] of women as well as

men” (Hutcheon, *Politics* 66). Furthermore, these novels call “attention, not to what *fits* the master narrative, but instead, to the ex-centric, the marginal, the borderline – all those things that threaten the (illusory but comforting) security of the centered, totalizing, masterly discourse of our culture” (Hutcheon, *Politics* 86, original emphasis)

Although McHale developed a significant and noteworthy theory on postmodern historical novels, which he referred to as “postmodernist revisionist historical novels,” he later opted in favour of Hutcheon’s term, ‘historiographic metafiction’, in order to describe this type of fiction (McHale 90). It is Hutcheon’s term and theory which has been widely adopted by scholars and theorists, especially those who have developed theories on re-visionary fiction. In her *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988) Hutcheon coins and defines historiographic metafiction as novels which “thematize the theory of contemporary historiography and problematize the distinction between history and fiction” (Kirca 17). As Hutcheon defines it, historiographic metafiction refers predominantly to contemporary novels “which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages” (*Poetics* 5). Historiographic metafiction foregrounds its position as a fictional text, and this, coupled with the inclusion of elements and personages from history, amounts to a highly paradoxical postmodern form. This form of fiction will be dealt with in greater detail in Chapter One.

Revising Re-vision

It is important to note that while the roots of re-visionary fiction may be traced to both feminist and historiographic metafiction – two terms which are very closely linked – it is not limited to historical narratives or feminist concerns alone. Indeed, much of the theory of historical re-visionary novels extends to the reworking of other narratives and texts which are re-told in postmodern fiction. For example, re-visionary fictions which deal with pre-texts outside of historical narratives likewise rely on the linguistic and historical turn, as well as the postmodern assumption that language “creates and shapes reality” (Kirca 2). Widdowson defines re-visionary fiction as a specific sub-genre of what has been referred to here as postmodern historical fiction, or historiographic metafiction. Although I am sympathetic to his claim, I would disagree, and argue that historiographic metafiction should fall under the broader and encompassing notion of re-visionary fiction. One can assume that Widdowson wishes to demarcate re-visionary fiction as subsidiary to historiographic metafiction in order

to retain many of the fine and foundational assumptions about the genre. The potentialities of the still-freshly defined and evolving genre of re-visionary fiction, however, are in my opinion more overarching than the specified form of historiographic metafiction. As I have argued, re-visionary fiction is based in the postmodern development of the historical novel, and thus should encompass historiographic metafiction. There is no reason why McHale and Hutcheon's assumptions cannot be incorporated into an understanding of re-visionary fiction. Contemporary re-visionary novels utilise texts and narratives from a wide range of genres and discourses in order to achieve similar ends and effects outlined by Hutcheon and other theorists on the postmodern historical novel. While multiple histories are made possible by historiographic metafiction, re-visionary fiction widens the scope of the possible narratives to be re-told, and is not limited to historical narratives. It is for this reason that I argue that historiographic metafiction, like feminist re-vision, should fall under the umbrella term of re-visionary fiction, as this allows for a more nuanced reading of novels which portray elements of historiographic metafiction but are also involved in more varied forms of re-vision, through a wider range of genres and discourses.

Both Widdowson and Plate explore how postmodern fiction utilises other texts and narratives aside from historiography in their works. Plate speaks generally of the pre-texts under re-vision as including fairy tale and any "founding myths of culture" (401). Widdowson maintains that re-visionary fiction involves "novels which 'write back to' – indeed, 'rewrite' – canonical texts from the past, and hence call to account formative narratives that have arguably been central to the construction of 'our' consciousness" (491).⁵ For Widdowson, re-visionary fiction implies literature "which re-vision[s] a 'pre-text' that remains a classic work in the English literary canon" (497). He explains that, in 'writing back' to canonical texts,

a hitherto one-way form of written exchange, where the reader could only passively *receive* the message handed down by a classic text, has now become a two-way correspondence in which the recipient *answers* or *replies* to – even *answers back to* – the version of things as originally delineated. (501, original emphasis)

This hitherto "one-way form of exchange" can be read in terms of Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of monologic discourse, while the "two way correspondence" can represent a marked move

⁵ 'The Empire Writes Back' was a phrase originally coined by Salman Rushdie, itself a re-vising of the *Star Wars* film title, *The Empire Strikes Back* (Widdowson 501).

towards dialogism. Monologic discourse is “undialogized,” it is language which is “authoritative or absolute” (Holquist, qtd. in Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 427). Dialogism stems from the concept of dialogue, and refers to “*double-voiced discourse*” or multi-voicedness (Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 324, original emphasis). “Dialogization” occurs when a “word, discourse, language or culture [. . .] becomes relativized, de-privileged” and “aware of competing definitions for the same things” (Holquist, qtd. in Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 427). It is “opposed to monologism [and] enables different voices in a literary text to exist simultaneously and in interaction with each other” (Kirca 22). Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism allows for a reading of re-visionary fiction as dialogic or double-voiced. His discussions on monologic and dialogic discourses in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (1981) offer a useful vocabulary with regard to the study of re-visionary novels, especially those inclined to the re-vision of master narratives such as history and science. Through Bakhtin’s observations one can read “official history” or other such metanarratives as monologic discourses which represent “only the viewpoints of the dominant ideology which in turn creates” these discourses as “monolithic” (Kirca 19). Re-visionary fiction thus strives for and “indicates the co-existence of different perspectives and interpretations” (Kirca 22).

While Widdowson provides some useful parameters within which to read re-visionary fiction, I must challenge his decision to limit the pre-texts to “canonic texts of the English tradition” (501). He goes as far as to qualify that, in referring to the canon, he is referring to “classics” which “retain a high profile of admiration and popularity in *our* literary heritage” (501, my emphasis). This description places too much emphasis on reworking texts from the literary canon, and tends to limit the pre-texts which are being revised to the novelistic and canonical literary forms only. The very insertion of the word ‘English’ is reductive, as it excludes for re-vision those pre-texts originally written in other languages or derived from different cultures. The reference to ‘our’ literary heritage also rather problematically assumes a particular reader. Locating re-visionary fiction as the revising of canonic literary texts alone may also exclude re-workings of certain religious texts or tales, lesser canonised mythology, scientific or medical journals and discourses, as well as elements from oral tradition. In Alan Warner’s *Morvern Callar* (1995), for example, there exist subtle references to Celtic history, mythology, religion and culture, which may not be considered as a part of the English literary canon. As this thesis will argue, however, this text is worthy of consideration as a re-

visionary text. Likewise, throughout her oeuvre Winterson has bent the rules of form and content, incorporating and blending a multitude of genres within her work in order to re-tell a wide range of metanarratives and discourses from classical Physics to the fairy tale. Although much of her work can be classified as either historiographic metafiction or feminist re-vision, her novels also transcend the parameters of these genres by re-telling narratives from other discourses. Her re-tellings are likewise often motivated by alternative reasons which are not outlined by historiographic or feminist theory. For instance, in Winterson's *Written on the Body* (1992) the narrator re-tells or revises data from medical text books and encyclopaedias, rendering the information imaginative and poetic in order to resist the clinical totality of discursive science and to attempt to reclaim the body of his/her dying lover from this discourse.

Widdowson's reduction also creates a stark distinction between historiographic metafiction and re-visionary fiction, as the former must then be solely preoccupied with the re-writing and problematising of history, while the latter must be involved in a re-writing and problematising of a fictional literary text. I would suggest it would be more useful to view re-visionary fiction as literature which does not merely revisit texts from the literary canon, but also those which, for whatever reason, are not considered canonical, as these, too, can affect culture and ideology in many ways. Furthermore, those discourses, genres and narratives which may not be classified as canonical offer contemporary novels much more than merely a position to critique. Re-vision does not merely involve exploiting a pre-text for its plot or for the inherent ideologies it represents; indeed, to draw upon these narratives is to draw on their distinctive tones, moods, characteristics and assumptions. This is a point that many re-visionary theorists fail to indicate, preferring to demarcate re-visionary texts as predominantly critical to the pre-text, while failing to note that authors often draw on these narratives to lend alternative characteristics to their own work. This, however, remains a significant reason for re-telling, and should not be excluded from discussions of re-visionary fiction.

**Extended Visions:
A Study of Re-telling in the Work of Jeanette Winterson and Alan Warner**

Although enjoyably difficult to classify, the novels under study here can be characterised in part as postmodern and re-visionary. Re-telling manifests in these novels through the authors' characteristically postmodern use of metafiction, hypertextuality, anachronism, and most significantly for this thesis: the blending of genre and discourse.

Throughout this thesis I refer to Winterson and Warner's re-visionary novels as being involved in the act of re-telling. I intend to use the term 're-telling', firstly, because Winterson herself uses it to describe her auctorial project. Secondly, I make use of the term in order to emphasise that the authors' transformative acts of re-telling at times exceed the boundaries delineated for the genre of re-visionary fiction. In order to indicate that Winterson and Warner's project is of a larger scope than re-visionary fiction as described by Widdowson and Plate, I will retain the term throughout my description of the authors' work. Although it is evident that these authors are both involved in forms of re-vision, I wish to explore how they achieve ends that have not yet been widely discussed by many re-visionary theorists.

For example, it is evident in Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* (1989) that she may indeed be involved in feminist re-vision, but to narrow the implications of her re-telling to feminist concerns alone is reductive. Placing Winterson's preoccupation with re-telling under the sub-genre of feminist re-visionary fiction also becomes problematic when looking at her later work, *Weight*, which does not deal directly with feminist concerns. Furthermore, *Sexing the Cherry* has likewise been described as exemplary of historiographic metafiction. While it is indeed successful in this regard, it involves a unique and complex blending of genres which are utilised toward not only the re-vision of historiography, but also the reimagining of the classical fairy tale, and the undermining of Enlightenment philosophy and Newtonian physics. In the chapters which follow I argue that, although the feminist and historiographic elements of her work are significant, there emerge further reasons for re-telling in both *Sexing the Cherry* and *Weight*.

When analysing the pair of novels by Alan Warner, *Morvern Callar* and *These Demented Lands* (1997), one encounters similar concerns. I will be arguing that Warner utilises Christian mythology and pre-Christian Celtic and pagan mythology in order to,

respectively, debunk the validity of Christian narratives in a contemporary working-class setting, as well as to empower his characteristically powerless female protagonist with goddess-like or mythical sensibilities. Although this will be a focus of my study, it would be short-sighted to claim that these are the only reasons for which Warner utilises existing narratives from religion and mythology.

Although re-visionary fiction has been defined as a form of literature that critiques dominant discourses such as history, it becomes evident in the analytical chapters that follow that this may not be the sole reason for these postmodern authors to revise. This thesis contends that while these authors' socio-political critiques are significant, they may not be the only motivation for re-vision in the texts under study. Both Winterson and Warner extend the parameters of re-visionary fiction and its sub-sets, and this is crucial for my study. It remains necessary, however, to discuss to what extent the authors are involved in the forms and functions of re-visionary fiction, in order to recognise how they go beyond or differ from these prescribed norms.

I have chosen Winterson and Warner for this thesis first and foremost because of their shared preoccupation with re-telling, despite, and also because of, the differences in their overall styles. Although they may appear an odd pair of authors to critique in a single study, they possess many points in common. Both have received critical and popular acclaim, achieving success in the university classroom and the academic journal, as well as in popular culture and the media. Warner has garnered critical acclaim and praise, winning the Somerset Maugham Prize for *Morvern Callar* and the Encore Prize for *These Demented Lands*, among other awards for his many subsequent works. Winterson too has achieved numerous awards, including the E. M. Forster Award for *Sexing the Cherry* in 1989 and an Order of the British Empire in 2006. Most crucially, both authors place tremendous importance on narrative and storytelling. Whether overtly or covertly, Winterson and Warner emphasise the importance of narrative as an essential and unique mode of creating meaning. They also foreground narrative as a prominent concern or theme in their novels. It is this emphasis on narrative as a distinct epistemological and creative tool which allows for the authors' involvement in re-telling to retain its significance. After all, it is what narrative itself can do which makes the re-telling of a narrative have consequence. In their respective works, narrative is depicted as an epistemological method of interpreting, understanding, and representing the world to ourselves and others. Winterson overtly thematises the act of storytelling and re-telling in her

novels, while Warner employs a specific narrative style and voice to emphasise the rhythms of storytelling in his texts. Both authors understand narrative as playing a pivotal role in both our construction of culture, as well as our criticism of it.

Winterson and Warner achieve their respective acts of re-telling predominantly by using various genres and discourses simultaneously. This generic transgression can be seen in *Sexing the Cherry* with the amalgamation of fantasy and the grotesque with history, and in *Weight* through the hybridisation of Greek mythology, science, technology, and autobiography. In *Morvern Callar* it occurs through Warner's combination of demotic discourse, 'gritty' Scottish realism, and Celtic and Christian mythology. In *These Demented Lands* the reader is met with a similar blending, but Celtic mythology.

Winterson and Warner: A Method of Mergence

Winterson (1959-) is a British author whose involvement with re-telling can be traced from her debut novel to her most recent work. Part One of this thesis comprises two chapters which focus on Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* and *Weight* respectively. In *Sexing the Cherry*, the extensive acts of storytelling and re-telling create a self-reflexive emphasis on fiction and narrative. The novel is near-encyclopaedic in its intertextuality, with manifold allusions to elements from mythology, historiography, fairy tale, and other literary works. Set in both seventeenth-century and twentieth-century England, *Sexing the Cherry* is alternatively narrated in the first person by the Dog-Woman, a fantastic giantess, and her son Jordan, as well as their twentieth-century counterparts who parallel the former characters in demeanour and attitude. These characters are talented and prolific storytellers, who intersperse their narration with many extra-diegetic narratives which help to explore the main thematic concerns of time, space, identity, and gender. These stories are appropriated from fairy tale and Greek mythology, historiography, and religious texts, as well as created by Winterson herself. In Chapter One, I will investigate *Sexing the Cherry*'s position as a historiographic and feminist metafiction, and then progress toward a further analysis of re-telling in the novel.

Similarly to *Sexing the Cherry*, Winterson's more recent novel, *Weight*, consists of a fluid blending of genres and narratives, including the epic story form and the satyr play, classical Greek mythology, contemporary demotic narrative discourse, autobiography, and

scientific and technological discourse. Winterson wrote the novella as part of *The Myths* series launched by Canongate Publishing in 2005. *Weight* re-tells the Greek mythological tale of Atlas and Heracles. Atlas, a titan who waged war against the gods, is punished by being forced to carry the Kosmos for all eternity. Heracles is fulfilling his own punishment for accidentally murdering his wife and children, when one of his twelve labours brings him into contact with Atlas. The revitalised myths of Atlas and Heracles in *Weight* parallel a metafictional one: Winterson's, or rather, the 'Winterson' character's autobiographical tale. In Chapter Two I will demonstrate how Winterson re-tells and transforms narratives from classical Greek mythology by blending and experimenting with various generic conventions. In order to achieve her re-telling in *Weight*, she blends and amalgamates various 'competing' genres and discourses, which amount to a deliberate transgression of their boundaries.

As will be shown in the first two chapters, many interconnected genres and narratives are intertwined within *Sexing the Cherry* and *Weight*. Although Warner's novels also blend genres and discourses, as well as contain acts of re-telling and embedded extradiegetic narratives, these occur in different ways and are presented more subtly than in Winterson's fiction.

Warner (1964-) is a Scottish author from the western portside town of Oban. Within his first two novels, he crafts a narrative style and voice which emphasises storytelling as a specific communicative and epistemological mode, and also blends forms and genres in order to create unique effects. Part Two of this thesis entails a discussion of Warner's *Morvern Callar* and *These Demented Lands* simultaneously. Morvern Callar is the young female protagonist and narrator of Warner's first two novels. She is the sole narrator of *Morvern Callar*, where she lives in the small, working-class community known only as the port (a fictionalised village situated on Scotland's coastline). The reader is first introduced to Morvern, a shelf-stacker at a local supermarket, when she discovers her boyfriend's dead body on the kitchen floor. He has committed suicide by cutting his throat with a cleaver. Morvern passes her deceased boyfriend's manuscript off as her own, and successfully sells his novel to a publishing company in London. She uses the finances to travel to the Spanish coast, first for two weeks and later for a period of years, returning to Scotland only when her money has run out. Morvern features again as a first person narrator in the sequel to *Morvern Callar*, *These Demented Lands*, although in the latter the narrative perspective is divided more or less equally between herself and another protagonist: The Aircrash Investigator. This

novel continues with Morvern's story by beginning where it ended in *Morvern Callar*. Pregnant and penniless after travelling parts of Europe, she does not return to the port, but instead journeys to an unnamed island off the coast of Scotland which is inhabited by a number of eccentric characters. She eventually becomes a maid at the Drome, a dilapidated 'honeymoon' hotel which serves as home to the unhinged Aircrash Investigator and is run by the Kurtzian hotel manager, Brotherhood. In Chapters Three and Four, I argue that *Morvern Callar* is underpinned by subtle references to Celtic and Christian mythology, which are re-told through Warner's use of language and content. This occurs in more overt fashion in *These Demented Lands*, where there appear numerous references to biblical narrative and Christian symbolism and mythology, re-written in a contemporary context.

The chapters on Warner's selected works will not be divided by novels as I have done with Winterson. Instead, I will discuss the novels simultaneously, and divide the chapters between Warner's use of form and content. Chapter Three will deal predominantly with Warner's use of language, while Chapter Four will analyse his use of mythic reference. As is demonstrated in an interview with Jesse Lawrence, Warner states that "themes [in his novels] come from the writing. Not the other way round" (para. 16). Although there are developments in the narrative style from *Morvern Callar* to its sequel, *These Demented Lands*, it will be useful to discuss the novels simultaneously, as they share many concerns. It is also first and foremost Morvern's unique character and narrative voice, present in both texts, which highlights orality and creates the distinctive quality of mythopoeia and storytelling in the texts that lends itself to the process of re-telling. It is likewise essential to enter into a discussion on Warner's hybridised and dialogic use of language and narrative style, as it is a blending of demotic and hieratic discourse which enable the weaving of the ancient and mythological with the contemporary, the banal with the extraordinary, as well as the crude or macabre with the spiritual or transcendent within *Morvern Callar* and *These Demented Lands*.

Part One

'I'm Telling You Stories: Jeanette Winterson's Palimpsests of Possibility

Part One of my thesis discusses re-telling in Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* (hereafter *STC*) and *Weight*, and demonstrates how Winterson's texts conform to the parameters of re-visionary fiction, as well as extend this genre. Before embarking on an analysis of re-telling in the texts under study, I will discuss the distinct emphasis on narrative that pervades Winterson's work.

As remarked upon in the Introduction, there is a noticeable emphasis on storytelling in Winterson's artistic project, an emphasis which offers an explanation as to why she grants re-telling such a powerful position in her novels. In her approach to narrative she holds a perspective similar to that of the narrative theorist Barbara Hardy, and the postmodern theorist Linda Hutcheon, both of whom stress the epistemological importance of narrative and the pervasive role that it plays in constructing reality and identity. For Winterson, all is fiction: "[s]cience is a story. History is a story. These are the stories we tell ourselves to make ourselves come true" (*Weight* 145). Similarly, Hardy argues that narrative production is the main method that our imagination uses to organise and communicate the data collected during experience. Hardy explains that, as humans, we

dream in narrative, day-dream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate, and love by narrative. In order really to live, we make up stories about ourselves and others, about the personal as well as the social past and future. ("Towards a Poetics of Fiction" 5)

These numerous examples point out that many "acts of mind" possess a narrative structure ("Towards a Poetics of Fiction" 5). The notion that our imagination, our consciousness, our belief systems, and our reality in general, are organised primarily through narrative forms is not an isolated one, and many theorists of varied fields (such as anthropological, sociological and psychological) have dealt with the subject. In *Tellers and Listeners*, Hardy argues that "[n]ature, not art, makes us all storytellers" (vii). She explains that

Narrative, like drama, lyric, or dance, cannot be regarded simply as an aesthetic invention used by artists in order to control, manipulate, order and investigate the experiences of that life we tend to separate from art, but must be seen as a primary act of mind transferred to art from life. (3-4)

As Hardy observes, narrative forms can be found in mythology, memory, religious texts, historiography, scientific discourse, and the “autobiography we are all engaged in making and remaking” (*Tellers and Listeners* 4). Hutcheon agrees, and understands narrative to be “a central form of human comprehension, of imposition of meaning and formal coherence on the chaos of events” (*Poetics* 121). Throughout her work Winterson emphasises this narrativity of human existence, and maintains that narrative is an important epistemological method; that is, narrative is a way of comprehending ourselves and the world. She foregrounds the fictionality of the narratives that shape our reality not only to demonstrate that stories have the power to invent the world, but also the power to “reinvent the world” and create “new possibilities, that expose [. . .] the objective as relative and history as at best partial” (Childs 265, my emphasis). In doing so, she demonstrates the power and the omnipossibility that narrative holds in creating and shaping our existence.

Winterson ends *The Passion* (2000) with the statement: “Trust me, I’m telling you stories” (40), a proclamation which Christina Paterson once described as a “mantra” for Winterson’s work as an author (para. 5).⁶ Paterson’s use of the word ‘mantra’ is an appealing one, given that Winterson has credited art, literature and, more specifically, storytelling, with a transcendental and transformative significance. In a review of *Art Objects: Essays on Ecstasy and Effrontery* (1995), Maya Jaggi writes that Winterson sees art and spirituality “as akin in recognising realities beyond the mundane” (para. 33). Indeed, one of the reasons Winterson claims to write is to “bring about a change in consciousness” (qtd. in Reynolds para. 21), and to make her reader “see things imaginatively, [and] transformatively” (qtd. in Reynolds para. 2). In her interview with Margaret Reynolds, she observes that literature is significant as it has the ability “to open up spaces in a closed world” (qtd. in Reynolds para. 2). Her preoccupation with narrative stems from her belief that it possesses an ability to “open up spaces” for new perceptions in a “closed world” of narrow ideologies. For Winterson, literature is, ideally, an instrument of transformation, which serves as a “way into other realities, [and] other personalities” (*Art Objects* 25-26). She has repeatedly stated that she believes that narrative has the power to challenge conventional perceptions, and to enable the reader to imagine ideas not yet available to them. Re-telling is an excellent way of

⁶ *The Passion* is Winterson’s third novel, and follows the stories of Henri, Napoleon Bonaparte’s chicken chef, and Vilanelle, a Venetian woman who cross-dresses and is born with the fabled webbed feet of canal boatmen.

exploiting this narrative capacity for change: if the story can always be told again or differently, it can allow for different effects and outcomes.

Winterson's hybrid use of genre is fundamental to her project of re-telling. While genre is used chiefly to differentiate between categories of art, it can also be defined more broadly as "kind; sort; [or] style" ("Genre"). In other words, genre can be used to describe categories outside the fields of art and literature. Mikhail Bakhtin defined genre in a similar sense, as Michael Holquist explains: "in the most general terms" Bakhtin's use of the word refers to a "horizon of expectations brought to bear on a certain class of text types. It is therefore a concept larger than literary genre" (qtd. in *The Dialogic Imagination* 428). In Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, "the term is most frequently invoked to define the kind of formulae that have tended to limit literary discourse," while "the novel is seen as having a [unique] relationship to genre, defining itself precisely by the degree to which it cannot be framed by pre-existing categories" (Holquist, qtd. in Bakhtin 428). In light of these assumptions, I will make use of this more broad definition of genre to refer to some of the discourses Winterson employs in *STC* and *Weight*. For example, in my analysis of *Weight*, I will refer to science as a genre, as well as classical mythology, autobiography, the epic form, the satyr play and the novel. Moreover, when the discipline of science is supplemented with mythological or fantastic narratives in the novels, I will describe this as a blending of genres and a transgression of generic conventions.

As I will make evident in the following chapters, Winterson's novels undermine, subvert and develop their pre-texts and, moreover, are also highly self-reflexive in doing so. This subversive self-reflexivity is not unlike that employed in other exemplary re-visionary fictions, which highlight their own fictional medium in order to undermine their pre-texts. Winterson's project, however, extends re-visionary fiction in subtle but important ways: although her novels display many characteristic traits of the genre, they also emphasise the act of re-telling in and of itself. In the act of reinventing pre-existent narratives and discourses, re-telling foregrounds the fictionality of these pre-texts, and highlights the narrativity of existence. This is made evident in both *STC* and *Weight*, in which Winterson emphasises the fictionality of the systems of meaning which define our lives. By foregrounding the narrative constitution of the discourses we use to explain ourselves and the world, Winterson encourages her readers to recognise their own ability to recreate these narratives transformatively. Moreover, she views re-telling as a way "to re-envision the world

and appropriate it for oneself” (Childs 265). In doing so she highlights the existential freedom inherent to the act of re-telling, and foregrounds the reader’s own responsibility for self-making or self-authorship.

Ortega y Gasset observes that it is “too often forgotten that man is impossible without imagination, without the capacity to invent for himself a conception of life, to ‘ideate’ the character he is going to be. Whether he be original or a plagiarist, man is the novelist of himself” (qtd. in Eddings 205). In a similar vein, existential philosophers argue that “the measure of an authentic life lies in the integrity of a *narrative*,” and that “to be a self is to constitute a story in which a kind of wholeness prevails” – a story in which one is “the author of oneself as a unique individual” (“Existentialism” para. 30, original emphasis). Winterson, too, speaks of how important it is to be involved actively in the telling of our own stories, since “[b]eing able to write a story around the chaos of your own narrative [. . .] allows you to see yourself as a fiction, which is rather comforting because, of course, fictions can change” (qtd. in Reynolds para. 6). Here she stresses the importance of creating and recreating our own narratives in order to maintain an authentic self and avoid a totalised or stagnant perception of the world. The opening section of *The PowerBook* (1998), for instance, thematises the idea of transforming the self through story. *The PowerBook* is an emblematic Winterson text: set in London, Paris, and cyberspace, it is beset with a curious interweaving of fairy tale, contemporary culture, fantastical historiography, and canonical texts, creating what has been called a “contemporary fable” (Paterson para. 7). In the opening paragraphs the narrator writes:

It’s only a story, you say. So it is, and the rest of your life with it – creation story, love story, horror, crime, the strange story of you and me.

The alphabet of my DNA shapes certain words, but the story is not told. I have to tell it myself.

What is it that I have to tell myself again and again?

That there is always a new beginning, a different end.

I can change the story. I am the story. (4-5)

In re-telling narratives – especially those narratives which may be informed by oppressive ideologies and influence our personal and cultural identities – it is possible to reclaim these stories by reading ourselves into them and thus re-presenting the self. Winterson’s re-telling can therefore be understood as an enactment of existential freedom. The importance, indeed necessity, of re-telling as an instrument of self-authorship, both for herself and the reader, is a

chief concern for Winterson. She thus re-tells not only to subvert the dominant ideology of the pre-text, but also to acknowledge the possibility, inherent in narrative, to create and recreate the self. In the following chapters I will illustrate how Winterson conforms to the primary subversive aims of re-visionary fiction, while noting how she extends the genre by demonstrating its potential for authoring the self.

Chapter One

The Life Between the Lines: Beyond the Re-telling of History in Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry*

For the Greeks, the hidden life demanded invisible ink. They wrote an ordinary letter and in between the lines set out another letter, written in milk. The document looked innocent enough until one who knew better sprinkled coal-dust over it. What the letter had been no longer mattered; what mattered was the life flaring up undetected . . . till now. (Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry* 10)

The above epigraph provides a pertinent metaphor for Jeanette Winterson's re-telling in *STC*, since, in this novel, Winterson sprinkles "coal-dust" over the "letters" of history, fairy tale, and Enlightenment epistemologies, in order to make visible the "hidden" narratives often elided by these discourses and genres. She makes these alternative narratives evident through her re-telling and re-imagining of metanarratives, which she achieves through an amalgamation and transgression of genre. In a hybrid style that weaves seemingly disparate elements into a meticulously crafted narrative structure, she blends the genres of magical realism and fairy tale with the discourses of history and science in order to transgress their parameters and propose a renewed understanding of reality and identity. These generic combinations critique the notion of history and the objective reality it seeks to represent. In its "plotting[,] the book challenges conventional notions of time, querying history with physics and reality with fantasy" (Childs 257-258). Furthermore, Winterson's amalgamation of historical, scientific, and fantastic genres contributes to the creation of parallel worlds in the narrative, which alter the perceptions of both the characters and the reader.

In this chapter I hope to demonstrate that, in *STC*, Winterson achieves the primary aims of re-visionary fiction, as the novel performs the genre's subversive functions. In addition, I will show that Winterson extends the genre by emphasising the act of re-telling itself, and foregrounding her characters' transformative self-authorship. As *STC* can be read as an example of both historiographic metafiction and feminist re-visionary fiction, I discuss both of these dimensions of the novel. To begin with, I will examine the novel as an instance of historiographic metafiction, and continue with an investigation of Winterson's re-telling of Newtonian science. In addition, I will investigate Winterson's subversion of gender norms in

her characterisation of the Dog-Woman as grotesque, and her re-vision of the fairy tale in the re-telling of “The Twelve Dancing Princesses” – a classic fairy tale first published by Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm.

‘There was No History That Would Not Be Rewritten’: *Sexing the Cherry* as Historiographic Metafiction

For Linda Hutcheon, historiographic metafiction is a genre which “characterise[s] postmodernism in fiction” (*Poetics* ix). Although this statement may be challenged as one which attempts to promote historiographic metafiction as “yet another master narrative,” and ignores other forms of postmodern fiction (Nünning 219), it is important to note that postmodern novels by “a diverse range of authors [. . .] are in fact ‘historical’ novels of one kind or another” (Widdowson 491).⁷ Many postmodern novels, despite their obvious differences, share a concern with “the narrative aspect of history, and with an aesthetic, self-conscious and manipulative concern with form” (Onega, “Mythical Impulse” 186). As several critics have agreed, Winterson’s “particular interest in history, which she makes a recurring theme in most of her novels,” coupled with “her questioning [of] the validity of objective historical knowledge,” positions her fiction, including *STC*, as a “good example [of] historiographic metafiction” (Kirca 43).

Historiographic metafiction – which this thesis maintains is a sub-genre of re-visionary fiction – refers to the distinctly paradoxical form which arises when the intense self-reflexivity of postmodern metafiction meets the supposedly objective and transparent discourse of historiography. Patricia Waugh defines metafiction as

fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside of the literary fictional text. (2)

⁷ Susana Onega points out that the “evolution” of this historical trait in postmodern literature “can be traced from the publication of John Fowles’s *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* in 1968 to the publication of Fowles’s *A Maggot*, [. . .]; Julian Barnes’s *Flaubert’s Parrot*; Jeanette Winterson’s *The Passion, Boating for Beginners*, and *Sexing the Cherry*; [. . .]; and the novels of Peter Ackroyd as a whole. To these may be added others like Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, and *Shame*; Martin Amis’s *Time’s Arrow*; Angela Carter’s *Nights at the Circus*; and Maureen Duffy’s *Capital*” (“Mythical Impulse” 186). Onega has also argued that the above authors of historiographic metafiction are a “part of a world-wide development related to Spanish American ‘magic realism’ and North American ‘fabulation’ which includes writers from all over the world,” such as the author of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Gabriel García Márquez (“British Historiographic Metafiction” 59).

This form of fiction indicates that “history itself is a multiplicity of ‘alternative worlds,’ as fictional as, but other than, the worlds of novels” (Waugh 104-105). Historiographic metafiction demonstrates that all narrative representations “are, in fact, particularized uses of language (i.e. discourses) that inscribe social and ideological contexts” (Hutcheon, *Politics* 67). By “using and ironically abusing general conventions and specific forms of representation,” historiographic metafiction “works to denaturalize them” (Hutcheon, *Politics* 8). As Hutcheon explains, the “theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs” which is evident in historiographic metafiction, allows for its “rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past” (*Poetics* 5). Such novels thus work to contest “any totalizing narrative impulse” (*Politics* 86). Winterson shares this understanding of historiography as a totalising metanarrative, and explains that:

history is a collection of found objects washed up through time, and [. . .] some of them we do hook out, and others we ignore. [. . .] We are continually understanding our past in a different way because we are continually re-interpreting it and fiction does that very well. But you can only do it well if you let some freedom in for the imagination. You can’t do it well if you’re trying to lock yourself slavishly into your notion of the past – which will not be true anyway. (qtd. in Reynolds para. 41)

In a section which deals explicitly with history in her debut novel, *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit* (1985), she writes: “[p]eople like to separate storytelling which is not fact from history, which is fact” (91), a separation which she has critiqued in much of her fiction. Thus, according to Mustafa Kirca, Winterson problematizes “the boundary between fact and fiction” by “constantly foreground[ing] the fictionality of history in her novels” (43). In *STC* this emphasis arises predominantly through her positioning of the historical within a fictional framework, her paradoxical juxtaposition of the historical and fantastic modes, as well as her use of metafiction, intertextuality, non-linear narrative, and parody.

STC is set predominantly in seventeenth-century England and references historical events such as the Puritan Revolution, the English Civil War (1642-1651), the trial and execution of King Charles I (1649), the reformation of the monarchy, the Great Plague of London (1665-1666), and the Great Fire of London (1666). The novel is populated with historical characters, such as the explorer, sailor and collector, Jonathan Tradescant (1608-1662), and the parliamentary commander, Lord General Thomas Fairfax (1612-1671). These

historical events and personages are narrated alternately by two fictional characters: the Dog-Woman, a robust and indelicate giantess so named for her occupation as a dog-breeder, and her adopted son Jordan, who, inspired by Tradescant, becomes a sailor and explorer. The Dog-Woman is responsible for most of the historical narration in the text, while Jordan's narrative details his fantastical and imaginative journeys.

One of the ways in which Winterson achieves the aims of historiographic metafiction in *STC* is through the characterisation and narration of the Dog-Woman. Although The Dog-Woman's chronological relation of seventeenth-century history may appear in line with conventional historical discourse, her characterisation as female, working-class and monstrous means that this history originates from a traditionally disempowered position. Furthermore, while her narration is less fantastical than Jordan's, she too provides fantastic deviations from the 'official record' and offers an alternative lens through which to view history via her position, as well as a narration of the untold histories of others. Kirca describes how, through her position as a grotesque woman and a teller of marginalised histories (such as those of the women she befriends), the Dog-Woman undermines the "history of 'great men' pattern" (66). This latter pattern – which details the exploits of the wars men fought and the lands they conquered – marks much of history, and is evidence that supports the feminist argument that history is a "field that women are silenced in and [. . .] an instrument that patriarchy uses ideologically to sustain its hegemony over women by excluding their activities and experience" (Kirca 25). Kirca further argues that "since the dominant culture privileges male experience through phallogentrism, history as a grand narrative has always been 'his story,' excluding the accounts of female experience that patriarchy sees as inferior and absent" (Kirca 25-26). Such criticism led to the feminist adaptation 'herstory' as a descriptive replacement, a term that attempts to confront a historiography in which women were marginalised and ignored (Widdowson 493).

Being "poor, female, large, and ugly," the Dog-Woman "narrates her stories from a position of marginalization" (Smith 27). Her narration therefore enables Winterson's defamiliarisation of conventional metanarratives, including history, science and patriarchy. While the Dog-Woman narrates from the margins, she is, however, granted a unique position as a narrator because her size and strength allow her a freedom predominantly ascribed to men in a patriarchal system. As Kirca points out, the "period of the Puritan rule should be regarded as a historical era in which the masculine authority was felt oppressively by

women” and which denied “the expression of female experience during a time of political upheaval and civil war” (71). In *STC*, the Dog-Woman is represented ambiguously: she is monstrous and murderous, and yet a mother and friend who engages in acts of astonishing generosity, kindness and gentleness. She is capable of violence, rage, and murder, as can be seen in her interactions with the Roundhead army (66), Preacher Scroggs and Neighbour Firebrace (88-89), and the criminals who attempt to rob her (108). She also displays compassion and tenderness, however, as can be seen in the love she has for Jordan and the care she takes with him as a child (14), her generosity towards her neighbour, the witch (14, 143), and in the careful and dignified manner she deals with her friend’s body, who has died of the plague (139-140). Her representation transgresses historically-binarised gender norms, because she embodies both typically masculine and feminine characteristics. This is indicated visibly by the section markers which are used to signify the Dog-Woman and Jordan’s respective sections in the novel. The Dog-Woman is represented by the banana, a fruit commonly associated with the phallic and thus the masculine. Jordan is symbolised by the pineapple, a fruit which in its yonic shape – at least in comparison to the banana – is more typically linked to the feminine. Moreover, although she represents the voices traditionally sequestered by history and society, she and the other marginalised characters in *STC* – such as the prostitutes she befriends and the Twelve Dancing Princesses – are endowed with an often-violent power which they use to overthrow the forces that dominate them. Importantly, of course, the Dog-Woman does not derive her strength and power from physical brutality alone. She also possesses a stringent morality of her own construction. Although she has the physical power to violently enact revenge and justice, she also has a fierce confidence in herself, which often leads her to ignore the social and legal codes of the time. While she identifies as a “good Christian woman” (13), she enacts her own notion of what this religion means for her morality. Indeed, she believes many of her deeds and much of her violence to be enforcing “the work of God” (*STC* 143), and she does not view herself as a criminal, because her “actions are not motivated by thought of gain, only by thought of justice” (*STC* 129).

In Angela Marie Smith’s discussion of *STC*, she draws upon Walter Benjamin’s formula for revolution – that, in order to disrupt history, one must utilise elements such as “courage, humor, cunning, and fortitude,” because these qualities “have retroactive force and will constantly call into question every victory, past and present, of the rulers” (Benjamin,

qtd. in Smith 27). The Dog-Woman possesses these “retroactive” traits in abundance, and beguiles the reader with narration that is a humorous and subjective mixture of historical detail and her own, rather fantastical, version of events. Often her participation in the historical action is minor: she engages only as a spectator to the events. Importantly, however, she is never merely a passive onlooker, but always breaches the boundary between her distanced perspective and the event by adding her own subjective views, or by physically involving herself in the occurrence, thus destabilising the “history of ‘great men’ pattern” via her “ex-centric,” but distinctly powerful, position (Kirca 66).

The Dog-Woman re-imagines historical events by becoming subjectively, and often violently, involved with them in ways which undermine the patriarchal discourse of history and thus disrupt its processes. Disguised as a prostitute so as not to be arrested as a supporter to the King, she is a saddened spectator to Charles I’s execution (69-71), and, some years later, she is a proud attendee of the executions of the parliamentary commissioners who had sentenced the late king (105-106). Her participation is often devilishly humorous; for instance, she counts herself lucky when she manages to take home a gall bladder (replete with stones) from the execution of the Puritan commissioners (106). Though she is never the instigator of an historic incident, she is always implicated in some way and is not shy to pour a “vat of oil” on the flames during the Great Fire of London (143). By subjectively and at times actively ‘telling’ herself into this and other historic events such as the Great Plague, she is involved in the re-writing of historiography from the humorous and transgressive standpoint of the margins. Regarding the Civil War, she offers her own opinion that “the ferment in the city is due not only to the heat, but also to the King seeming to turn Papish on us, and Parliament being in an uproar, and Cromwell with his lump-shaped head stirring it and stirring it” (22). As a Royalist, and firmly at odds with the Puritans, whom she describes as “po-faced, flat-buttocked zealots” who “hated everything that was grand and fine and full of life” (67, 26), she eventually comes to blows with the Roundhead army (68). In the years of unrest during the Civil War, she often resorts to violence to make her views known, uphold her understanding of justice, and protect others. She joins a group which recommends “avenging the King’s murder” by following the biblical injunction in the Old Testament’s “Law of Moses” – that is ““an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”” (84). Taking this scriptural duty literally, the following week she empties a sack of her spoils onto the meeting-house floor: 119 eyeballs and over 2000 teeth belonging to Puritans (84, 85). The Dog-

Woman does not merely narrate history; she forces herself into it and interrupts it through her fantastical, humorous, and aggressive interaction with it.

Through the Dog-Woman's narration, the reader comes to learn "the story of women during war time along with the officially recorded 'facts' about the Civil War" (Kirca 68). She reports the previously unacknowledged role of women in this history, as well as the history of those who are doubly oppressed by virtue of their status as working-class and by the dominant perception that they are sexually deviant, such as lesbians and prostitutes. Importantly, Winterson presents the prostitutes "as historical agents from a potentially revolutionary class, enacting a violent retribution against the puritans who both oppress and take advantage of working women" (Smith 33). The Dog-Woman enacts revenge on the Puritans for their "hypocrisy" and oppressive treatment of women (Kirca 78), by relieving them of their eyes and teeth, and by murdering the puritan preacher, Scroggs, and her neighbour, Firebrace, while both men are engaged with a prostitute in a brothel. In a bizarre and brutal act of revenge on behalf of herself and Jordan – who were attacked by the Roundheads at Scroggs and Firebrace's instigation – and the prostitutes, who are exploited by the puritans in general, the Dog-Woman decapitates the men (88-89). Her position as both narrator and murderer "constitutes the Dog-Woman as a teller of (hi)stories that disrupt historicism" and situates her as a "voice for a community of the marginalized" (Smith 34). In another, more subdued incident which illustrates the defiance of the marginalised, the Dog-Woman comes across a church where a stained glass window has been damaged by cannon fire as a result of the intervention of "Black Tom Fairfax" and his army of Roundheads (64). She describes how the women:

loved the window. Without speaking, and in common purpose, the women began to gather the pieces of the window in their baskets. [. . .] They gathered every piece, and they told me, with hands that bled, that they would rebuild the window in a secret place. [. . .] The church danced in light. I left them there and walked home, my head full of things that cannot be destroyed. (64)

This encounter highlights one of the most crucial aims of historiographic metafiction, which is to "focus on past events and historical personages which history chooses not to include. The excluded events are foregrounded, their stories are retold and alternative histories are composed" (Kirca 18). By telling this story, the Dog-Woman "defiantly reconstructs histories

shattered by dominant forces” (Smith 22). Moreover, in writing “alternative versions to the already accepted one,” *STC* presents “multiple historical possibilities” (Kirca 18, 19).

Jordan’s narration, which is fantastical and brimming with imaginative tales, also disrupts historiography by challenging conventional boundaries of gender, time, and space. Indeed, the fact that the narration in the novel as a whole is shared by two characters and their twentieth-century counterparts in two different time periods itself indicates a desire to undermine the monological discourse of history. As Smith observes, the novel’s “persistent refusal of a single truth [. . .] pervades the retellings” it contains (34). Like the Dog-Woman, Jordan documents his own subjective record of events. He records his account “in a book of [his] own,” some of which the reader is party to (102). His narration includes stories about a city which employs cleaners to clear the sky of words as they “resist erasure” and clutter the sky (17); a house with no floors where he first meets Fortunata, the youngest of the Twelve Dancing Princesses; and a city where love is outlawed, as it has repeatedly wiped out the population (76). Notably, Jordan’s “psychic journeys to the floating city” and other fantastic places, are “treated in the same tone as [his] experience of real geographical places” (Makinen 92). This causes the reader to question the validity of the latter geographical sites, and emphasises that Jordan’s journeys of the imagination are as important – if not more important than – his physical explorations. Winterson’s “juxtaposition of alternative narratives,” such as history and fantasy, highlights “the artificiality of the narrative system” which is used to legitimate historic discourse (Farwell, qtd. in Makinen 96). She undermines traditional historiography through Jordan’s narration, while emphasising “alternative journeys and alternative histories” (Kirca 72). As Jordan states at the beginning of the novel, it is the journeys that are concealed by other journeys, the “path not taken and the forgotten angle,” that he wishes to record (10).

Jordan’s fragmented, dreamlike, and fantastic tales demonstrate a deviation from traditional historical narratives. As a sailor and explorer, he is responsible for writing the log book of his ship, but he tells the reader that, for every journey he and Tradescant have made together, he has “written down [his] own journey and made [his] own map” which he believes to be a “faithful account of what happened, at least, of what happened to [him]” (102). Jordan’s fantastic tales serve as a reinvention of the classic heroic explorer narrative, which traditionally aims to emulate the linearity and logic of the logbook, travelogue or historic journal, and to elide any subjective influence on these narratives. As a male explorer

in the seventeenth century, Jordan should subscribe to imperialistic and patriarchal ideology, and embody the pattern of “great men” that Kirca argues is ubiquitous in historiography (66). Jordan’s narration, however, “exhibit[s] a postmodern suspicion of master narratives, linearity, and absolute truth” (Smith 34). For instance, he writes a list of commonly understood “Lies” about time and historiography:

Lies 2: Time is a straight line

[. . .]

Lies 4: We can only be in one place at one time

Lies 5: Any proposition that contains the word ‘finite’ (the world, the universe, experience, ourselves...

Lies 6: Reality as something which can be agreed upon

Lies 7: Reality as truth. (83)

Here, Jordan stresses the “interpretive uncertainty” of these discourses and mediums, and thereby emphasises “the impossibility of any true and totalizing rendering of history” (Smith 36).

Jordan’s imaginative journeys dispute the notion that “all the journeys are done,” and encourage the reader to “[f]old up the maps and put away the globe” so that he/she might “[s]tart another drawing” of a map which is accurate to his/her own experience (81). Through the imagination and the narratives we create, he claims that:

All times can be inhabited, all places visited. In a single day the mind can make a millpond of the oceans. Some people who have never crossed the land they were born on have travelled all over the world. The journey is not linear, it is always back and forth, denying the calendar. (80)

These statements serve as a validation for the act of telling and re-telling. In the imaginative journeys of the mind “[t]ime has no meaning, space and place have no meaning,” and thus do not necessarily serve as limitations in the process of re-visioning narratives in order to access different understandings (80).

Jordan often states that he desires to be a hero like John Tradescant and others. This is also true of the twentieth-century counterpart he is aligned with, Nicolas Jordan. Jordan claims that “England is a land of heroes, every boy knows that” (79), while Nicolas spends his childhood aspiring to the likes of William the Conqueror and Lord Nelson from “*The Boys’ Book of Heroes*” (116-117). Jordan and Nicolas both embark on adventurous voyages

“on a male-dominated ship, aware of masculinity’s limitations as they dream of an alternative [journey, as well as a] feminine supplementary to their characters” (Makinen 88). It is clear that Jordan is familiar with the traditional heroic narrative when he tells the reader that he wants to “be brave and admired and have a beautiful wife and a fine house,” as well as “to be a hero and wave goodbye to [his] wife and children” (100-101). However, while Jordan and Nicolas may both appear the “proponent[s] of traditional heroic values,” through their “narrative trajectory and stated desires, both narrators explode that system” (Farwell, qtd. in Makinen 96). Moreover, Jordan’s statements on heroism are always tainted with slight sarcasm and a distinct lack of naivety about male roles. He is not “satisfied with [the] narrow binary stereotypes of masculinity and femininity” (Makinen 88). Despite their desire for the hero’s narrative, then, the male protagonists seem to know that the secret of the classical hero’s success is due to the “great division” which is spoken of in the novel – the separation of “heroes and homemakers,” or men and women, which makes the hero’s “life possible” (131). As Jordan wryly remarks in his re-telling of one of Fortunata’s stories, traditional heroes returned home “full of glory” to “wives who only waited” (131). His own narrative does not indulge this desire for glory, however, and his actions do not embody those of the classic explorer. His fantastical journeys, as well as his correlation with Nicolas, allow for an “experience of history that contrasts with the linear narrative of Nicolas’ *The Boys’ Book of Heroes*,” which Smith demarcates as “a litany of war and imperialism” (29). Jordan and Nicolas, while initially inspired by “heroic journeys like those that underwrite historicism, are drawn instead to the ‘countless lives’ and histories obscured by [imperial and patriarchal historiography]” (Smith 31). Indeed, Jordan’s stories often detail women who are “against the patriarchal norms concerning gender identity,” such as the prostitutes and nuns he visits (30-31) and the Twelve Dancing Princesses, and his tales are a “means of inserting the untold stories of women and opening a space to narrate” rebellious female experience (Kirca 74).

Significantly, both Jordan and Nicolas meet women who reinvent traditional understandings of heroism and historical progress. Nicolas is urged to redefine heroism after he reads about the Dog-Woman’s twentieth-century counterpart in the newspaper. She is a chemist who is being persecuted because of her one-woman campaign to raise awareness about a mercury-polluted river. Nicolas deems her to be heroic, because heroes “give up what’s comfortable in order to protect what they believe in or to live dangerously for the common good” (138). He believes that she encapsulates a more appropriate definition of a

hero than the one observed in *The Boys' Book of Heroes*, since the book demonstrates that traditional heroes can be “idiot[s], behave badly, ruin [their personal lives], have any number of mistresses and talk about [themselves] all the time” (117-118). These men mostly “enjoy the company of other men, although attractive women are part of their reward” (118). Jordan is compelled to redefine heroism in view of the self-reliance, selflessness and bravura of his only parent, the Dog-Woman, “who cares nothing for how she looks, only for what she does” (101), and the princess Fortunata, after whom he spends much of his life searching. Initially, Jordan views Fortunata as the “closure or ‘happy-ever-after’ to his quest, but she refuses to be a part of his story, in refusing to accompany him” on his journeys (Makinen 96). If Jordan’s story was a typical quest narrative, he would be rewarded for his explorations through closure. Fortunata can never be Jordan’s reward, however, as she is the ‘author’ of her own narrative and does not desire to be a part of his. She is independent, solitary, and lives, acts, and dances for herself. As she herself puts it, she dances “for its own sake and for hers” (99). The Dog-Woman, too, redefines the idea of the hero, as she often embarks on violent campaigns in order to uphold her system of values and protect those people who are traditionally disempowered, such as the the prostitutes she assists. Paulina Palmer argues that a “writer with a phallogocentric viewpoint would no doubt treat [the Dog-Woman] as a target of ridicule but Winterson, writing in the tradition of the lesbian/feminist re-evaluation of the woman as monster, treats her in a celebratory manner” (qtd. in Makinen 86). In Palmer’s view, then, Winterson “focuses her attention on [the Dog-Woman’s] heroic qualities and describes her as representing the rebellious, transgressive aspect of femininity which patriarchy attempts to suppress” (qtd. in Makinen 86). In a similar vein, Farwell maintains that it is the Dog-Woman, and I would add her twentieth-century counterpart, the chemist, as well as Fortunata and the Twelve Dancing Princesses, who assemble a “firm alternative story” to the traditional male heroic narrative (qtd. in Makinen 96).

As I have shown, *STC* possesses many of the characteristics of historiographic metafiction, as these novels “focus on the process of event becoming fact, they draw attention to the dubiousness of the positivist, empiricist hierarchy implied in the binary opposing the real to the fictive, and they do so by suggesting that the non-fictional is as constructed and as narratively known as fiction” (Hutcheon, *Politics* 77). This is achieved through Winterson’s employment of fantastic and transgressive narrators who subvert ‘official’ history by critiquing the ideological assumptions which accompany these official versions, as well as

undermine the traditional discourses associated with historiography. It is pivotal to note, however, that Winterson's obsession with the re-telling of narratives is not relegated to the realm of producing alternative histories alone, since her re-visionary project also involves the re-telling of myth, fairy tale, and scientific theory. Ultimately, she seeks to undermine our "usual ways of seeing" (*Art Objects* 54), which include not only the linear thinking associated with historiography, but also the patriarchal ideology which informs fairy tales and mythology, and the rigidly rationalistic and positivistic understandings of certain scientific theory.

'Empty Space and Points of Light': Identity and the Atom

As I have demonstrated above, Winterson sets *STC* in Enlightenment England in order to deconstruct its oppressive history through the Dog-Woman's unique perspective and Jordan's dreamlike expeditions. She also chooses this era in order to interrogate the epistemologies commonly associated with this period – notions which future generations subsequently inherited. In doing so, she hopes to expand the perceptions of her readers, as well as to challenge their conception of the self.

By blending the discourses of science and technology with those of fantasy, fairy tale and mythology, Winterson participates in the postmodern challenge to the Enlightenment (Moore 116). As Annemarie Estor notes, in many of her novels Winterson "knowingly violates the disciplinary order by appropriating scientific texts into her own – literary – discourse" (32). She is intrigued by many aspects of New Physics – or post-Einsteinian physics – such as relativity and quantum theory, and incorporates these concepts in her characters' perception of, and interaction with, the world. Particularly appealing to Winterson are the notions of time travel and parallel universes, as well as the instability of time and matter – ideas which have influenced the narrative structure of many of her novels, including *STC*.

As Lisa Moore observes, *STC* aims to rewrite "the origins of European modernity" which include "colonial exploration, the rise of empirical science and Enlightenment notions of the unified self" (116). Winterson re-imagines these understandings through Jordan's narration, which calls into question the authenticity of the "technologies of modernity" and reveals their limitations (Moore 116), in particular by emphasising the artifice of the map and

the log book, two of the primary tools of the imperial explorer. Winterson's re-telling of this period demonstrates, however, that these Enlightenment epistemologies are "only one of the many possible ways of describing human experience" (Moore 116).

In line with the above, Winterson is notably interested in debunking totalising understandings regarding time, space and matter commonly inherited by modern man, understandings which accrue much of their legitimacy from Newtonian physics and the Enlightenment era. Winterson outlines these conventional notions, and then questions their validity by describing examples of physical and imaginative experiences which contradict these notions, as well as by subtle reference to theories from New Physics. She opens *STC* with two epigraphs which position the novel against the totalising rationalism of modernity and for a re-imagining of reality and the self in light of imaginative experience and new scientific discovery. Given that both of these epigraphs are not referenced, it would seem that they emanate from Winterson herself, and provide important clues to the novel's concerns, since they raise questions on the nature of time, matter and reality. The first states that "[t]he Hopi, an Indian tribe, have a language as sophisticated as ours, but no tenses for past, present, and future. What does this say about time?" (8). Merja Makinen argues that this epigraph suggests that Western conceptions of time can be interrogated by a "cross-cultural comparison" and that the conception of time outlined in historiography is a "Western construct" (88). This critique of our normative conception of time is developed through Jordan's meditations on "the nature of time" (*STC* 89), which differentiate between our lived experience of time and our philosophical and scientific understandings of it (Makinen 89). As Makinen explains, Jordan "experiences time as an arrow moving in a straight line (a Newtonian sense of time), but thinks about it as a simultaneity of space and time (an Einsteinian sense of time)" (89). For example, Jordan tells the reader that

[w]e have dreams of moving back and forward in time, though to use the words back and forward is to make a nonsense of the dream, for it implies that time is linear, and if that were so there could be no movement, only a forward progression. But we do not move through time, time moves through us. (90)

These ideas are also explored by the twentieth-century chemist, who observes that, while she has a "calendar and a watch, and so rationally [she] can tell where [she is] in this thing called a year," her own experience is different, and she feels as though she has been watching the river for years (126). Her "strongest instinct is to abandon the common sense approach and

accept what is actually happening to [her],” that is, “that time has slowed down” (126). She believes that this experience is not entirely nonsensical; indeed, “under certain conditions” our “pulses slow or race, our breathing alters, the whole body will change its habit if necessary” (126). Memory likewise confuses our sense of linear time and reality, because, while it is a personal record of history, it takes the form of disjunctive images and therefore confirms the fragmented nature of experience. As the Dog-Woman explains, she “can remember some incidents” from her childhood, “but the sense of time passing escapes [her]” (108). She muses further that if she “were to stretch out all that seemed to happen, and relive it, it might take a day or two,” but immediately queries: “[w]here then are all the years in between?” (108)

The conception of matter as solid and knowable is likewise undermined by quantum theory, which found the atom – the basic unit of matter – to consist predominantly of empty space. In the second epigraph to *STC*, Winterson states, “[m]atter, that thing the most solid and well-known, which you are holding in your hands and which makes up your body, is now known to be mostly empty space. Empty space and points of light. What does this say about the reality of the world?” (8). As Peter Childs explains, Winterson here indicates the instability of objective reality by pointing out that “below the level of the atom matter only has a *tendency* to exist” (263, original emphasis). Taken together, the novel’s epigraphs foreground the unstable nature of reality as the primary focus of the narrative they precede. Though the Dog-Woman herself believes that the world is flat and matter is substantial, her own body denies a static and fixed understanding of the world (23). Her size is gigantic and ambiguous, and often causes her to question inherited or conventional perspectives on reality. She argues, for example, that although she once forced an elephant into the sky while jumping on a see-saw, she does not know what the incident can tell her about her own, or the elephant’s, size – as a “balloon looks big and weighs nothing” (25).

As mentioned above, time is a pivotal theme in the novel, but particularly with regard to “how it intersects with consciousness to create a sense of identity” (Makinen 93). As Moore asserts, the “novel is principally preoccupied with a challenge to Lockean identity as the duration of consciousness through time” (117). Jordan’s quest is ultimately a quest for the self, a quest to try to reconcile or understand two supposedly separate worlds: the inner life and the outer. He observes that, while our outer, public lives are

governed by the seasons and the clock [, . . .] our inward lives are governed by something much less regular – an imaginative impulse cutting through the dictates of daily time, and leaving us free to ignore the boundaries of here and now and pass like lightning along the coil of pure time, that is, the circle of the universe and whatever it does or does not contain. (89-90)

In other words, the inner life is governed by imaginative experience, memory, and dreams, which inevitably affect the way in which we construct reality in our “outer life” (102-103). Throughout Jordan’s discussions on the ambiguous nature of such predetermined stabilities as time, matter, and memory, the Lockean “notion of identity is shown to be just as flawed as all the other Enlightenment projects,” such as science, geography and cartography (Makinen 93). Modernity dictates “the regime of the subject, of the bounded body, of fixed identity” (Moore 116), but Winterson shows a desire to replace these bounded conceptions with the idea of multiple selves and subjectivities. Through Jordan’s endless search for himself, Winterson debunks the Enlightenment notion of a fixed and unified self in a stable reality which can be analysed and interpreted objectively. She thus destabilises the idea of reliable knowledge of the past in order to undermine our assumptions about reality and identity. Both Jordan and the Dog-Woman have to assume they “had a childhood,” but they cannot assume they had the one they remember (92). As Jordan explains, “[e]veryone remembers things which never happened. And it is common knowledge that people often forget things that did” (92). Moreover, this unreliability undermines a fixed, immovable sense of self. Here Winterson enacts a common postmodern “challenge [to] the humanist assumption of a unified self and an integrated consciousness by both installing coherent subjectivity and subverting it” (*Poetics* xii). Jordan views his own identity as incorporating multiple selves, as is evident when he looks at Paolo Uccello’s *A Hunt in a Forest* and sees his “countless lives existing together and receding slowly into the trees” (92). His quest for the multiple parts of himself often takes a physical exploration, as can be seen in his experiments with cross-dressing. He cross-dresses in order to be “free of the burdens” of his gender, and to gain access into female spaces such as brothels and market places in order to better understand certain women’s experiences (31). These gender performances allow him to explore and re-imagine his gendered identity, and offer him insight into different social worlds.

As is obvious in much of Winterson’s work, “[a]bsolutism” of any kind – be it the positivist thinking associated with modernity and the enlightenment, or misogyny and discrimination – is a way of thinking that Winterson seeks to ‘emasculate’” (Estor xiv). In

STC she uses contemporary scientific understanding to challenge Enlightenment discourse and question our inherited and naturalised conceptions of reality. Makinen argues that, in *STC*, “[t]ime, space and consciousness, are all interpermeable, and in a state of flux” which “Science cannot fix or limit [. . .] to a series of explanations” (92). To put it in Hutcheon’s terms, Winterson both uses and ironically abuses scientific discourse in her project of re-telling. By employing the subversive tendencies of re-visionary fiction, she undermines and interrogates those notions which cause her characters and readers to view narratives, themselves and, ultimately, their reality as fixed and unchangeable.

‘I Sing Inside the Mountain of my Flesh’: The Dog-Woman and Her World

In her fantastic re-imagining of the ‘feminine’ form, Winterson utilises fantasy and the grotesque in order to situate the Dog-Woman as a transgressive figure and a site of possibility. As Burns argues, fantasy is not a “dilettante’s pastime for Winterson; it is the source of belief and often the bread of survival” (286). The Dog-Woman’s fantastic and grotesque characterisation serves as an “interruption” of “dominant cultural fantas[ies]” (Burns 286), such as the patriarchal ideology which informs history and other social and cultural mythologies. Winterson utilises the grotesque to grant both the Dog-Woman and her twentieth-century counterpart enormous strength and determination, which enable them not only to disrupt the dominant narratives which seek to control them, but also to position themselves as powerful agents and authors of their own narratives.

“How hideous am I?” asks the Dog-Woman, before beginning to describe herself in more detail (24). She is inexplicably huge: she compares her body to “a mountain range,” and comments that her skirt could “serve as a sail for some war-torn ship” (25, 65). Moreover, she exhibits extravagance and excess, fulfilling Bakhtin’s description of a grotesque body as “grandiose, exaggerated, immeasurable” (*Rabelais and His World* 19). As Bakhtin notes, giants and their mythology are “closely related to the grotesque conception of the body” (328), a conception which “ignores the closed, smooth, and impenetrable surface of the body and retains its excrescences and orifices” (317-318). The Dog-Woman’s size is not only immeasurable because she is a giant, however, but also due to Winterson’s ambiguous representation of her dimensions. For example, although she is described as mountainous, she can also weigh nothing at all and can “melt into the night as easily as a thin thing that sings in

the choir at church” (14). The Dog-Woman’s body itself marks the reader’s entry into an alternative world: her body represents possibility, as she is not so much a giantess but a shape-shifter, whose mental understandings of her own size affect her physical interactions with the world. When she was a child she broke both her father’s legs when lifted onto his lap, but she explains that her “mother, who lived only a while and was so light that she dared not go out in a wind, could swing [her] on her back and carry [her] for miles” (25). She is heavy enough to launch Sampson the elephant to the height of the stars (24), but describes how in “the dark and in the water [she weighs] nothing at all” (40).

Through the employment of the Dog-Woman’s grotesque and ambivalent size, Winterson creates a site of fantastic potential. The grotesque rejects binaries and certainty through its promotion of ambiguity. As such, it can be used as an ideological tool to undermine discourses of oppression. In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin demarcates “the concept of grotesque realism” as an element of the carnivalesque (18). The fundamental attributes of the grotesque style include “exaggeration, hyperbolism, [and] excessiveness,” which allow for renewal through degradation (304). Degradation, for Bakhtin, is an important attribute of the grotesque; it is “the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract,” which enables the ‘uncrowning’ of dominant power structures (19). The grotesque form consecrates “inventive freedom,” and permits “the combination of a variety of different elements and their rapprochement, to liberate from the prevailing point of view of the world, from conventions and established truths, from clichés, from all that is humdrum and universally expected” (34). Accordingly, the grotesque “discloses the potentiality of an entirely different world, of another order, another way of life” (48). In *STC*, Winterson’s grotesque portrayal of the Dog-Woman allows for an inversion of hierarchical norms, including patriarchy, heteronormativity, and linear understandings of time, space and history. Winterson utilises the grotesque in her novel as it demarcates a site of resistance against convention and it consequently anticipates alternative possibilities and different modes of perceiving and being.

The Dog-Woman’s humour is pivotal to her embodiment of the carnivalesque and grotesque. For Bakhtin, laughter is necessary to subvert hierarchies and enable the possibility of new worlds and ways of being. He observes that:

The principle of laughter and the carnival spirit on which the grotesque is based destroys this limited seriousness and all pretense of extratemporal meaning and unconditional value of necessity. It frees human consciousness, thought, and imagination for new potentialities. (*Rabelais and His World* 49)

For example, when the Dog-Woman is attempting sex with a man, he tells her that her genitals are too large for him to perform oral sex. Referring to her clitoris he says, “I cannot take that orange in my mouth. You are too big Madam” (107). However, when she examines her valva for herself, she finds everything to be in proportion and scoffs: “These gentlemen are very timid” (107). Her inability to have sex with men because of her size is indeed humorous; however, this inability also demonstrates “the text’s refusal to acquiesce to culture’s attempt to control the woman’s body” (Farwell, qtd. in Makinen 97). Through these simultaneously humorous and subversive incidences, the Dog-Woman fulfils Bakhtin’s expectation of carnival performers, whose “function is to disrupt, undercut, and complicate the status quo, to lay bare their contradictions and falsities of the ruling philosophical, religious, and formal conventions” (Carroll 93).

As a site of ambiguity, the Dog-Woman’s body questions masculine and feminine conventions (Makinen 91). Indeed, she describes herself in ambivalent terms: “My nose is flat, my eyebrows are heavy. I have only a few teeth and those are a poor show, being black and broken [. . .] the caves in my face are home enough for fleas. But I have fine blue eyes that see in the dark” (24). Her grotesque size and monstrous strength, her often violent actions, and her insistence that she is a charitable, modest, Christian woman, allow for the blurring of gender boundaries, and thereby serve as a challenge to hegemonic discourses, including the “representation of women as men’s ‘other’ which has been constructed by patriarchal discourses” (Kirca 66). Furthermore, she subverts the idealisation of the subdued and gracefully contained feminine form, as the grotesque image is “that which protrudes from the body, all that seeks to go out of the body’s confines” (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 316). She is described, in typically grotesque fashion, through images of excessive sweating, devouring and swallowing, actions which are deemed atypical of ‘femininity’ by patriarchal norms (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 330-331). Her body refuses to be contained within static boundaries; every aspect of it and its functions are excessive. During a particularly hot summer, for example, she notes that she “could scarcely step outside without sweating off [. . .] enough liquid to fill a bucket,” and further explains that these “waterfalls took with them countless lice and other timid creatures” (21).

The Dog-Woman's contemporary counterpart, a twentieth-century woman whose character parallels that of the Dog-Woman, draws on the grotesque characterisation of her "*alter ego*" in order to inspire her own strength and power (*STC* 125, original emphasis). She is a chemist who, although encouraged by her parents to take a well-paying job at a corporation, chooses pollution research and ecological conservation. Quite overweight in her youth, the memory of her previous body size "persisted in [her] mind" and into adulthood (120). She tells the reader:

I had an *alter ego* that was huge and powerful, a woman whose only morality was her own and whose loyalties were fierce and few. She was my patron saint, the one I called on when I felt myself dwindling away through cracks in the floor or slowly fading in the street. Whenever I called on her I felt my muscles swell and laughter fill up my throat. Of course it was only a fantasy, at least at the beginning. (125, original emphasis)

Like the Dog-Woman, she upholds the rights of the under-represented, constructing her identity through her fantasies of the former, and imaginatively authoring her life with power and purpose as she does so. The twentieth-century woman imagines that she is "huge, raw, a giant" and fantasises that, when she goes out as a giant, it is with her "sleeves rolled up and [her] skirts swirling round [her] like a whirlpool" (120). She imagines that, if she were as strong, resolute and uncontained as her alter ego, she would take a sack and travel the world filling it up with executives and world leaders from the World Bank and the Pentagon. She would then take them to the "the butter mountains and wine lakes and grain silos and deserts and cracked earth and starving children and arms dealers in guarded palaces" (123). As a giantess, she imagines she could force change – that after compulsory diets and training in feminism and ecology, the executives and world leaders would "start on the food surpluses, packing [the food] with their own hands, distributing it in a great human chain of what used to be power and is now co-operation" (123).

A conflation of the two women's narrative worlds occurs when the Dog-Woman contributes to the Great Fire of London, and the twentieth-century woman burns down the factory responsible for polluting the river she has been attempting to protect. The Dog-Woman views the fire of London as a means to purify a city full of "filth and pestilence" as a result of God's wrath at the killing of the King (141). To an extent, Winterson re-invents or extends the Rabelaisian and Bakhtinian grotesque form here because, as the twentieth-century

woman explains, there is no conventional “Rabelaisian dimension for rage” (124). “Both woman are ridiculed” (Makinen 85) by seventeenth-century Londoners and twentieth-century children respectively, and both women’s bodies can be “regarded as subversive powers” which desire to be “larger than patriarchy” by evoking its “fear and disgust” (Kirca 68), not only for their size but their rage-fuelled actions. The twentieth-century woman feels contained by a society that ridicules size, power, and action in women, and uses her grotesque fantasies as a means of harnessing her rage as strength and conviction. As she explains: “I wasn’t fat because I was greedy; I hardly ate at all. I was fat because I wanted to be bigger than all the things that were bigger than me. All the things that had power over me. It was a battle I intended to win” (124).

The carnivalesque and grotesque find their sources in the pre-classical era of folk culture and humour, and are opposed to the closed, conservative representations of the body which became characteristic of the classical literary fairy tale. In Winterson’s re-telling of the classical fairy tale, she draws on parodic inversion and metafiction in order to exhibit a re-visioning of the fairy tale genre and its representations of gender.

‘Happily Ever After’: The Twelve Dancing Authors

In her re-telling of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm’s “The Twelve Dancing Princesses” Winterson challenges the assumption that fairy tales are “universal, ageless, therapeutic, miraculous, and beautiful” (Zipes 1), and reveals these narratives to be “historical prescriptions” (Zipes 11). She speaks back to the historical and social oppression of women, positioning *STC* in the sub-genre of feminist re-visionary fiction. To achieve this, she transgresses the parameters of the fairy tale in order to reclaim this genre for her characters, apparently allowing them to ‘author’ and rework these narratives according to their own subjective desires. In doing so, Winterson shows the reader the importance of narrativising the self and re-telling the narratives which define our lives. Her re-telling of fairy tales retains the fantastic style of the genre, but critiques the notion that such tales are without history or ideological context, and challenges the hegemonic epistemologies perpetuated by the classic fairy tale.

The Grimm Brothers’ version of the “Twelve Dancing Princesses,” which can be found in their collection *Children’s and Household Tales* (1812), is conventionally relayed,

that is, by a third-person omniscient narrator. The plot involves a King who has twelve daughters, all of whom are very beautiful. Every night he locks them in their bedchamber, and each morning he unlocks the door, only to find that their shoes have been worn out from dancing. The King cannot fathom where his daughters go in the night and declares that any man who can determine their nightly whereabouts may choose one of them to be his wife and become the next King. Any volunteer who comes forward will be given three days and three nights to determine the whereabouts of the twelve, and if he does not do so in the allotted time he will be put to death. Many princes try and fail. Eventually, a soldier, who is advised by a wily old woman to avoid the princesses' sleeping potion, manages to follow them to an underground castle, where he discovers them dancing with their beloved princes. Upon finding out the whereabouts of the twelve, he chooses the eldest daughter to be his wife and becomes King after her father dies. In this narrative the traditional fairy tale trope of marriage as a reward for the princess is transformed into a form of punishment, as due to her disobedience she is 'given' to the soldier in the marriage transaction, instead of being able to be with her chosen prince. The eldest daughter is punished most severely in this fairy tale, as she is guilty of confidence and arrogance: on their way to the underground palace she admonishes her younger, more cautious sister, who senses danger three times on the night that they are caught. The story serves as a representation of a patriarchal societal and familial structure, and demonstrates that women who transgress their father's law and exhibit disobedience, deceit, independence, sexual deviancy, arrogance, and cunning, are eventually punished.

The genre of the literary fairy tale, which originated in oral folklore, was, according to Jack Zipes, "purposely appropriated" by educated bourgeois and aristocratic writers "and converted [. . .] into a type of literary discourse about mores, values, and manners" in order to ensure that "children would become civilised according to the social code of that time" (3). These adaptations of oral folktales "led to an institutionalized symbolic discourse on the civilizing process which served as the basis for the [. . .] genre" (Zipes 3). Notions about sexuality and the social roles and behaviour of men and women were embodied and legitimated by literary fairy tale discourse, which affirmed the "dominant Christian absolutist view regarding the regulation of inner and outer nature in favour of male hegemony and rationalized industry" (Zipes 33). Accordingly, the "morality and ethics of a male-dominated

Christian civil order” became “the underlying principle in the writing of literary fairy tales” (Zipes 8, 9).

The Grimm Brothers’ fairy tales, in particular, were tailored for an increasingly conservative Victorian middle-class audience and reflected their social concerns (Zipes 48). The heteronormative concept of the nuclear family, with a hierarchy drawn from protestant patriarchal power structures, dominated bourgeois society at the time the Grimm Brothers were writing, and was especially characterised by “the growing notion that the woman’s role was in the home and that the home was a shelter for innocence and children” (Zipes 53). The morals and didacticism expressed by their fairy tales therefore “justify a division of labour and the separation of the sexes” (Zipes 53). Contemporary Western fairy tales (inherited from Charles Perrault, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, and Hans Christian Anderson) have been influenced immensely by the “aesthetics and ideology of the seventeenth and eighteenth century French fairy tales which have become part and parcel of a general civilising process in the West” (Zipes 17). One can trace a “direct line from the Perrault fairy tale of [French] court society to the Walt Disney cinematic fairy tale of the culture industry” (Zipes 17). As Denise Escarpit observes, the purpose of the fairy tale has always been to “instruct and amuse, that is, to make moral lessons and social strictures palatable” (qtd. in Zipes 9). In her re-telling of “The Twelve Dancing Princesses,” Winterson uses the fairy tale genre against itself, by inverting its cultural conventions, whilst utilising it as a tool to “instruct and amuse” by overturning oppressive strictures which have masqueraded as moral codes for centuries. Moreover, she gives expression to voices that are suppressed or eliminated in the genre, such as those of women and homosexuals. Like Jack Zipes, Winterson is aware that the fairy tale established regulations that “deprived women and other oppressed groups of self-expression and independence” (37). While the genre is defined by the “civilising process” in Europe, it is precisely because of its socialising role that the fairy tale has the ability either to “legitimize or criticize the course of the western civilizing process” (Zipes 11). It is precisely this ability that Winterson has exploited, through parody and fantasy, in order to utilise the latent subversive capacity inherent in fairy tales.

It is important to note the ideological agenda of the fairy tale, including its inscribed roles of hero and heroine, which serve to prescribe model patterns of behaviour for girls and women, and boys and men. The heroine in the fairy tale is civilised, of proper breeding and behaves according to the social codes of upper-class society: “[s]he is beautiful, polite,

graceful, industrious, properly groomed, and knows how to control herself at all times” (Zipes 25). The heroine must exhibit modesty, patience and reserve, and must be passive and submissive. If she fails to exhibit these qualities or is disobedient in any way she is severely punished. These punishments range from imprisonment to banishment and death. Negative attributes of female characters include unattractiveness, spontaneity, and “curiosity, unreliability, and whimsy” (Zipes 37). Her task as heroine usually involves stoic inaction: she must wait until rescued by a man who has recognised in her the above-mentioned virtues and, because of these, will choose to marry her. Marriage, in most fairy tales, is the ultimate reward and salvation for a female character, as she “cannot behave civilly or live happily without the male to temper her” (Zipes 34). As Zipes explains, the heroine:

lives only through the male and for marriage. The male acts, the female waits. She must cloak her instinctual drives in polite speech, correct manners, and elegant clothes. If she is allowed to reveal anything, it is to demonstrate how submissive she can be. (25)

This submissiveness extends to the suppression of sexual and emotional desires, as part of her general compliance with patriarchal authority. Beauty, one of the most revered traits of the fairy-tale heroine, depends on “prudence and discretion which is figuratively depicted by the heroine either sacrificing herself to a male beast or submitting to his commands and wishes because he has a noble soul and civil manners” (Zipes 37). The message inherent in most of the tales, then, is that “the girl must learn to fear her own curiosity and sensuality” (Zipes 52).

While the heroine embodies inaction and containment, the hero embodies action and exuberance. Physical appearance is not highlighted as particularly important in comparison to the other qualities a male hero must embody, qualities such as intelligence, courage, deft manners, ambition, and the ability to work his way up the social ladder (Zipes 25). Heroes must exhibit “self-control, politeness, reason, and perseverance” (Zipes 41). While the primary goal or success for female characters is marriage, for the male characters “social success and achievement are more important than winning a wife” (Zipes 25). Women are thus “incidental to the fates of the male characters whereas males endow the lives of females with purpose. The heroes are active, pursue their goals by using their minds, and exhibit a high degree of civility” (Zipes 25). These roles for men and women are strictly defined in the fairy tale genre, and a character’s success in the stories is premised on working within his/her defined role. Men and women will succeed if they stay within the boundaries of their

respective domains. Conversely, if they try to appropriate each other's designated roles, they will fail and be punished. In *STC* this generic pattern is subverted by the disruption of the conventional roles of hero and heroine, not only with the tale of "The Twelve Dancing Princesses" but also, as discussed earlier, in the portrayal of the Dog-Woman's character traits, and Jordan's reconfiguration of the heroic explorer narrative.

In Winterson's re-telling of the "The Twelve Dancing Princesses" each princess defies the one-dimensionality of their pre-textual selves, and disrupts the fairy tale form by enacting alternatives to their conventionally emplotted lives. Telling their own stories in the first person, they rebel against the patriarchal authority of their father and husbands. Jordan is told the tale of the "Twelve Dancing Princesses" in a dream he has while at sea. He is searching for Fortunata – although he does not know her name yet – a dancer he met in the city of words. He reasons that "one dancer might well know another and that a dozen [dancers] must surely know one" (43). He then decides to visit them at their home, where the eldest princess explains that they had been caught in their nightly escapes to a floating city where everyone danced. They were found out by a clever young prince, however, not an older soldier. The prince had eleven brothers, to whom each princess was given in marriage. "As it says," the eldest tells Jordan, "we lived happily ever after [. . .] but not with our husbands" (48). Jordan then listens to each of the princesses' stories, all of which reject the social constructs of the classic fairy tale. Instead of remaining with their husbands, each princess liberates herself and absconds to a "female community" (Palmer, qtd. in Makinen 86).

The princesses' acts of re-telling promote alternative narratives to the pre-text, alternatives which include role-reversal, inversions of dominant ideological patterns, and a shifting of power structures. They escape the confines of their father's patriarchal rule by flying and dancing, but when they are discovered by the prince they refuse to accept that they may not dance again. In Winterson's re-visionary tale, women do not remain married when unfulfilled. Rather, they exhibit violent reactions or at least active opposition to their subjugation. This is represented in the murder or abandonment of abusive and unsatisfactory husbands, and a rejection of oppressive social strictures. It is also made apparent through the princesses' own infidelity, their refusal to tolerate various infidelities committed against them, their candid references to sex and sexuality, their propensity for homosexual desire and love, and their rejection of the heteronormative paradigm and patriarchal family unit. Thus

the first, fifth and seventh princesses have affairs with women (one with a mermaid and one with Rapunzel, another character from a Grimms' fairy tale). The second, third, eighth, ninth, and eleventh princesses murder their husbands, for reasons which range from the latter's infidelity and abuse to their greed and depression. And the fourth, sixth, and tenth princesses leave their husbands as a response to their various infidelities and to achieve freedom from domesticity.

In the re-telling of both the original "Twelve Dancing Princesses" and "Rapunzel," the novel "questions gender constructions through the feminist fairy story of a princess and her female lover who exist within a private social space where oppositions are confused and ruptured, thus illustrating the arbitrary unnaturalness of normal gender relations" (Makinen 91). Rapunzel, the fifth princess's lover, comes to live with her in a tower against the wishes of her family, who want her to marry a prince. The angry family classify the princess as a witch, and keep trying to break into the tower, causing the lovers to seal up the entrance: as a result, the princess "got in by climbing up Rapunzel's hair, and Rapunzel got in by nailing a wig to the floor and shinning up the tresses flung out the window" (52). However, the prince disguises himself as the princess and climbs up into the tower. When inside, he ties Rapunzel up and waits for the "wicked witch" to arrive (52). As the witch/princess returns home, the prince attacks her and throws her out of the window. He then forces Rapunzel to watch as he blinds her lover in a field of thorns (52). In the Grimms' version, the prince is Rapunzel's rescuer, and the witch the evil adversary who imprisons Rapunzel in the tower as she has no children of her own. In Winterson's version by contrast, the witch is the lover and tragic hero, and the prince the antagonist. The tower is not a prison, but a place where the lovers are protected from malignant intolerance that condemns their union. In Makinen's terms, this re-telling is an "effective way of calling [the fairy tale] norms into question and undermining the conceptual basis for heterosexual prescriptions within cultural practice" (91). Winterson's re-telling, despite the reversal of roles and the portrayal of transformative love, is nevertheless tragic, since the homophobia of an oppressive society eventually prevails, which demonstrates that the societies in which these women live inflict "brutal punishments" on women "if they dare to transgress the conventional role of object of exchange by forming sexual relationships with one another" (Palmer, qtd. in Makinen 86).

The combination of violence, sex, and humour in Winterson's re-visioning of this classic fairy tale "demythologizes power structures and dominant categorizations, specifically

those of gender and class” (Smith 27). The tale’s reversal and rejection of normative roles for women – and sometimes men – “reconfigure power structures,” as the women “violently reclaim their right to freedom and self-narrative” (Smith 28). The sisters’ tales are often sexual: they discuss sexual organs and desire in open detail, and often employ a tone which is explicitly sensual, demonstrating a more liberated view of sexuality and the body than was allowed in nineteenth-century fairy-tale discourse. Furthermore, the “women reject patriarchal expectation and abuse” – many of them doing so by choosing relationships with women instead of their husbands (Makinen 86). Yet again, “an understanding of the malleability of gender and sexual boundaries characteristic of the point of view of a marginalized sexuality is represented not as a minority position, but as the unproblematic possession of the novel’s most admirable characters” (Moore 116). The unabashed tone of their individual stories aids in the normalisation of these alternatives as legitimate ways of responding to male patriarchal oppression. In these re-tellings and in the novel as a whole neither the princesses or the prostitutes’ lesbianism, nor Jordan’s cross-dressing, “are depicted as unusual or remarkable” (Moore, qtd. in Makinen 93).

The princesses’ alternative stories are granted added legitimacy through Jordan’s development of the “theme of subjectivity” in the novel (Makinen 85). Jordan asserts that “identity is multiple” and that one possesses a “conglomeration of selves” as opposed to a fixed self (Makinen 85). As I demonstrated in the previous section, Winterson portrays identity as unstable and as narratively constructed, and this is manifested in the “fluid interaction” between the seventeenth-century subjects and their twentieth-century alter egos (Makinen 85). As Moore indicates, the “linking of Nick Jordan and the female ecologist with their seventeenth-century counterparts deconstructs linear time [. . .], creating a dislocation of identity into a variety of fragmented selves” (118). The fluidity of identity is likewise foregrounded in Jordan’s search for Fortunata, which he comes to view as the quest for himself: during the course of his journeys he discovers that his mission has subconsciously been “an effort to catch up with [his] fleet-footed self, living another life in a different way” (80).

Through characters such as Jordan, the Dog-Woman, and the Twelve Dancing Princesses, Winterson underlines the distinctly postmodern assertion that the “individual subject [itself] is also a fictional self-construction” (Makinen 85), and subverts the Enlightenment conception of identity as static. The “ambiguous relationship which some of

the characters bear to reality” (Makinen 86), the blurring of history and fantasy, and the emphasis on the representational status of metanarratives, reiterates the fictionality of these narratives which construct the self, or the inherent narrativity of identity. One of the resounding messages of the novel is that the “inward life,” or the life of the mind, memory and consciousness, “tells us that we are multiple not single, and that our one existence is really countless existences holding hands like those cut-out paper dolls, but unlike the dolls never coming to an end. [. . .] Our lives could be stacked together like plates on a waiter’s hand. Only the top is showing, but the rest are there and by mistake we discover them” (*STC* 90-91). As the twentieth-century counterpart of the Dog-Woman observes, if she has a “spirit, a soul, any name will do, then it won’t be single, it will be multiple. Its dimension will not be one of confinement but one of space” (*STC* 126). These assumptions about the narratively constructed and incomplete self demarcate the act of re-telling not merely as a tool of transgression, but a means of creating the self authentically through active self-authorship. While *STC* subverts many pre-texts in order to liberate the characters from oppressive discourses and genres, the novel likewise highlights the act of re-telling in order to emphasise (albeit via a literary illusion) the characters’ capacity for self-making, and to indicate to the reader that she, too, may re-construct the narratives which inform her life.

Conclusion

In *STC* Winterson demonstrates a creative affinity with the transgressive features of re-visionary fictions, such as historiographic and feminist metafiction. As Laura Doan maintains, the novel “subverts gender and identity, striving to figure a more open and liberatory acceptance of cultural otherness, differences and ‘monstrosities’” (qtd. in Makinen 92). In addition to these re-visionary traits, however, Winterson foregrounds the concept of narrative identity. She illustrates that a recognition of the narrative self, coupled with the revolutionary spirit of re-vision, can be employed to create the self and the world anew. *STC* also points out and then disputes the contemporary assumption that there is “so little wonder left in the world because we have seen everything one way or another” (113). Re-telling combats this assumption, by demonstrating that this is “not so,” as there is no end to “how vast” the imagination or “matter of the mind” is (*STC* 81). Winterson views art and, more specifically, narrative art, in *STC* as that which draws us “out of ourselves” in order to

discover new selves and new ways of being (*STC* 91). Through their reading of the novel Winterson hopes her readers will feel compelled to “[b]reak the narrative. Refuse to tell all the stories that have been told so far [. . .] and try to tell the story differently – in a different style, with different weights,” in order to author their lives more freely (*The Powerbook* 53). In Chapter Two, I investigate Winterson’s development of these concepts in her later novella, *Weight*, in which she thematises re-telling even more overtly in order to foreground its ability to recreate wonder in our conception of the world and to revitalise our image of the self.

Chapter Two

Putting Down the Night Light Globe: The Book of the World Re-Told and the Transgression of Boundaries in Jeanette Winterson's *Weight*

Winterson wrote the novella, *Weight*, as part of *The Myths* series launched by Canongate Publishing in 2005. Authors commissioned for the series include Margaret Atwood, Chinua Achebe, A.S. Byatt, Karen Armstrong and Winterson herself, each of whom “has retold a myth in a contemporary and memorable way” (*Weight* v). The scope of the project is global; as a “joint enterprise involving some twenty-five international publishing houses worldwide” (Plate 402), the series has been hailed as “the most ambitious simultaneous world-wide publication ever undertaken” (Byng, qtd. in Plate 402). *The Myths* intends to have “one hundred myths retold by the year 2038” (Staels 100). The creative and commercial impulse behind the production and publication of this series reiterates the focus of this thesis, and emphasises the contemporary literary trend and popularity of re-visionary fiction. The series itself “exemplifies how rewriting has not only reached center stage within culture but become big business as well” (Plate 402).

In her introduction to *Weight*, Winterson speaks explicitly about *The Myths* series and her choice of subject. She highlights the importance of the act of storytelling and, more specifically, re-telling, both for the succeeding novella and for literature as a whole. Winterson “themat[is] rewriting” (Plate 402) in her introduction, by lauding the series as “a marvelous way of telling stories – re-telling stories for their own sakes” (*Weight* xvi). For example, Winterson notes that “[t]he story of Atlas holding up the world [. . .] was waiting to be written” or rather, “[r]e-written,” and that the “recurring language motif of *Weight* is ‘I want to tell the story again’” (xviii). This ‘language motif’ not only becomes a significant refrain throughout the novella, but also serves as a framing device which continually foregrounds the narrative function and necessity of re-telling in the text.

Winterson continues her introduction by discussing her own body of work as characteristic of re-visionary fiction and re-telling:

My work is full of Cover Versions. I like to take stories we think we know and record them differently. In the re-telling comes a new emphasis or bias, and the new arrangement of the key elements demands that fresh material be injected into the existing text. (*Weight* xviii)

This “new arrangement of key elements” emerges in her innovative use of genre in the novella. In order to transform both classical mythological narratives and her own autobiographical narrative, Winterson experiments with several genres, thereby transgressing their generic conventions. Two of the most notable transgressions are the blending of autobiographical and mythological conventions, and the interpenetration of literary time frames in the novella. Moreover, in this claim that she likes “to take stories we *think* we know and record them differently” (xviii, my emphasis), she foregrounds the instability of the ‘original’ story, the pre-text, or the story the reader assumes to be the ‘correct’ version. By recording these stories differently, Winterson creates a new “emphasis or bias” (*Weight* xviii), modifying the way the reader views both the original story and the revised version. Characteristic of re-visionary fiction, acts of re-telling often allow for a renewed reading of ignored, undermined or absent perspectives and elements from the pre-text. “Bias” is a particularly interesting word for Winterson to utilise in this explanation, however, as it indicates that re-told narratives cannot profess to provide a more truthful account, but often provide an equally biased, but alternative, one. In *Weight* it becomes evident that rather than a single alternative, a multitude of options are evoked. This provides for a general shift in perception from limitation to possibility or choice, rather than a shift from one specific viewpoint or idea to another, as is common with re-visionary fiction.

In *Weight*, Winterson re-tells narratives from classical Greek mythology and literature, namely, the myths of Atlas and Heracles. She re-writes the mythological moment in which Heracles takes the Kosmos off Atlas’s shoulders in order to gain the latter’s assistance with one of the twelve labours: picking the apples from the garden of the Hesperides. Aside from the lives of Atlas and Heracles, the author also re-tells the story of a third character: a fictional ‘Winterson’, for whom Atlas serves as a mythical alter-ego since their narratives parallel one another. Moreover, in her re-telling, Winterson temporarily re-invents the narrative devices of the tragic and epic forms, and furthermore, achieves a transformative re-telling of Atlas’s myth by employing multiple genres simultaneously. For example, several narrative planes co-exist in the text, and it is this hybridised and transformative use of genre which amounts to the re-visioning not only of classical Greek narratives, but also the epistemological disciplines of history, science, technology and geology, and the literary genres of autobiography, epic, parody, burlesque travesty and tragedy. The novella is a re-telling designed to re-imagine the mythological narratives of Atlas and Heracles in such a way as to challenge both the ‘Winterson’ persona’s and the reader’s perception of the universe and her own self-imposed narratives.

As is characteristic of Winterson's oeuvre, *Weight* is a highly inventive, intertextual and metafictional work which employs several narratives and narrators that parallel and intersect one another. The novella is divided into various narrative planes or what Staels terms "story worlds," which exhibit different genre conventions (Staels 110).⁸ These include "the modern world of science and technology (*logos*), the imagined world of ancient myth (*mythos*), and the author's biographical realm of existence" (Staels 111). To these three story worlds or generic structures might be added Heracles's world, which is defined by burlesque and carnivalesque discourse. These story worlds are narrated by Atlas, Heracles, 'Winterson', and an omniscient third-person narrator who provides commentary across these narrative levels.

In the introduction, Winterson discusses her use of autobiography in the text, since her revisionary project involves a strong parallel between her fictional persona and that of Atlas. Although it is crucial to acknowledge her employment of a significant amount of autobiographical information in the text, it is important also to clarify that the 'Winterson' character is primarily a fictional construct. In this regard, the author explains that "*Weight* has a personal story broken against the bigger story of the myth we know and the myth I have re-told. I have written this personal story in the First Person, indeed almost all of my work is written in the First Person, and this leads to questions of autobiography" (*Weight* xiv-xv). Winterson's work has often been characterised as autobiographical. For instance, *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit* was viewed by most literary critics and journalists as a fictionalised autobiography. She speaks of this issue in an interview with Margaret Reynolds in 2002:

[A]ll writing is partly autobiography in that you draw on your own experience, [. . .] not in a slavish documentary style, but in a way that transforms that experience into something else [. . .]. Other writers do it. Milan Kundera does it, Paul Auster does it. Of course when they do it, it's called 'metafiction'. When women do it, it's called 'autobiography'. (para. 24)

Winterson warns readers not to interpret any of her work as uncomplicated autobiography, and explains that – specifically in *Oranges* – she "wanted to invent [herself] as a fictional character" (Reynolds para. 24). Indeed, in *Weight* too she speaks of the desire to write herself as "a character in her own fiction" (139). Winterson further claims that it is not autobiography that is important to her as a writer, but rather "[a]uthenticity" (*Weight* xv), arguing that "the writer must fire

⁸ Staels's analysis of *Weight* as a whole has proved an invaluable contribution to my argument. Her observations on the transformative use of genre have allowed for greater depth in my own analysis of the novella. In particular, her ideas on the "burlesque transformations" in *Weight*, the "novelization" of the epic form, and the satyr play's influence on Heracles have proven useful in my own investigation into Winterson's varied use of genre (Staels 100-101, 113 and 114).

herself through the text [and] be the molten stuff that welds together disparate elements” (*Weight* xv). This is certainly how the autobiographical information in *Weight* functions: it “welds” the many story worlds and genres together, while allowing her to recreate her own narratives through ‘writing’ herself. I shall typographically indicate the fictional Winterson of *Weight* as ‘Winterson’, and when I note the use of autobiographical information, I refer only to information which is supplied, intratextually by the author on her fictional persona’s life, much of which may be accurate to the author’s actual experience, but all of which must ultimately be viewed as a fictionalisation thereof. Nevertheless, as underlined in Chapter One, it is crucial to investigate notions of self-authorship and personal myth-making as a significant impulse motivating the acts of re-telling in *Weight*.

Staels reads Winterson’s novella as a re-negotiation of the epic form, which not only liberates the text from “generic constraints,” but also liberates Atlas from “the boundaries and limitations of the ancient epic story world” (Staels 101). I have extended Staels’s argument to encompass Winterson’s equally significant re-negotiation of the tragic form. The re-imagining of the Atlas myth, and the epic narrative form as a whole, releases Atlas from the ‘generic constraints’ of the ancient myth and epic. As Atlas functions as ‘Winterson’s’ mythical counterpart in the text, his liberation enables her ‘escape’ from her own autobiographical story world. In the same way that Atlas’s and Heracles’s narratives are circumscribed by fate, the ‘Winterson’ persona’s narrative is restricted by determinism. In the course of this chapter the characterisation of Heracles and the re-telling of his myth will be investigated for, as a transformative trickster figure, his role in the liberation of Atlas, and subsequently ‘Winterson’, from their narratives cannot be underestimated. Through the transgression of genre Atlas and ‘Winterson’ are granted a freedom in which to re-tell their narratives without the burden of fate or determinism. Their new-found freedom remains a bounded freedom, however, as their narratives are still subject to the limitations of the book.

Staels claims that Winterson’s metafictional involvement in the text, as well as the “parodic and burlesque transformations” in *Weight*, demonstrate that she is involved in a re-telling project which represents both a continuation of the “tradition of rewriting classical mythology” and also a “discontinuity with the past in employing a technique” which Hutcheon refers to as “(metafictional) parody” (100-101). In her re-writing of mythology, Winterson uses methods which have been employed in mythic re-tellings for thousands of years: the devices of parody and burlesque travesty. She also parts from tradition, however, by engaging in metafiction and a multi-textured experimental blending of genre and discourse. Staels defines metafictional

parody as a “technique that focuses on inherent limitations of past forms of writing” and that “underlines the inbuilt historical character of modes of writing in terms of form, style and subject matter” (101). In *Weight*, metafictional parody is used to “seriously rework a literary model,” in this case the ‘high’ genres of tragedy and epic, in order to “call attention to [their] conventions and limitations by putting [them] in a new, contemporary context” (Staels 101). In the novella, these genres are associated with rigid borders, static emplotment, fixed fate, and limitation. Throughout her oeuvre, and indeed, her life as a creative writer, Winterson has pitted herself against institutions, industries and genres that are characteristically and categorically limited, and has always striven to transgress those borders that impinge upon imagination, creativity and liberty.

Finally, it is crucial to analyse Winterson’s amalgamation of the scientific and the mythic in *Weight*. As I have shown in Chapter One, debunking dominant understandings of time and space derived from Classical Physics is a primary concern in *STC*. Equally important for *Weight* are the concepts of relativity and quantum theory, and how these ideas affect the characters’ perception of the world and the self. *Weight* further suggests that Winterson understands history, fairy tale, science, and mythology as “merely different aspects of a single epistemology” (Estor 29), and that she consequently attempts to “remove the barriers between the rational and the poetic” and to “erase the boundaries between science and literature” (Estor 1, 29). Throughout the novella, she conjoins these typically disparate epistemologies in order to exploit the potential of both. The merging of these genres contributes substantially towards Winterson’s re-telling of the mythical story of Atlas, her re-imagining of her fictional persona’s tale, and the reader’s perception of the world and her own narrative.

In the Beginning there was the Word. And the Word could be Re-written: The Paratext and the ‘Book of the World’ Re-told

In the paratext which precedes the introduction to *Weight*,⁹ Winterson introduces a metaphor of the world itself as a narrative, and thus places significant emphasis on the activity of re-telling as a way to view the world anew. She likens the strata of sedimentary rock to the pages of a book, “each with a record of contemporary life written on it” (xiii), and uses this geological analogy to

⁹ Gérard Genette utilises the term paratext to refer to “a title, subtitle, intertitles; prefaces, postfaces, notices, forewords, etc.; marginal, infrapaginal, terminal notes; epigraphs; illustrations; blurbs, book covers, dust jackets, and many other kinds of secondary signals, whether allographic or autographic [. . .] which provide the text with a (variable) setting and sometimes a commentary, official or not” (3). It is a useful term for the particular piece of writing at issue here which is placed prior to the introduction to *Weight* and is not titled.

explain that “the record is far from complete,” an explanation which serves as a motivation for wanting to “tell the story again” (xviii). This paratext proves crucial to an understanding of the succeeding novella, as it lays the foundation for the metaphor of the “book of the world” (*Weight* 6), which is encountered in the opening pages and which foregrounds the significance of the motif of re-telling in the pages that follow (*Weight* 6).

Winterson’s metaphor outlines the postmodern and re-visionary hypothesis that, whether in the pages of a book or in the geological reading of rock structures, “the record” – literary, historical or scientific – contains large gaps, untold stories, and uninvestigated understandings or versions (xiii). She explains that the “succession of layers is further obscured as strata become twisted or folded, or even completely inverted by enormous geological forces” (xiv). Extending the metaphor of the ‘book of the world’, this obscuring of the strata by geological forces relates to obfuscations and ‘errors’ within our collective body of history or knowledge. Early in the novella, in a discussion of the earth’s creation, the narrator expresses disdain towards the adage that “the rest is history” (5), and challenges this reductive (and somewhat complacent) statement by wryly commenting: “[w]ell not quite” (5). In a similar vein, the paratext’s typography dissolves into repetition, line breaks and ellipses, expressing the irregular layers of the record (both geological and otherwise), and physically demonstrating its incompleteness or lack:

The strata of sedimentary rock are like the pages of
a book . . .

Each with a record of contemporary life written on
it . . .

Unfortunately the record is far from complete . . .

The record is far from complete . . .

(Winterson, *Weight* ix-x)

The paratext therefore emphasises that the record is incomplete regardless of the recording – or, as Winterson views it, narrative – discourse, be it geological, scientific, historic or poetic, and thus emphasises the postmodernist view that there are “plural meanings and truths as opposed to one meaning or one ‘Truth’” (Kirca 2). Consequently, one must “keep telling the stories” in alternative ways (*Weight* xx). The author feels compelled to re-tell these stories in nuanced ways

in order to add to the record, and she does this with fervour, because of, and not despite, the acknowledgement that the record will never be complete.¹⁰

The assertion that there can be no complete record or absolute understanding of the world, regardless of the method of deconstruction used, supplements Winterson's explanation, in the introduction, for the need to "tell the story again" in transformative ways. It becomes evident in *Weight* that her main tool for creating this transformation involves the transgression of discursive and generic boundaries. According to Staels, the paratext "self-reflexively comments on the novella's plural narrative levels and lays bare the device of one narrative level and ontological border intruding into another" (111). This is a technique which Winterson uses throughout her novella by amalgamating the genres of classic mythology, science and technology, and contemporary reference. The paratext, together with the introduction, "self-consciously deals with Winterson's creation of various story worlds, based on genre conventions, and metaphorically speaks about her violation of generic boundaries by means of transformative narrative techniques" (Staels 111).

In the opening chapter, the narrator returns to the notion of *reading* the 'book of the world':

All the stories are here, silt-packed and fossil-stored. The book of the world opens anywhere, chronology is one method only and not the best. Clocks are not time. Even radioactive rock-clocks, even gut-spun DNA, can only tell time like a story. (6)

Together, the paratext and the above quotation inform the extended metaphor of 'the book of the world', or the world as represented and explained through narrative, a metaphor which is sustained throughout the text, and which functions as a motif across the various story worlds. As Winterson's character declares near the end of *Weight*, "the globe itself, complete, perfect, unique" is a story, "[s]cience "is a story," "[h]istory is a story," and these "are the stories we tell ourselves to make ourselves come true" (145). She also locates time itself as a narrative: claiming that, when someone asks to be told the time, what they are really asking is to be told a story (*Weight* 7). These metaphors illustrate Winterson's understanding of these discourses and disciplines as stories, or methods of telling stories, and that these stories help to shape and inform our perception of the world and ourselves.

¹⁰ It must be noted that the author holds no illusion that the re-told stories are any more 'complete' than the 'original' pre-text. The open-ended conclusion of the novella attests to this, by suggesting a lack of closure and the need for the re-told ending to spur yet another new beginning.

Winterson uses the ‘book of the world’ metaphor, and scientific understandings of the universe and infinity, in order to demonstrate the multiple ways in which a story can be told or re-told. In the metaphor which sustains the novella, she aligns the infinite nature of the universe with the omnipossibility of narrative. The notion that “all the stories are here” – and able to be unlocked through re-telling – is not only linked to the metaphor of ‘the book of the world’, but also to the view of the infinite potentialities which exist due to our ever-increasing body of scientific knowledge of the earth and the universe, as well as the infinite nature of what is unknown to us about the universe. Both the author and ‘Winterson’ see boundless potentiality in what is unknown to us; moreover, the author sees similar potential in taking “what we think we know” and rendering these elements unfamiliar (*Weight* xviii). The record’s being “far from complete” is reiterated in the notion that, although humankind has sent people to the moon, landed BEAGLE 2 on Mars, and “know more about outer space than anyone ever,” it is still “just the start” (*Weight* 133). What we know are just “jottings, hesitations, small facts, big gaps” (*Weight* 133). As ‘Winterson’ observes, the “universe is expanding. The more we see, the more we discover there is to see” (*Weight* 137). She then realises that there may always be a “new beginning” and “a different end” to the narratives we tell (*Weight* 137).

Weight’s paratext introduces the primary concerns of the novella in its amalgamation of geology, fiction, and typography. Likewise, it lays the foundation for the ‘book of the world’ metaphor, which underpins the novella. In the following sections, I will discuss some of the literary techniques and devices which Winterson uses in order to combine genres and subsequently breach their limits, amalgamations which undermine certain genres, and amount to a distinctive re-telling of the narratives at work in the text.

‘Your First Parent was a Star’: The Merging of *Mythos* and *Logos* in *Weight*

Winterson takes the conventionally incongruent discourses of *logos* (science and technology) and *mythos* (myth, narrative, and the realm of the imagination), and blends the two. In doing so, she undermines the Enlightenment’s separation of the ‘rational’ *logos* and ‘magical’ *mythos*, which were viewed as diametrically opposed (Coupe 24). This separation led to the envisaging of “humanity as having progressed from magic, through religion, and so to science” (Coupe 24). As Laurence Coupe explains, the term ‘myth’ “originally meant ‘speech’ or ‘word’” – other definitions include ‘utterance’ and ‘story’ – “but in time what the Greeks called *mythos* was separated out from, and deemed inferior to, *logos*” (9). *Mythos* came “to signify fantasy” and

logos “rational argument” (Coupe 9). The philosopher Paul Ricoeur argues that we must refrain from dismissing myth as “false explanation” and move towards appreciating its “exploratory significance and its contribution to understanding” (qtd. in Coupe 8). Like Ricoeur, Winterson views mythology as an alternative epistemological method, and her work demonstrates this view, by blurring the boundaries between the real and the imaginary, and the rational and poetic.¹¹ Understanding myth as “a dimension of modern thought” (*The Symbolism of Evil* 5), Ricoeur advocates the potential of myth and “its power of discovery and revelation” (qtd. in Coupe 8). He suggests that

By the spirit of language we intend not some decorative excess or effusion of subjectivity, but *the capacity of language to open up new worlds*. Poetry and myth are not just nostalgia for some forgotten world. They constitute a disclosure of unprecedented worlds, an opening on to other *possible* worlds which transcend the established limits of our *actual* world. (*A Ricoeur Reader* 488-490, original emphasis)

As Coupe elucidates, while “myth may be paradigmatic,” and “imply a social and cosmic order, or perfection,” it likewise maintains “a promise of another mode of existence entirely, to be realised just beyond the present time and place” (8-9). He discusses myth with regard to what he terms “radical typology,” which views myth as possessing “permanent possibility” and a “dynamic tension between the already and the not yet” (106-107). Winterson amalgamates the symbolic and explanatory potential of myth and narrative poetics with the *logos* of science in order to create a renewed way of viewing the world – that is, as a place impregnated with infinite possibility. In doing so, she undermines the rigorous rationalism of science, against which she has positioned herself throughout her work. Moreover, the combination of these discourses also undermines the reader’s view of science and mythology as binaric, showing that this binary – which alienates the poetic from the rational – can be transcended.

The opening section of *Weight*, entitled “I want to tell the story again,” begins with a contemporary creation myth which utilises elements from mythology, science, and historiography.¹² Winterson re-writes the opening verses of Genesis as “In the beginning there

¹¹ In this regard Winterson differs from her feminist re-visionary counterparts, such as Angela Carter, who firmly stated that she was in the “demythologising business” (Carter 71). Carter viewed myths, specifically those which perpetuated patriarchy, as “extraordinary lies designed to make people unfree” (71). While Winterson’s work obviously agrees with this feminist statement, her own re-visionary project envisages myth in terms of Ricoeur’s understanding of its potential to help create alternative worlds. It is safe to say that Winterson is in the ‘re-mythologising’ business, as her work injects mythological significance into the commonplace and contemporary, as well as re-works many mythologies from alternative points of view.

¹² Creation myths can be viewed as the lynch pin of social and cultural epistemologies, affecting the way a society forms its hierarchies, laws, and belief systems.

was nothing. Not even space and time” (3). She continues by blending elements of myth with science: a unique approach to writing a creation story during a time dominated by advanced scientific discoveries on the origin of the earth and the universe.

Atlas’s connection with ‘Winterson’ is made evident in these opening sections, as it is initially difficult to discern which narrative voice is in operation. Their voices can be confused, or are conflated, at times, and this is particularly noticeable in the reworked creation myth. The first paragraph opens with what one would assume to be Atlas’s voice telling the reader: “You could have thrown the universe at me and I would have caught it in one hand” (3). The voice in the succeeding paragraph, however, appears to possess the tone, extradiegetic knowledge, and relationship with the reader which is typical of ‘Winterson’: “What is it that you contain?” she asks the reader (3). On these occasions I will utilise the formulation Atlas/‘Winterson’, to demonstrate the intentional ambiguity of the narrative voice. Atlas/‘Winterson’ begins the new creation myth by asking the reader:

What is it that you contain? The dead. Time. Light patterns of millennia opening in your gut. Every minute, in each of you, a few million potassium atoms succumb to radioactive decay. The energy that powers these tiny atomic events has been locked inside potassium atoms ever since a star-sized bomb exploded nothing into being. Potassium, like uranium and radium, is a long-lived radioactive nuclear waste of the supernova bang that accounts for you. Your first parent was a star. (4)

In a merging of mythos and logos, Winterson aligns the infinite potential of the universe with that of the individual, a potential that she claims can be exploited through re-telling, as she does through her own re-invention of creation myths. Explaining how the universe began, Atlas/‘Winterson’ addresses the reader directly, using the second-person pronoun to involve her in the story of creation. This re-telling aligns the individual, corporeal, and finite, with the universal, cosmic, and infinite, and explains the universe as intricately connected to the human body or being. Here Winterson merges scientific and historical understandings of the earth’s origins with knowledge of human experience, creating for the reader a personal connection with the creation of the universe that is often negated by a scientific relating of ‘facts’. This re-writing of scientific discourse within a fictional framework offers a version of creation somewhere between that of mythology and scientific historiography. In this re-telling, Atlas/‘Winterson’ often ‘corrects’ or supplements scientific and historiographical understandings of the earth and creation by adding a narrative of imaginative experience. For example, the Earth tells Atlas/‘Winterson’ about her beginnings in “radioactive whispers,” as that is all there is left of the

‘Big Bang’ or “one great shout into the silence” as the theory is poetically described (*Weight 3*). He/she speaks of the Hadean period: “Science calls it the world before life began [. . .]. But life had begun, because life is more than the ability to reproduce” (*Weight 4*), and continues by describing this period when “life longed for life”:

It was hot as hell in those days. It was Hell, if hell is where the life we love cannot exist. Those ceaseless burning fires and volcanic torments are lodged in us as ultimate fear. The hells we invent are the hells we have known. Hell is; *was not, is not, cannot.*
(*Weight 4*, original emphasis)

Here, Atlas/‘Winterson’ links human fears and the mythological conception of hell as rooted in us through our connection to creation. Thus the author is not only portraying the creation of the universe as something linked directly to the human body through our atomic make-up, but also engaging the human mind with the processes of creation by attributing our human fears to conditions where “the life we love cannot exist” (*Weight 4*). Likewise, Atlas/‘Winterson’ reinvigorates or re-mythologises scientific discourse by re-imagining our understanding of the earth’s development over millennia:

I could list for you the wild optimism of the Cambrian era, pushing up mountains like grass grows daisies, or the Silurian dream-days of starfish and gastropods. About 400 million years ago, shaking salt water from their fins and scales, the first land animals climbed out of the warm lagoons of the vast coral reefs. The Triassic and Jurassic periods belong to the dinosaurs, efficient murder weapons, common as nightmares. Then three or four million years ago – chancy and brand new – what’s this come here – a mammoth and something like a man? (5)

Through this blending of evolutionary understandings from scientific discourse, imaginative experience, narrative poetics and mythological significance, Winterson endows this re-imagined creation narrative with a renewed wonder.

This is likewise achieved through the personification of the Earth. The reader is told that not even Earth could not have “guessed the coming wonder” of life as we know it (6), making the outcome even more phenomenal. Atlas explains that Earth “loved the risk, the randomness, the lottery probability of a winner,” in which she was “the blue ball with the winning number on it” (6). The metaphor of creation as a lottery allows for an understanding of the risk and probability that led to life on earth. Although the earth is often personified in creation myths, the reader is here given a more personal perspective in which the Earth is feminised and endowed with

emotions and characteristics which accentuate the wonder of creation, such as innocence, amazement, unselfconscious volatility, and awe; she is “amazed” and “always strange and new to herself” (6). Following mythical and literary tradition, Earth is personified as a woman; however, she is also given a new dimension through Atlas’s explanation of her as his own Mother and the lover of his father, Poseidon. Atlas explains how Earth and Poseidon were “irresistible” to each other, but that both were volatile, and when his “mother threw a plate across the room,” in moments of domestic dispute, “the whole world felt the crash” (11, 12). By blending the mythic personification of Earth with a re-writing of the mythical character of Poseidon, and fleshing these characters out with experiential humour, and empirical evidence from geology, science and paleontology, a new form of creation story is achieved in these opening sections. It is neither a completely scientific and geological rendering, nor a historical and mythological one. The blending is successful, however; creating an effect on the reader that relies as much on scientific reference and personal perspective as the poetic language in which these references are enclosed.

As it is noted by the unnamed narrator in the *The PowerBook* (2000), “the real and the invented” were once “parallel lines that never met. Then [through Non-Euclidean geometry] we discovered that space is curved, and in curved space parallel lines always meet” (94). Similarly, in *Weight*, the story is said to move “at the speed of light, and like light, the story is curved. There are no straight lines. The lines that smooth across the page deceive. Straightforward is not the geometry of space. In space, nothing tends directly; matter and matter of fact both warp under light” (*Weight* 145). The amalgamation of the scientific and poetic concerns here gives great power to the notion of re-telling. The outcome is that the universe is represented in ways which revitalise the reader’s perception of it. The author’s scientific evocation of infinity, and the unstable nature of time and space, amounts to a renewed sense of wonder which allows both Atlas and ‘Winterson’ to contemplate that there may be “no boundaries” (132) or “limits” (145) to how the narrative can be told.

There are two refrains which reiterate re-telling and re-imagining in the text, these being “I want to tell the story again,” from the introduction, and “spin the globe” (141). ‘Winterson’ imaginatively spins the night-light shaped like a globe from her childhood, an image which serves to further connect herself and Atlas, and refers to her childhood past-time of re-making the globe through narrative. These refrains are accompanied by musings on how difficult it is to achieve the balancing act of homeostasis on earth, and the fractured nature of time and space throughout the universe, instabilities which reiterate just how many ways the ‘story’ of the world could have been told (*Weight* 146). As Winterson declares towards the end of the novel, “*All that*

we can see is only a fraction of the universe” – and the latter, we are told, is expanding (151). She uses the scientific unknown (such as dark matter) to support a creative re-imagining of alternative endings for her characters and, ultimately, for the readers themselves (*Weight* 151).

In *Weight*, one finds references to quantum physics, and a repetition of the questions raised in *STC* surrounding the classical understandings of space, matter, and time. Winterson challenges the reverence for rationality and objectivity that much of science advocates, while exploiting theories which allow for the unknown and infinite. Both Atlas and ‘Winterson’ muse on the weight or substance of nothingness, such as the nothingness which the past and future are made up of, or the nothingness which makes up atoms (*Weight* 145). ‘Winterson’ draws on the understanding that atoms are mainly “[e]mpty space and points of light,” a refrain first used in *STC*, and carried through to *Weight* (*Weight* 146, original emphasis). Atlas and ‘Winterson’ are initially confounded by this knowledge, but in time the realisation allows them a certain freedom, and allows Atlas to view his world differently, re-tell his story, and become a part of the “infinite space” he so desires (*Weight* 16). Likewise, ‘Winterson’ realises that the boundaries of herself upon which she leans do not exist, and that she herself can tell her story anew (*Weight* 145).

This interpenetration of genres, which amounts to a unique interplay of story worlds, is most effective because of Winterson’s use of the novel form. Below, I will examine the effects that novelisation has on these mythic characters and their mythologies.

The Novelisation of Atlas and Heracles

In *Weight* Winterson subverts the epic, in which there is little formal or conceptual place for a personal, subjective perspective, by allowing Atlas and Heracles to re-tell their own narratives in the first person. Atlas relates his own myth of origin, and how he came to carry the Kosmos. Likewise, Heracles recounts instances from his own myth using contemporary carnivalesque and burlesque discourse. This unique first-person narration serves as a device which destabilises the totalised epic form by allowing for an alternative – because individualistic and personal – perspective.

As is evident in his numerous musings on fate and boundaries, Atlas feels trapped and essentially “weighed down by an epic world-order” (Steals 112). This epic world-order is “normative and determinative,” and is “partly embodied in the gods, partly in Fate” (Sutton, qtd. in Staels 112). As Bakhtin explains, “the epic world of the absolute past is inaccessible to personal experience and does not permit an individual, personal point of view or evaluation” (*The*

Dialogic Imagination 16). Indeed, for Bakhtin, there is “no place in the epic world for any openendedness, indecision, indeterminacy” (*The Dialogic Imagination* 16). When Atlas speaks of the first day of his punishment, when the Kosmos is deposited onto his shoulders, he asks: “Who is strong enough to escape their fate?” (*Weight* 22). In Euripides’s heroic tragedy *Heracles*, the characters muse on the limitations of fate and the oftentimes curious and cruel actions of the gods. For example, Heracles’s first wife Megara, upon her impending death, states that it is impossible to “make unfated what fate has ordained” (Euripides 311). Hera drives Heracles mad, and in this state he murders both his wife and children. Gripped by grief at the tragedy he has caused, he cries out, “[h]umanity can do nothing for me: Hera is in control” (Euripides 1253).

This preoccupation with fate, determinism, and the gods – which, as Bakhtin has shown, is characteristic of mythological epic and tragedy – is likewise evident in *Weight*. Heracles tells Hera: “[y]ou are my fate [. . .] and guess what? I am yours” (40). When battling Ladon, the dragon who protects the golden apples, Heracles knows “it would be this poison or the one after. He had taken milk from Hera’s breast and she would one day return it to him as poison. He had known as much when he was a baby” (*Weight* 38). He appears sure of this fate and the power of the gods before he later begins to question these forces. When Heracles asks Atlas why they both continue to carry out their punishments, Atlas answers that “There is no *why*”; instead there is only “the will of the gods and a man’s fate” (*Weight* 50-51, original emphasis). Heracles also points out that, although he is “the strongest man in the world” bar Atlas, he is “not free” (*Weight* 51), and in response Atlas tells him that “[t]here is no such thing as freedom” (*Weight* 51). In Euripides’s tragic play, although fate and the natural order are deplored, lamented, and even questioned by Heracles, order is inevitably restored and Heracles’s questions go unanswered (Euripides lines 1341-6). In *Weight*, by contrast, the gods seem quite aware that it is the *notion* of fate, rather than fate itself, that keeps Atlas and Heracles from acting freely and becoming agents or authors of their own narratives. Zeus appears genuinely concerned when Atlas tells him that Heracles is thinking about his situation, and asking questions about the god’s power over him (*Weight* 57). He is relieved at Atlas’s stance that “No one can ask *why* to the gods,” but Zeus fears that Atlas himself might actually begin to consider the “nature of Heracles’s blind question” (*Weight* 57, original emphasis). Likewise, Hera alludes to the fact that fate may not be as these characters perceive it to be, telling Heracles: “[i]f I seem like fate to you, it is because you have no power of your own” (*Weight* 41).

To employ a helpful Bakhtinian notion, as Staels does in her analysis, Atlas and Heracles are “burdened by the *chronotope* of ancient myth” (112). The term refers to literary “time-space”

that can be described as a “unit of analysis for studying texts according to the ratio and nature of the temporal and special categories represented” (Holquist, qtd. in Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 425). The concept is distinctive since, unlike “most other uses of time and space in literary analysis,” neither time nor space “is privileged; they are utterly interdependent” (Holquist, qtd. in Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 425). The burden of the chronotope in *Weight* is made evident when Heracles temporarily relieves Atlas of his load so that he can pick the golden apples. When Atlas climbs Hera’s tree, he is only aware of three apples; however, once he returns to the ground he notices that the tree is laden with fruit. Hera explains to Atlas that the three pieces of fruit represent his past, present, and future, and that he sees only three apples as he cannot see the “tree as it is” because he cannot see “the changefulness of the world” (75). She tells Atlas, too, that “all these pasts are [his], all these futures, all these presents,” and that he “could have chosen differently” but he did not (75). In other words, Atlas perceives fate when he could recognise choice. His sense of entrapment arises from the constraints he experiences as a character in an unchanging, static story, one which is limited by a set chronotope, generic conventions derived from the epic, and a mythological story which will “forever” have him be the “same person” and “perform the same task” (*Weight* 69).

Heracles plays an important role in Atlas’s development, as it is under his guidance, as a novelistic and burlesque trickster-figure, that Atlas begins to question his predicament and his understandings of fate. Raising the issue of the motivation behind Atlas’s continuing to carry the Kosmos, and his continuing to undertake the twelve labours, Heracles poses the question: “Why are we doing this, mate?” (*Weight* 49). He begins to question why he should not be able to bend the “future as easily as an iron bar” and why he is “fixed, immovable, plodding out his life” and wearing “Hera’s yoke” (*Weight* 44). His musing leads him to realise that it may be his own yoke he wears, and that he is responsible for his supposed fate (*Weight* 44). Heracles’s questioning demonstrates a contemplation of “modern existential freedom” and causes Atlas to challenge his “absolutely fixed identity and [consider] his personal freedom in determining the course of his life” (Staels 113). As Staels argues, this escape from his “predetermined position [. . .] is formally explored in the narrative text through the novelisation of the epic genre” (113). She observes that Winterson’s novel “participates in what Bakhtin describes as the parodic-travestyng ‘novelisation’ of the epic genre, or the transposition of epic into novelistic material” (105). As Bakhtin explains: “[t]o portray an event on the same time-and-value plane as oneself and one’s contemporaries (and an event that is therefore based on personal experience and thought) is to undertake a radical revolution, and to step out of the world of epic into the world of the novel”

(*The Dialogic Imagination* 14). Winterson's focus on Atlas and Heracles's personal perspectives on their own myths, as well as the 'Winterson' persona's involvement in their re-telling, contributes to her novelisation of the epic form and the re-telling of these narratives. As Bakhtin notes, "the novel was structured not in the distanced image of the absolute past but in the zone of direct contact with inconclusive present-day reality" which prioritises "personal experience and free creative imagination" (qtd. in Staels 113). By re-writing these characters in the form of a contemporary novel, Winterson grants them an individualised perspective, in which they are freer to question and challenge their previously-determined narrative worlds.

Moreover, Atlas's experience of holding up the Kosmos could not be explored within the epic genre, as a first-person perspective on the Titans and the Gods is not a product of the epic or of classical mythology. Atlas describes how "time splattered [his] calf muscles and the sinews of [his] thighs" as the Kosmos drew nearer and "scorched" his back while the world "settled at the sole of [his] foot" (*Weight* 22-13). Because he is allowed to express his acute pain, a new version of the old myth, and a different ending, is made possible. Initially depicted as bounded by fate – a concern which he struggles with in terms of his carrying the burden of the world – Atlas progresses from the crushing assumption that "there is no *why*" to the liberating question "Why not put it down?" (*Weight* 50-51 and 134). He thus transforms from "an absolutely bounded and preformed epic hero, in a story world dominated by a single unifying perspective," to a "novelistic character" who achieves self-knowledge and a new perspective in a story world defined by multiple perspectives and alternative plot-lines (Staels 113).

This novelisation of the epic story form serves as a device which undermines mythology, as it allows for a challenge to the character's previously totalised, closed, and determined worlds. While these divergences from epic story convention are dealt with conceptually through the character's contemplation of determinism and freedom, as well as through the use of contemporary language, they are also explored formally "through the novelisation of the epic genre" (Staels 113). As Staels points out, Atlas's transformation is caused by the penetration of what Genette terms *extradiegetic* narratives and genres into the generic conventions of the mythic world (Staels 111, my emphasis). Winterson exploits the sense of entrapment which Heracles and Atlas experience and uses the blending of genres and the novel form to release Atlas from his epic fate. In doing so, she parallels Atlas's entrapment with her own. In the following section I will demonstrate Atlas's novelistic development as a character, and consider the mirroring of his story world with that of 'Winterson's' autobiographical re-telling.

**Boundaries and Desire:
'Winterson' and Atlas in *Weight***

As is evident from the introduction to *Weight*, Atlas's mythic world and 'Winterson's' story world mirror each other in many respects. Indeed, the novella ends with the conflation of their narratives (*Weight* 143). As is argued by Staels, Winterson's use of multiple story worlds can be discussed with the aid of Genette's notion of metalepsis, which "designates the transgression of narrative levels" within a text (111). Genette explains that it involves "any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.), or the inverse" (qtd. in Staels 111). In other words, metalepsis involves the intrusion of an external narrator (in this case both the omniscient third-person narrator and 'Winterson') or narratee (the implied reader) into the narrative universe (the mythic world of Atlas and Heracles). What this amounts to, according to Kirca, is "a case of intertextual boundary-violation, transworld identity between characters belonging to different fictional worlds" (17-18). The introduction, which can be viewed as the 'frame text', "foregrounds the autobiographical story world as a narrative level that interpenetrates the diegetic universe, or the embedded story worlds" (Staels 111). As is made clear by this frame text, "*Weight* has a personal story broken against the bigger story of the myth we know and the myth [. . .] re-told" (xviii-xix).

Both Winterson and Atlas share a preoccupation with notions of boundaries, limitation, desire, fate, choice, space, time and – perhaps most importantly – re-telling and its role in their liberation. Their respective narratives are linked by these preoccupations, as well as recurring utterances such as "leaning on the limits of myself" (*Weight* 14, 95, 145) and 'Winterson's' childhood obsession with the globe-shaped night-light (*Weight* 145). These mirroring techniques allow for an intrusion of Winterson's narrative into the diegetic world of Atlas. Furthermore, the insertion of Winterson's biographical, modern, and scientific narratives into Atlas's mythic world, and the deployment of contemporary colloquial discourse by Heracles, undermines the ancient mythological world of the character's origin. Winterson's use of metalepsis, therefore, is partly responsible for the destabilising of the traditional epic form, since the story world of 'Winterson', and the modern world of science and technology, intrude upon the epic story of Atlas. As Staels explains, the frame breaking device "involves the technique of *mise en abyme*, that is, the mirroring of events and discourse between the different story worlds" (112). This narrative technique ensures a critique of the epic story world, while simultaneously endowing 'Winterson's' world with mythological importance, and offering Titan-like significance to the

narrator who ‘carries’ (or tells) the burden of her story. For this reason, one of the main mythologising devices in the text is Winterson’s conflation of classical mythological narrative and the contemporary reality of both the reader and the Winterson narrator.¹³ Furthermore, by divulging that Atlas has watched the 1969 moon landing (134), his myth is no longer relegated to the ancient space of the epic form. Winterson notes that the Greeks could only see as far as Saturn, and demarcates this planet as the physical and metaphysical “boundary” of Greek civilisation (*Weight* 132). By bringing the ancient Greek, Atlas, into contact with unknown planets and spacecraft, she disrupts the borders of his hitherto bounded imaginary or consciousness, and interpellates him in the postmodern era of the infinite. For instance, the narrator depicts Atlas as “watching Mars” (*Weight* 103) and the Mir space station, which is like “television” for him and Laika, the dog he rescues from the Russian Sputnik in 1957 (*Weight* 133). These references to modern history, science, and technology help create a new narrative framework for Atlas by merging the ancient epic story world with the modern world.

Atlas, immortal and left with an eternity in which to re-imagine himself and his life, due to the “limitless universe of his imagination” (*Weight* 104), can be in certain respects aligned with the author, “whose creative spirit and linguistic medium challenge the constraints of (genre) conventions” (Staels 113). Speaking of her rejection by both her biological and adoptive mothers, the ‘Winterson’ character explains: “having no one to carry me, I learned to carry myself. My girlfriend says I have an Atlas complex” (*Weight* 97). Atlas, too, views his immense burden not as the world but rather as himself, “colossal and weighty, little Atlas desperately holding up the Atlas of the world” (*Weight* 84). ‘Winterson’ explains how the world she has created for herself has to be carried with her, just as the demigod carries the Kosmos (*Weight* 100). Like Atlas, she feels trapped by her life, which oftentimes “reads like fate” (*Weight* 97). This metaphor of the self as a narrative carried like a heavy burden, a burden which is linked to the Kosmos, is strengthened by her observations on time. She comes to the realisation that “the past does not dissolve like a mirage” and that “the future, though invisible, has weight,” adding that “[w]e are in the gravitational pull of past and future” and that it “takes huge energy – speed-of-light power – to break that gravitational pull” (*Weight* 99). In a moment of musing, similar to Atlas’s

¹³ The process of ‘mythologising’ would involve endowing a genre or narrative with the quality of myth or with narrative devices from mythology. One could define mythologising as simply ‘making mythological’ or ‘making mythopoeic’. It occurs in two ways: either in the accurate rendering of certain mythological characters and events (such as the use of Atlas as a Titan who shouldered the Kosmos) or in the mythicising of a genre or narrative previously or currently viewed as outside of the mythological sphere (such as the modern world of science and technology).

lamentations on fate, ‘Winterson’ asks: “[h]ow many of us ever get free of our orbit? (*Weight* 99). She then further aligns herself with Atlas and his entrapment in the epic form, explaining that:

The ancients believed in fate because they recognised how hard it is for anyone to change anything. The pull of past and future is so strong that the present is crushed by it. We lie helpless in the force of patterns inherited and patterns re-enacted by our own behaviour. The burden is intolerable. (*Weight* 99)

‘Winterson’ is burdened by her past, and what she views as a future determined by the recurring actions of a present informed by that past. Atlas, too, is plagued by a concern with “*boundaries, and the longing for infinite space*” (*Weight* 16, original emphasis). Both characters experience the weight of limitations and the longing to be free of them, thus allowing for a “thematic analogy” to be established between ‘Winterson’ and Atlas which relies on their “telling their life story again and [revealing] their motive for doing so” (Staels 12).

These two characters’ longing for space in which to move literally and figuratively, free of the many boundaries that fence in desire, can be read as a longing for alternative narratives. Plate points out that the mirroring of the two story worlds of Atlas and Winterson allows for a comparison between the “demigod carrying the world on his shoulders and the storyteller holding up her fictional world” (403). As Plate points out, “Winterson’s self-mythologizing as Atlas [. . .] extends the relevance of *Weight* beyond authorial metafiction” (403). She argues that the storyteller “is not just the writer of fictions; she is also the teller of the story of her own life” (403). In the novella, ‘Winterson’ relates her childhood experiences with her night-light globe or “light up universe,” describing “journeys of survival” in which she would travel the little globe, “country by country, some real, others imagined, re-making the atlas as [she] went” (138). This strengthens the connection between Atlas and herself, and is significant in showing that re-telling and re-imagining her world in order to escape, challenge or change it, has become a life-long preoccupation. As a child she believed that, if she “could only keep on telling the story, if the story would not end, [she] could invent [her] way out of the world” (*Weight* 139). As she explains, writing herself as “a character in her own fiction” allowed her the “chance to escape the facts” (*Weight* 139). It is due to this imaginative strategy that she views herself, ironically, as fortunate, as the life she was given when abandoned by her birth mother and rejected by her adoptive mother she describes as a story she could “read but not write,” and she was therefore forced to re-tell it in and on her own terms, and to re-imagine a new life for herself in the re-

telling (*Weight* 139). She decided that, as an orphan who had “brought no world” with her, she had to create one for herself (*Weight* 141).

The novella enacts this childhood desire, and is left open-ended but optimistic, having created a space for both Atlas’s and Winterson’s past narratives to be relinquished and their futures to remain deliberately undetermined. It becomes apparent that Winterson’s autobiographical narrative is the world she has created, the one she metaphorically carries on her back, “vast and expanding” (*Weight* 143). If her world is created in narrative, it follows that she can remake this world through its re-telling and by ‘putting it down’, as Atlas does with the Kosmos (*Weight* 146). It is obvious that Winterson locates great personal power in the activity of re-telling, including the power to re-create one’s identity, attitude and even one’s situation.¹⁴ Importantly, her character aligns the world she has created in narrative with the globe or ‘the book of the world’, and so emphasises the metaphor of the ‘worlds’ that both she and Atlas carry. Atlas carries his story world, defined by the epic and its fated boundaries, while Winterson carries her autobiographical world, defined by a fear of determined pasts and futures, limited vision, and fixed perspectives. This “mirroring of events and discursive forms between the internally duplicated narrative levels” of Atlas and Winterson, together with the use of “multiple voices and narrative viewpoints,” Staels argues, necessarily results in a semantic transformation of the ancient Atlas myth” as well as a re-imagining of the author’s own autobiographical mythology (Staels 112).

Winterson thus views re-telling as an opportunity to re-write one’s own existence and to propagate new beginnings and different endings (*Weight* 137). The myth’s alternative ending sees Atlas freeing Laika – the dog sent to die alone in space in the Russian Sputnik – and putting the Kosmos down in the early twenty-first century. The dog, Laika, belongs to the discourse of history, space travel and scientific discovery, and her relationship with Atlas once again represents an amalgamation of mythos and logos in the novella. By freeing Laika, Atlas embodies the role of author, and offers the dog an alternative destiny, one which is significantly different to her fate in reality. Reiterating Heracles’s earlier question, Atlas asks himself, of the burden of the Kosmos: “Why not put it down?” (*Weight* 149). He finally does just that, and this action liberates him from the “generic constraints of the ancient story and from his fully finished mythical identity” (Staels 113). Atlas is allowed to become a part of the “*infinite space*” he so desires (*Weight* 16). Heracles’s existential question, one which he himself ignores – in doing so, enabling

¹⁴ Winterson thus utilises a technique which is commonly demonstrated in postcolonial and feminist re-visions which attempt to liberate previously marginalised groups of people, in order to free herself from her own biographical narrative, and encourage the reader to do the same.

his fated death – is finally dealt with by Atlas in his taking responsibility for his own narrative. The “transgressive act” of putting down the globe “is mirrored in the creative artist’s ability to ‘put down’ a variant of the Atlas myth in the novelistic universe” (Staels 113-114), as well as to ‘put down’ her own autobiographical story to make way for change. Winterson tells the reader that she “chose this story above all others because it’s a story [she’s] struggling to end” (*Weight* 137), and she professes that she writes fiction so that she can “keep telling the story [. . .]. Always a new beginning, a different end” (*Weight* 137). Remaining true to this desire, the novella is left purposely indefinite, with multiple possibilities in evidence. Ultimately, the conclusion is left to the reader, but it is my understanding that, by writing herself as a character and aligning herself with Atlas, Winterson attempts to cathartically relinquish her own story world through Atlas’s new ending.

This self-mythologising – or the ability and desire to narrativise the self and “tell the story again” – demarcates re-telling as stemming from an “existential drive to project human existence narratively,” a drive which is also spurred by the possibilities inherent in reinventing the narratives which inform our lives (Plate 403). It is crucial to note, however, that although the characters are allowed partial liberation within the text, they can never truly transcend the boundaries of the book. The intentional paradox within metafiction, and the unintentional paradox within autobiography, is that these forms are never free of fiction. Indeed, it is the fictionality of human existence which Winterson relies on in order for her re-tellings to remain significant for the reader. Regardless, it must be noted that in reality Laika is long dead, Atlas remains ‘written’, and thus not the author of his own narrative, and ‘Winterson’ is not the author of the novella, but rather a character in a book. The characters, not unlike real people, possess a bounded freedom, hemmed in by the fallibility of the text. The effect of these characters’ seemingly self-authored acts of re-telling on the reader, however, should not be underestimated, and Winterson’s own provocations on what literature is capable of should never be excised from a reading of her work.

Despite the limitations that both experience, Winterson attempts to free Atlas and her persona by re-telling their narratives in transformative ways. She achieves this by mirroring their narrative worlds and by utilising notions from physics to demonstrate the infinite nature of the universe and thus the countless number of ways in which a story can be re-told. Through time, Atlas begins to recognise the “changefulness of the world” of which Hera spoke. He realises that he is “carrying not only this world, but all possible worlds” (*Weight* 25) – he is carrying “the world in time as well as the world in space” and the world’s “potential as well as what so far has

been realised” (*Weight* 25). ‘Winterson’, too, by the end of the novella, harnesses the imagination and scientific understandings of time, space and the infinite nature of the universe to come to the realisation that “[there are no limits]” as the story can always be re-told (*Weight* 145).

Heracles is a fine example of how Winterson’s amalgamation of differing discourses and genres amounts to a humorous and successful mythic re-telling in the novella. Although a somewhat subsidiary character in terms of his counterparts above (Atlas and ‘Winterson’), he is in many ways the catalyst to Atlas’s development. Below I will consider Winterson’s re-telling of Heracles, and the impact that his existential questioning and fated ending has on Atlas.

‘A Joke and a God’: The Re-telling of Heracles

As a crucial figure in Greek mythology, Heracles’s exploits can be noted in the earliest surviving illustrations and literature from the eighth century B.C. and onward (Brommer 2). A popular Greek hero, he appears in many ancient literary genres, from epic tragedy to a form of theatre which is crucial to an analysis of Heracles and *Weight*: the satyr play. In his classical form, Heracles embodies the role of tragic hero, an archetype which Winterson parodies and problematises within her novella, since she grants him the dual position of both a “*joke and a god*” (*Weight* 35, original emphasis). Like Euripides, and many satyric and heroic playwrights more than two thousand years before her, Winterson plays on the double-nature of Heracles, who, by parentage, is both a mortal and a deity. As a trickster figure, who operates within burlesque and carnivalesque conventions, Heracles’s debunking of the epic and tragic form is more overt than that of Atlas in *Weight*. His characterisation allows *Weight* to be viewed as a “generically hybrid text that parodically disrupts the hierarchy between ‘high’ and ‘low’ literary genres” (Staels 100). The ‘high’ genres are those of the epic form and tragedy, and the ‘low’ are those of the carnivalesque and the satyr play. Staels argues that in Winterson’s novella, the hierarchy of the ‘high’ genres is undermined and the “classical myths are transformed by means of [. . .] burlesque conventions of the Greek satyr play and the Menippean satire” (100). These conventions, which involve parody, burlesque travesty and the carnivalesque, are manipulated in order to challenge and undermine the genre of epic tragedy, from which the character of Heracles is derived, and undermine the limitations of the epic, thus contributing to the nuanced blending of genre within the novella.

In her re-telling of Heracles, Winterson maintains details from his life as they are portrayed in classical mythology. In both classical mythology and the novella, Heracles is born half god and half mortal due to the union of his father, Zeus, and mortal mother, Alceme (spelled Alceme in *Weight*). His birth is the product of a deception by Zeus, who disguises himself as Alceme's husband, Amphitryon, in order to get her "into bed" (*Weight* 31). Just as his legitimate father is the most powerful of gods, Heracles is the most powerful of heroes (Kovacs 303). Nevertheless, his father's illegitimate affair invokes the lifelong ire of Zeus's wife, Hera, from whom Heracles's name, meaning 'glory of Hera,' is derived (Kovacs 303). Zeus, fearful of Hera's reaction to his illegitimate son, tricks her into breastfeeding Heracles so that he should become immortal.

Staels observes that Winterson's "burlesque transformations" of the Heracles myth rely on certain generic conventions of the Greek satyr play (101). Dana Sutton, an influential scholar of the genre, defines Greek satyr plays as a "short mythological farce" which would be performed after a trilogy of tragedies (ix). These tetralogies formed part of the dramatic competitions which took place during the Dionysia in Athens throughout the fifth century B.C. (Sutton ix). According to Staels, the satyr play "comically reworks and inverts mythology and tragedy by means of parodic travesty" (102). So-named because the choruses were made up of satyrs, these plays were "comically grotesque travesties of traditional myths" (Sutton 134), and primarily "parodied the tragic heroization of epic heroes by creating a comic double, which explains the emergence of popular figures such as comic Odysseus, who was topped in popularity by comic Hercules/Heracles" (Staels 102). As Sutton observes, "when a hero does stand at the center of a satyr play, he is usually Heracles, the most popular Greek hero, precisely since he is the most human and accessible, because of his fallibility, his Gargantuan appetites, and his occasional clownishness" (168). Heracles is ironically described as the "Hero of the World" throughout *Weight*, and is often referred to as possessing a "double-nature" of both god and man, or hero and comic (30, 36). In many satyr plays, as well as in the novella, he appears in two capacities: as a "monster-subduing hero" and "Gargantuan eater and drinker" (Sutton 154).

The essence of satyric comedy and the mythological satyr play is incongruity, and this is achieved by the "wildly ludicrous juxtaposition of the heroic and the comic" (Sutton 159). Once the collision of the usually 'low' comic and 'high' heroic occurs, "all that is presented as noble and consequential in tragedy has the potential for appearing monstrously, hilariously inappropriate" (Sutton 160). The tension that is created when characters that normally appear in an elevated style are set down amongst satyrs generates satyric humour. Thus, it is important to

note that, although tragic heroes such as Heracles are portrayed humorously in the satyr plays, they never fully lose their nobility, and their status as a “serious hero” is never completely damaged (Sutton 161). The satyr play is therefore not “a wholly farcical genre, but a serio-comic form insofar as its characteristic humor comes from the collision of the serious and the comic and requires the presence of both” (Sutton 162). Sutton explains that the “essential business of tragedy is to proclaim that there is a natural order of things, a determinative world-order against which one transgresses at his peril” (158). In many satyr plays the gods are shown to be “authorizing and enforcing this morality” (Sutton 159). Thus the satyr plays – and, indeed, *Weight* – which parody and travesty the tragic style and subject matter, are involved in a comic debunking of the tragic and mythic forms, the gods themselves, and the restrictive order of which they are a part. In certain respects, the satyr play is “subversive to tragedy, insofar as an essential aspect of satiric humour consists in travestyng tragedy and inviting the audience to laugh at what tragedy takes seriously” (Sutton 159). In much of Greek mythology, Heracles is portrayed as a tragic hero, subject to the paradigms of tragedy and epic. In Winterson’s novella, he is represented as the tragic-comic hero from the satyric tradition; he is unique, anomalous, and humorous because he is both hilariously human and a powerful god. This portrayal allows for the undermining of the natural and determinative world order of much tragedy, epic and mythology.

Greek tragedy is characterised by “high poetry,” accomplished not only by the use of “elevated vocabulary,” but also as a “bold use of metaphor and other species of figurative imagery” (Sutton 143). In contrast, the language used in the satyr play is modified for humorous purposes and “contaminated, by the admixture of non-tragic elements” (Sutton 142). These modifications include “various types of colloquial and comic diction involving un-tragic phrases, constructions, and vocabulary items,” as well as “anachronisms and indecency” (Sutton 142). The language Heracles uses in *Weight* is distinctive, as he is the only character “who uses a burlesque discourse that is dissonant with high epic discourse” (Staels 114). The tragic hero, “like tragedy itself,” should be “grand and majestic” (Sutton 168), but Heracles’s discourse in *Weight*, which is colloquial, flippant and often vulgar, “contaminates the boundaries of the epic genre” (Staels 114). Consequently, the sections of the novella narrated by Heracles, or featuring Heracles, contribute to the transgression of epic conventions.

In line with the conventions of burlesque and the satyr play, Winterson’s Heracles uses a discourse which is idiomatic and anachronistic, humorous and brash. The amalgamation of this discourse with mythological subject matter conflates the ancient and mythic with the contemporary and personal. Heracles speaks confidently, glibly and vulgarly, in language which

is full of humour, sarcasm and mockery, punctuated by idiomatic expressions. He is a “burlesque first-person narrator” who undermines high Homeric style “by using a trivialising transgressive speech” (Staels 107). In his first conversation with Atlas, for example, he describes his step-mother, Hera, as a “ball-breaker” (*Weight* 51) and, when first addressing Atlas, he says: ““Have a drink Atlas, you old globe. We’ve all got our burdens to bear. Your punishment is to hold up the universe. My punishment is to work for a wanker”” (29). He also calls Atlas his “old mountain” and “old mate” (33), and quips to him: ““If you’ve got all the time in the world, I’ll begin”” (31). This language, replete with nicknames, jokes and insults, brings the epic story into the familiar and modern realm of the reader. Used to describe mythical events, Heracles’s language destabilises the epic and the conventions of myth by invoking typical features of travesty and the satyr play. It cements Heracles’s position as a subversive and transformative trickster figure, whose irreverential attitude to boundaries and authority directly affects Atlas’s decision to relinquish his great burden, and challenge the conventions of his story.

In tragedy, anachronisms and references to the activities and accoutrements of everyday life are suppressed, because “tragedy requires a certain elevated remoteness in order to achieve its effect” (Sutton 162). The satyric humour of anachronism is rife within Winterson’s characterisation of Heracles, however. There are many humorous (because anachronistic and commonplace) references which inform Heracles’s activities, such as when he takes his chariot to the “garage” to be fixed (*Weight* 59). He is described as using the riding-box of his chariot like a “horse-drawn dustbin,” as it is “always full of discarded wineskins and yesterday’s quick-shot boar” (*Weight* 59). While he waits for his chariot to be fixed, he sits on a straw bale, looking “at drawings of nymphs,” as one would look at nude photos in a modern day pornographic magazine (*Weight* 59-60). Like a modern-day celebrity, he is asked to sign autographs for admirers, which he does with a piece of “bone on a wax tablet” (*Weight* 60). As Genette explains, it is characteristic of travesty to bring “the past closer to the present” and to render an “elevated style into a familiar, colloquial and modern one” (Staels 107). On a day which is described as a “typical day in the life of a hero,” Heracles takes his wife “Deianeira tea in bed, [gathers] his army, and [goes] to lay waste to Eurytus” (*Weight* 113). In yet another humorous description of a heroic deed, Heracles boasts to Atlas: “The Hydra, now she *was* a worm. Chop off one head and straight away there’d be another glaring at you. Like marriage really” (35). The originally epic depiction of the many-headed Hydra from the swamps of Lerna is here transformed by Winterson’s Heracles into a “worm” whose behaviour resembles that of a nagging housewife.

Heracles possesses an unselfconscious physicality and bodily excess. In a boisterous and humorous discussion of god-like strength, for example, Heracles asks Atlas: “Can you balance Africa on your dick?” (51). Staels describes Heracles’s speech and demeanor as carnivalesque, and reiterates that it is this “[t]ransgressive carnivalesque discourse” that “is present in the debunking of epic events and characters” (107). Heracles, on another occasion, nonchalantly divulges that he was a “bit of a braggart in [his] youth,” who “killed everything, shagged what was left, and ate the rest” (*Weight* 31-32). As in the original myth, Winterson represents Hera as Heracles’s enemy, but adds an extra dimension of sexual desire to his relationship with his step-mother. His characterisation, in the novella, as “a stereotypical macho man, a womanizer and a buffoon whose behavior is grotesquely marked by sexual excess,” involves a “comic exaggeration of the ‘low’ life of the body, especially its digestive and sexual functions” (Staels 114). In a number of satyr plays Heracles appears as a “sort of Greek Gargantua, a roistering eater and drinker” (Sutton 161). His sexual exploits are often recounted in the novella and are accompanied by comic reference to his genitals. The reader is repeatedly told that, in the presence of Hera, “his prick went kangaroo” (90), and that it “kept filling and deflating like a pair of fire bellows” (40). He also confides to Atlas that it was not breast milk which caused the Milky Way, but rather his semen, and explains that Hera was “too much of a lady to tell anyone” (*Weight* 52). As demonstrated in Chapter One, bodily excesses are typical features “of the burlesque or the carnivalesque” and can be seen to work effectively both in the Greek satyr play and in *Weight* (Staels 114).

Heracles’s position as a trickster figure is an important aspect of his character, as it allows him to serve as a “transformation archetype” in the text (Staels 101). Sutton points out that it was quite common for the trickster to serve as the hero of the satyr play (169); since tragedy took a rather “severe view of excessive cleverness,” cunning and trickery were made all the more appealing in the more subversive genre (Sutton 170). The mythical Heracles was often cast in the role of trickster – responsible for the rescue of others, such as Prometheus – a deed which is also reproduced in *Weight* (87-91). Winterson significantly chooses for her subject matter that famous mythological example of trickery: Heracles deceiving Atlas into carrying the Kosmos once more (*Weight* 82-83). His role as trickster is a crucial one, as he forces Atlas to “face his own shadow, his unexplored potential for change, growth and becoming” by raising the question of ‘why are we doing this?’ (Staels 115). It is this question – Heracles’s “thought wasp” – which eventually leads Atlas to ask his own question: “Why not put it down?” (*Weight* 47, 134). Staels observes that, in “raising existential questions, Heracles is Atlas’s helper” (115). Nevertheless, while

Heracles is the originator of this challenge to fate and the epic narrative, he actively ignores his doubt, and thus must meet his own fate at the hands of trickery, in a demise consistent with his Greek mythological destiny.

As Sutton has pointed out, satyric “incongruity” is in many ways “profoundly subversive” (168). The satyric play functions by rendering the tragic world “implausible by introducing inconsistency,” and this has the “effect of retroactively disarming tragedy” (168). It is important to note, however, that the historical function of the satyr plays was to diffuse the tension created by the tragic plays which preceded them. In much the same way as the carnival, they provided relief, but only to the extent that a balance might be restored and the order of the status quo of tragedy maintained. As I mentioned earlier, although Heracles participates in comic discourse and situations, in *Weight* his status as a tragic hero is not utterly damaged, and the tension between the heroic and the satyric is not ultimately ruptured (Sutton 161). Sutton observes that “at a deeper level the satyr play is not really antagonistic to tragedy, insofar as it does not seek to subvert tragedy’s characteristic view of a world-order. In its own humble way it affirms [this order]” (159). Thus, while the satyr play is a “farcical form given over to travesty of both mythology and tragedy,” in an ironic sense it “teaches the same lesson[s]” (Sutton 158). Staels notes that the satyr play should still “be regarded as a serio-comic form, because in spite of [its] ridiculing [of] generic conventions, it affirms tragedy’s normative, determinative world-order” (102). It is surely significant that, although Heracles adopts a subversive discourse and persona, in *Weight* he remains tethered to his epically-fated emplotment and is denied the ‘escape’ allowed to Atlas: he both instates and subverts the epic and tragic traditions in the novella. Unlike Atlas, he remains embedded in his textual and generic origins, and constantly attempts to bury the one existential question he formulates. Importantly, Atlas, who confronts the question and eventually challenges the epic world-order outright, is allowed an alternative ending, while Heracles, who evades it, meets his predestined end. Heracles’s characteristic ending therefore emphasises Atlas’s unorthodox one, in that the former’s fate underlies the importance of Atlas’s active re-telling of his own myth.

Heracles serves as yet another site where genres converge and diverge in the text, or are both installed and undermined. The characterisation of Heracles contributes to the generic hybridisation of Winterson’s *Weight* and the re-vision of these myths, especially in terms of his subversive influence on Atlas.

Conclusion

All that we can see is only a fraction of the universe.

Some matter is detectable only by its gravitational effects on the rotation of galaxies. This is called dark matter and no one knows its composition. Dark matter could be conventional matter, like the small stars called Brown Dwarfs, or it could even be black holes.

Or it could be Atlas holding up the universe.

But I think its Atlas and Laika walking away. (Weight 151, original emphasis)

Weight ends with a statement on the epistemological uncertainty of the composition of dark matter, and it is this uncertainty which allows for the potential imagining of a multitude of possibilities. The reader must decide whether dark matter is made up of stars, black holes, Atlas holding up the Kosmos, or – as the omniscient narrator chooses to imagine – Atlas and Laika walking away from their former lives and burdens (151). The reader is thus encouraged to imagine their own ending, or take an active part in this re-telling. As Hutcheon asserts, the notion of an ‘end’ “suggests both teleology and closure” (*Politics* 62), but Winterson avoids such a definitive conclusion in her transformation of characteristically ‘closed’ genres and narratives. What results is a shift in perception for Atlas, ‘Winterson’, and the reader – a shift from limitation to existential possibility or choice, which is achieved in part through a progression from inhabiting genres, stories, and life-worlds which are characterised by limitation, towards literary spaces which are characterised by multiple crossings of generic convention.

It is my argument that, by re-telling her own and Atlas’s narratives, Winterson succeeds in the transgression of generic limitation in *Weight*. In other words, she manages to create a textual space in which boundaries can be transgressed, and this is achieved through the use and abuse of multiple genres, such as science, autobiography, and myth. To an extent Winterson’s characters, including her own, are permitted to re-imagine their own stories and thus re-interpret their past narratives in order to create their own ‘worlds’ or ‘futures’. As they are not limited to a specific genre or chronotope, they are freer to exist between and across these boundaries. While the characters at times occupy a liminal space between genres, however, it is obvious that generic transgression cannot take place without genre, and that a new genre, or sub-genre, is inevitably created through this transgression. This new genre gestures toward limitlessness and alternative possibility through generic hybridisation.

By recognising the world and our identity as a story we tell ourselves, Winterson foregrounds the existential ability to reformulate these narratives in order to reach alternative conclusions. The ‘Winterson’ character and her alter-ego, Atlas, grapple with this discovery in the concluding sections of *Weight*. When either notes that “[a]ll the stories are here” (6), they recognise that there are indeed innumerable untapped and untold stories or ways of seeing and evaluating – or numerous potential “[pasts, presents, and futures]” to access (75). Through re-telling and the blending of multiple genres, one can access these latent story versions and alternative narratives. Crossing these usually rigid margins of time, space, and discipline, the characters are allowed to exist and act in dramatically different ways. Winterson’s character comes to understand re-telling as a tool which can be used to break the “gravitational pull” of rigid and linear understandings of past and future, as well as the usually divided worlds of science and myth, or the rational and poetic (*Weight* 99).

Although Winterson advocates the action of ‘telling the story again’ in order to gain new perspectives and understandings, these new perspectives themselves are left, it seems, purposefully suggestive. Despite this, the activity of creating a text which is characterised by the transgression of specific and limited genre conventions allows Winterson to communicate to the reader the possibilities which exist in the re-telling both of personal and master narratives. It is evident that she views the act of re-telling as crucial to the creation and re-creation of identity, and to the attainment of new perspectives, whatever these may be. For Winterson, however, these new perspectives are informed by observations both from ancient mythology and contemporary physics. By utilising the imaginative freedom available in storytelling and mythology, together with scientific knowledge of the universe, the world and one’s place in it may be approached with renewed wonder. On the whole, re-telling fulfils what Winterson once outlined as the purpose of literature, that is, to “open up spaces in a closed world” (qtd. in Reynolds para. 2).

Part Two:

Hybridic Language and Myth in Alan Warner's *Morvern Callar* and *These Demented Lands*

In everything I've done, I have wanted to try and give the impermanent the quality of myth. (Warner, qtd. in Dale 66)

Part Two of this thesis examines Alan Warner's *Morvern Callar* (hereafter *MC*) and *These Demented Lands* (hereafter *TDL*), and argues that these multi-voiced works re-tell mythic narratives through a specialised discursive syncretism. In these novels, Warner creates hybridised narrative voices: these voices are a blend of demotic, or spoken, and literary, or written, discourses. Demotic language can be described as "sociolects and dialects from everyday situations, or 'street language'" (Scott 1). As Northrop Frye puts it, there is conventionally a "primary differentiation between the demotic style (which is modelled on the language, rhythms, and associations of ordinary speech) and the hieratic style (which employs a variety of formal elaborations which separate literary language from ordinary speech)" (Abrams 312).¹⁵ Part Two demonstrates how Warner's use of a hybridised and dialogic narrative discourse is crucial to his act of re-telling in *MC* and *TDL*. His hybridised discourse lends itself to a loosening of generic conventions, which revitalise the seminal mythological narratives to which he alludes in these novels. My study of Warner is divided into two interconnected chapters: Chapter Three will be concerned with the dialogic narrative discourses Warner creates, while Chapter Four will analyse the references to mythology in the novels. I have discussed the novels simultaneously as they are involved in similar projects and operate together as a unit. Together, the chapters will demonstrate that Warner's creative deployment of language lends itself to an eclectic blending of thematic content. This dialogic narration enables the merging of the ancient and mythological with the contemporary, the ordinary with the extraordinary, as well as the crude or macabre with the spiritual or transcendent.

In the following chapters I will show that Warner's multi-voiced narrative discourse in *MC* and *TDL* conduces to the creation of supernatural, surrealistic, or fantastic worlds, while simultaneously reminding the reader of corporeal experience and the reality of social issues such as class-conflict and poverty. The hybridised language is the keynote to Warner's fusion of genre,

¹⁵ It is important to differentiate my use of the word hieratic, which appeals to a formal literary style, from its more common definition as "of or concerning priests" ("Hieratic").

which makes possible the inclusion of ancient mythological and folkloric understandings within a contemporary Scottish narrative. In two novels set in the electronic age in the decade at the brink of the new millennium, Warner employs mythical narratives and tropes from pagan, Celtic and Christian mythology. The result is a “postmodern pastiche of wildly contrasting cultural” issues that offers the reader new perspectives on these mythical and socio-political elements (Le Blanc 146).

Warner has commented on his multiple references to mythology as well as the subtle emphasis placed on myth in his works. In an interview with Sophy Dale he notes:

There’s a fashionable word in seventies criticism – “mythopoetic” – I always liked that word, and in *Morvern Callar* I wanted to tell a working class person’s story as if it wasn’t just realism, so that it had something of the quality of myth. In everything I’ve done, I have wanted to try and give the impermanent the quality of myth. (qtd. in Dale 66)

Warner’s desire to “tell a working class person’s story as if it wasn’t just realism” signals a departure from the style and concerns of his Scottish contemporaries, many of whom have fashioned narratives of working-class life in a graphic and often brutal realistic mode.¹⁶ While there are indeed moments of poignant realism in Warner’s work, they somehow derive at least some of their pathos from the mythic patterning that informs them. By aligning the “working class person’s story” with the “impermanent,” Warner implies that he associates the “quality of myth” with a notion of permanence, that is, an enduring quality, and a relevance or significance that survives – often inexplicably – its immediate context. Warner indicates that this enduring relevance or permanence is achieved through the way in which a story is told. In *MC* and *TDL*, the impermanent is represented by the contemporary individual and her culture, which includes contemporary music, drugs, and raves, as well as her specific economic and social position. Morvern’s status as a working-class woman renders her unimportant and “impermanent” – weightless, invisible – in a society divided rigidly along class and gender lines.

In these novels, Warner grants a quality of myth to characters, settings and occasions where one might least expect it – or deem it deserved. This last point is crucial, as many might find “a contradiction between the mythic qualities” in the novels and their “details of everyday life” (Dale 67). Warner’s work is often too-comfortably categorised as “Scottish working-class [. . .] ‘gritty realism,’” by critics, who fail to acknowledge mythic or poetic aspects in his novels (Dale 67). Rather, the examples of storytelling, folklore and mythology in the novels suggest “a

¹⁶ See, for example, *Trainspotting* (1993) by Irvine Welsh and *How Late it was, How Late* (1994) by James Kelman.

serious precedent for the conjunction of the details of working-class life with a mythic, or even fantastic element” (Dale 67). In Warner’s synthesis of the mythical and contemporary, he undermines the misguided interpretation of the mythic as solely part of a ‘high aesthetic’, by granting the contemporary, the commonplace, and the crude the ability to engender moments of transcendence and mythic unity. In doing so, he endows his characters and their culture, lifestyles and stories with a renewed legitimacy, and – importantly – does so without naively romanticising the working class situation. For Warner it seems that the quality of myth and its effect on the reader *is itself* what is crucial to his writing, not the specific content of the pre-textual myths. This quality of myth encourages the reader to recognise a certain significance in Warner’s scenes and characters, perhaps more so than if they were not rendered mythological.

Aside from the author’s remarks on the quality of myth in *MC*, the Argonaut’s assertion that “[w]hen our myths fade we must revitalise them,” encourages us to take a closer look at the re-telling of myth in the novels (*TDL* 163). The Argonaut is a “crazy salvage-diver-come-Armada-treasure-hunter” (*TDL* 9), whom Morvern meets on the unnamed island in *TDL*. He shares his name and profession with the mythological Greek figures, who are best known for their involvement in one of the oldest known Greek sagas: Jason and his search for the golden fleece of Colchis (“The Argonauts” 87). While the original Argonauts were a collection of the noblest Greek heroes (“The Argonauts” 87), Warner’s re-imagined Argonaut is drug-addled, possibly insane, and plays the drums on a raft out at sea. The Argonaut is also used to re-imagine Christian mythology: his kayak is covered in verses from the Bible written in silver paint, and he serves as a Pontius Pilate figure who ‘crucifies’ the Aircrash Investigator with an aeroplane propeller, shortly before featuring as one of the “wise kings” at “The Nativity” at the end of *TDL* (183, 212). He is a revitalised pastiche of various mythological figures, a bricolage of both ancient and contemporary reference and an unusual palimpsest akin to that of his own kayak. While the Argonaut never explains what he means by this revitalisation of myth, he clearly serves in this utterance as a mouthpiece for the author.

Many “literary works may be regarded as ‘mythopoeic,’” as they tend “to create or recreate certain narratives which human beings take to be crucial to their understanding of their world” (Coupe 4). This can be recognised in Winterson’s re-telling of creation myths in order to include evolutionary theory and experiential wonder in *Weight*. It is therefore important to note that while Warner aims to offer to his characters the significance and permanence he deems characteristic of mythological narrative, he simultaneously wishes to rework or “revitalise” these myths within a contemporary context. Warner’s use of mythological and religious reference is

largely disjointed, undermining the traditionally ordered narrative structure of myth to better represent his characters' more fragmented, postmodern experience. There is therefore an impulse within Warner's work that endows his characters and scenes with the significance of myth, while simultaneously undermining its potency as a master narrative capable of the symbolic totalisation of experience. Warner's first two novels thus evince what Hutcheon claims to be one of the foremost characteristics of postmodern fiction; a paradoxically "even-handed process" that "ultimately manages to install and reinforce as much as undermine and subvert the conventions and presuppositions it appears to challenge" (*Politics* 1-2). Due to this, Warner's novels "characteristically hesitate between pattern and randomness, the paradoxical construction and deconstruction of perfectly neat structural patterns that, [in keeping] with the baffling contradictoriness" attributed to postmodern acts of re-telling and "the original paradoxical quality of myth," which simultaneously "manage[s] to affirm and deny the very possibility of transcendence" (Onega, "Mythical Impulse" 191). These assumptions, which are characteristic of Warner's work, reveal postmodernism to be "a contradictory phenomenon, one that uses and abuses, installs and then subverts, the very concepts it challenges" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 3).

Warner's paradoxical use of myth in *MC* and *TDL* indicates that he resists reducing his characters to archetypal symbols from mythology, and is opposed to telling their stories in the linear and teleological modes of masterly mythic narrative. At the same time, he imbues them with mythic authority. Consequently, the mythological elements in the texts are often not explicit, but exist instead as a redolence or reverberation of mythic quality. They are also decidedly fragmented. An obvious example is Warner's characterisation of Morvern, who, although endowed with certain qualities possessed by mythic archetypes, is ultimately Warner's unique creation. Notably in *MC*, there are few direct references to iconic features of or events in Celtic and Christian mythology and, instead, a subtle attribution of the mythic qualities to the eponymous protagonist. The pastiche of mythology informing her characterisation serves to grant Morvern certain empowering mythic attributes while undermining other, reductive mythical aspects. Warner diverges from ordinary re-visionary fiction in this regard. Rather than using the original narratives from history or mythology as a base upon which to construct his re-telling, he utilises the mythic as an overlay for his own original narrative, in order to fulfil his project of giving the "impermanent the quality of myth" without reducing the impermanent to a mythic structure.

Overall, Part Two will investigate the extent to which Warner fulfils the aims of re-visionary fiction by undermining various elements of the mythological pre-texts he draws upon.

Furthermore, I will argue that his novels are not limited to these aims as they re-vise the pre-texts not only because they are ideologically charged, but also to endow his characters and settings with distinctive aspects of these pre-texts. For example, Morvern is empowered by both her contemporary existential inclinations and her associations with mythic goddesses. Moreover, I will demonstrate that Warner, while engaged with the socio-political aims of re-visionary fiction in his novels, is more concerned with how the act of re-telling can engender an inimitable contemporary character, and an original narrative style.

Chapter Three

Alan Warner's Poetic Prose: 'The Brightest Thing in Such Darknesses'

Warner's first two novels garnered considerable acclaim for the uniqueness of their narrative style. The exceptional narrative voice seems to stem from a curious blending of genres and discourses: the demotic and the hieratic or poetic, the ordinary and the transcendent, the macabre and the humorous, and the mythological and the contemporary. These amalgamations are achieved through Warner's inventive use of language. Most significantly, the hybridised narrative discourse conflates the ordinary with the mythological and creates what Warner aptly calls "the quality of myth" in his works (qtd. in Dale 66). Before I commence my discussion of language in Warner's texts, I need to contextualise his position as a Scottish author.¹⁷ Warner is influenced by many forerunners and contemporaries in his use of the demotic; however, he also differs from these authors in significant ways and has expressed a desire to avoid reductive categorisation as a "new Scottish" writer.

Alan Warner and Scotland

The adoption of demotic discourse is not unusual for Scottish authors. One can see the demotic at work in the novels, poetry and short stories of authors such as Irvine Welsh (1958-), James Kelman (1946-), Anne Donovan (1956-), Duncan McLean (1964-), and Tom Leonard (1944-). As Craig Cairns notes: "[t]hroughout the history of non-Gaelic Scottish literature [. . .] vernacular speech is the medium of resistance to incorporation by more powerful forces" (135). In particular, James Kelman's fiction has allowed the demotic to become the "narrative centre" of the novel: post-Kelman fiction followed his lead in extending the demotic voice beyond the characters' dialogue to the voice of the narrator and implied author (Cairns 132). This prompted Scottish

¹⁷ The reader may note that there appears no such analysis of Winterson's national identity in this thesis. My reasons for providing such an analysis for Warner are three fold. Firstly, *MC* and *TDL* (despite the latter's resistance to naming) are set in modern Scotland. Secondly, Warner employs the Scottish demotic, which is purposefully subversive to the English 'centre.' My discussion of Scottishness is thus necessary with regard to my focus on the subversive aspects of the language in the novel. Thirdly, the realistic detail of Warner's novels as set in Scotland at a particular cultural and economic period are important to mention in terms of their amalgamation with ancient mythology. Winterson's *STC*, though set in London, is ultimately fantastical and placed in what is continually referred to as an unmappable world. Weight is set in ancient, re-imagined Greece and outer space. Thus "Britishness" is not a pertinent issue in Winterson's novels in the same way that "Scottishness" is in Warner's work.

authors to experiment further with language and ultimately led to the international recognition and acclaim of Scottish fiction in the 1990s. In reference to the use of language in his third novel, *The Sopranos*,¹⁸ Warner notes that:

[s]poken language, the real voices and dialects of the regions, has been the important aspect to Scottish literature in the last years. The idea that you could [. . .] have a third-person narrative voice speaking the SAME dialect as the characters is wildly exciting to me[,] and this use of working class Scottish language has revitalized and energized Scottish literature. (qtd. in Hempel para. 23, original emphasis)

Warner is intrigued by the “revitalising” of literature that the use of the popular and local idiom can achieve, and clearly aware that language can aid in a re-vision of content. Warner’s use of language is thus crucial for his re-telling. He goes on to explain the “demographic and political” dimension of the use of the demotic (qtd. in Hempel para. 23). The demotic draws attention to the implicit assumption “that literature was hardly being written from the working-class point of view with any authenticity. British novelists were middle-class dealing with a middle-class world often far removed from the daily experience of most folk, and certainly LINGUISTICALLY alien” (Warner, qtd. in Hempel para. 23, original emphasis). As Roderick Watson elucidates, contemporary Scottish writing “has been characterized by two apparently contradictory impulses: an interest in direct and demotic utterance, and a move towards a degree of linguistic estrangement” (141). The result of this kind of fiction “has been to destabilize the cultural and expressive hegemony of Standard English and to liberate a sense of linguistic and imaginative energy” (Watson 141). This liberation is an effect of the demotic that, coupled with the linguistic experimentation of Warner’s protagonist Morvern, is clearly notable in *MC* and *TDL*. These novels thus contribute to the destabilisation of the “cultural and expressive hegemony” to which Watson refers.

Choice of a literary language “always carries a political freight” for Scottish authors (Dale 21). Because it is informed by class and regional divisions, language is politically charged. As Dale observes, authors who use demotic voices emphasise that there is “no such thing as ‘neutral language’ – a writer either chooses to write in the language of power – Standard English in Britain – or not, but either way, the choice is an inescapably political one” (21). The adoption of the demotic voice as a primary register was a significant development in Scottish literature for many reasons, the most important of which could be termed post-colonial. The demotic allows

¹⁸ *The Sopranos* details a day in the life of a group of Catholic high school girls from the port (Morvern’s fictionalised home town on the coast of Scotland) who take part in a choir competition in Edinburgh.

authors to “talk back [to] the centre,” which, for a Scottish author, is England, the English literary canon, and its affiliation with Standard English (Scott 1). Jeremy Scott argues that the use of non-standard English in Scottish literature, with its distinctive dialects, slang and idioms, is an “ideological choice” the writer makes, to legitimise cultures which are unrepresented or misrepresented in canonical literature (1). Scottish authors such as Hugh MacDiarmid (1892-1978), James Kelman (1946-) and Tom Leonard (1944-) have been “particularly articulate in their opposition to ‘English’ and the prevailing middle-class systems of culture and education which have done so much to silence or to undervalue the truths and aesthetic merits to be found in the speech rhythms and idioms of every day usage” (Watson 141). Tom Leonard explains that writers are often “patronising” in their depiction of speech, where “a writer-narrator presents Standard English, and a quoted character-persona presents something else” (qtd. in Dale 21). He refers here to instances where the writer indicates the “prescriptive norm from which the ‘character’ is ‘deviating’” (Leonard, qtd. in Dale 22). For example, the writer may use an apostrophe in a word such as ’elping (helping) to indicate that a letter is missing and thus imply that the characters’ use of language is incorrect (Leonard, qtd. in Dale). Such techniques “indicate a supposed deficiency” in the characters’ speech and allow the writer-narrator to communicate with the reader “over their heads” (Leonard, qtd. in Dale 22). By creating a narrative voice which is the same as that of the characters, Warner eliminates this condescension, and gives legitimacy to his characters. In doing so, he emphasises the authority and authenticity of his characters’ use of language.

The continued development of the demotic in Scottish literature has led to what Warner refers to as the “democratization of literature” (qtd. in Jones, “Interview” para. 8). Jones notes that “Warner attributes part of the recent renaissance in Scottish literature to similarities between the writers and their audience” (“Interview” para. 8). Warner explains that in Scotland:

the gulf between writers and readers has gotten smaller. Writers feel divorced from the whole literary world and have more in common with the people who actually read the books than they used to. In the past there was this sort of ivory tower thing, but now some sort of democratization of literature is going on, whereby it’s becoming more open as an art form. (qtd. in Jones, “Interview” para. 8)

In some ways, Warner’s highly original narrative style can be attributed both to the influence of the Scottish literary tradition on his work, and to his reaction against it. While Warner acknowledges that Kelman’s influence on his work “can’t be underestimated,” he sees his own writing as a “reaction against the lack of narrative drive in most twentieth-century Scottish

novels,” which is evident in Samuel Beckett and Kelman’s “ability to tell a story in which nothing happens” (qtd. in Dale 15-16). Warner’s texts are propelled by many idiosyncratic anecdotes and stories that indicate his reaction against the politically motivated anti-narratives in some contemporary Scottish work. Although Warner’s uniquely crafted narrative voices are cognate with the contemporary Scottish literary practice of demotic, urban working-class realism, he also diverges from this literary trend in significant ways. Importantly, he remarks that “nationalistic canons just set up non-existent barriers to [literary] development” (qtd. in Dale 13). While honoured at being considered a part of the ‘renaissance’ in recent Scottish literature, Warner has expressed much trepidation at the categorisation of his works as definitively Scottish, or ‘chemical generation’ (see Strachan para. 8).¹⁹ Unlike many of his contemporaries, Warner blends the demotic with the hieratic in his works. His narrative style gives equal attention to the lyrical quality of oral speech, and the poetic aspects associated with the literary. While he has spoken out against critics who berate the demotic form, it is evident that he remains less intrigued by the political potential of writing in the demotic than by what it can do for the craft of writing and literature itself. This is where his work is distinct from other contemporary Scottish fiction. While he shares “an anarchic approach to narrative and form” with Irvine Welsh and other Scottish authors (Denes para. 7), his use of the demotic is motivated less by “a form of nationalism” than by “a wish to explore the viability of the demotic as narrative discourse, partly out of a hedonistic delight in its cadences” (Scott 9). Robert Crawford expands upon this statement, observing that “the poetry of Warner’s text goes hand in hand with an unKelmanly hedonistic impulse” (“Flower of Scotland” para. 10). As Scott observes, “[t]here is a huge gulf between the phlegmatic, Hemingway-like ‘facticity’ of Kelman’s earlier stories and Warner’s vivacious prose-poetry” (9).

Warner has created a flexible narrative style from a popular oral voice enhanced with poetic cadences and collocations. While authors like Kelman ignore the hieratic, “out of a diffidence to the idiolect of a character, Warner shows great delight in the lyrical potentialities of language and attempts a *fusion* of the demotic and the hieratic” (Scott 9, original emphasis). It is this fusion that I wish to unpack in this chapter, with the goal of understanding how Warner creates a dialogic narrative voice that speaks to both the contemporary and mythological in *MC* and *TDL*.

¹⁹ The references to drugs and rave culture in *Morvern Callar* have led Warner to be considered as “a member of the group (including, amongst others, Irvine Welsh), first nominated by the magazine *The Face* as the ‘chemical generation’” (Thursfield para. 7). This refers to a generation of youth in the 1990s which were associated with urban lifestyles defined by the use of narcotics and the attendance of raves.

Like Winterson's work, Warner's novels blend genres and styles, and contain acts of re-telling and embedded extradiegetic narratives. These occur in significantly different forms in Warner's novels, however, and are presented less overtly than in Winterson's fiction. In a similar fashion to Winterson, Warner places a distinct emphasis on narrative and has been labelled a "natural storyteller" by literary journalists (Weissman para. 1). Warner's narrative style emphasises storytelling as a specific communicative and epistemological mode, and thus advocates the re-telling of narrative as a significant method of revitalising and revising knowledge and ideology. Warner chooses to re-tell mythological narratives in his novels in order to revise our understanding of myth, as well as to grant authority to language and characters who have traditionally been denied this legitimacy. Indeed, "literature is a means of extending mythology" (Coupe 4), and Warner achieves this in large part through his emphasis on storytelling and the hybridic narrative voices that he constructs. In the following section I will discuss the emphasis placed on narrative in *MC* and *TDL*. In doing so, I will examine the narrative voices of the protagonists and the community of the port: a fictionalised coastal town in Scotland where *MC* is set. This initial analysis of the narrative voices in the novels will demonstrate Warner's emphasis on the importance of narrative in his works, and lay the foundations for my discussion on how Warner blends the demotic and the hieratic within his writing.

**'A good lot more ceildhing went on and we were all mortal as newts':
The Narrative Voices in Alan Warner's *Morvern Callar* and *These Demented Lands***

Warner places a distinct emphasis on narrative and storytelling through the narrative voices which he crafts in *MC* and *TDL*. The culture of mythic and folkloric storytelling in the port and the unnamed island is made apparent throughout the two novels. My use of the word 'folklore' is central to my understanding of Warner's work, since it is the collective term "applied to sayings, verbal compositions, and social rituals" that have been handed down primarily by "word of mouth [. . .] rather than in written form" (Abrams 104). Folklore is inherited even in literate communities through the use of "oral jokes, [songs,] stories, and varieties of wordplay" (Abrams 104), all of which abound in *MC* and *TDL*. It can thus serve to inscribe oral elements within a literary framework. As a form, folktale includes myths, fables, legends and the fairy tale (Abrams 105). Although Warner's narratives are, of course, written, the narrative voices display many elements characteristic of the spoken word and the oral tradition of storytelling. Warner's

inclusion of orally communicated anecdotes and histories can be construed as an emphasis on myth, since, despite its numerous definitions, myth is ultimately a form of ritualised storytelling. The recurrent oral storytelling which takes place in the port and on the unnamed island thus adds to the mythic quality of the novels.

Warner employs the demotic in his characterisation of Morvern Callar – the protagonist in both novels – whose voice is a fluid mixture of Standard English, Scots, poetic language, slang, and a regional dialect.²⁰ Morvern seems to possess her words, whether narrated internally or spoken out loud, in an immediate and intimate way. Her narration is untainted by the conventions of novelistic literariness, and her tone, language and diction constantly remind the reader of an oral register or spoken dialogue. Morvern’s narration is inconsistent or ‘incorrect’ in its use of punctuation, suggesting the informality of the spoken and conversational. For instance, there is an unpredictable use of apostrophes in the novels such as “I’d’ve” to indicate *I would have* and the elision of apostrophes in contractions such as “couldnt.” The amalgamation of words and the contraction of words, such as “offof,” “dinnae,” and “atall,” the solecisms and the elisions, all give the impression of a specialised spoken rather than written discourse. Morvern frequently omits the definitive article, as can be seen in the sentences: “[a]ll floor-blood had a sort of skin on” and “[p]uddles were frozen and wee-ones from school had burst all ice” (*MC* 3, 5). This omission of articles “suggests the natural rhythms of speech rather than the prescriptive use of grammatical rules” (Dale 23). This is also achieved through the use of the second-person pronoun in the narration. The use of “you” rather than “I” breaks from conventional first-person narration, and invites the reader to share the speaker’s point of view or experience. It also gives the impression of conversational and oral descriptive elements rather than written narration. For instance, in *MC* she tells the reader: “I was down on my hunkers cupping up cold river water and dashing it on my face. I grit teeth at coldness of the water though the heatwave was still a real scorcher and you could feel the sun hot on your hair” (85).²¹ Here the use of the second-person pronoun, the surprisingly intimate experiential detail of “hot on your hair,” and the informality of specialised slang and omitted words, all offer an unlikely accessibility to a narrative voice that might otherwise seem impenetrably interior and subjective.

²⁰ Scots is defined as the “form of English used in Scotland” (“Scots”). That is, the Scottish variant of Standard English, or, the traditional language used in Scotland.

²¹ In order to represent the poetic, experimental and ‘spoken’ elements of Morvern’s narration it is often necessary to supply quotations exactly as they feature in Warner’s novels, without the disturbance of grammatical integration within my own sentences. Morvern’s original voice does not lend itself easily to integration within Standard English. My approach may appear syntactically inaccurate, but remains necessary in order to retain the integrity of Warner/Morvern’s narration.

The dialogue of Morvern and other characters is not indicated by quotation marks, and only sometimes by line breaks, which blurs “the line between the ‘spoken’ and the ‘written’ even further” (Dale 23). Throughout *MC* and *TDL*, the characters use specialised, informal, local working-class speech patterns. Their informal register is populated with Scottish slang such as “aye” (yes), “greeting” (crying), “hunkers” (haunches), “oxter” (armpit), “nut” (no or nothing), “rampant” (aroused), “mortal” (drunk) and modern slang such as “cool,” as well as many other colloquial phrases which emphasise this representation of the spoken word. There is also a distinctive dialect which is used by Morvern and the port community. Her and the other characters’ words are written as they would sound when spoken in a particular accent, not as they would be written in Standard English: for example, she uses “no” for “not” and “wi” for “with.” Scott argues that Warner’s use of this type of language marks “the ambition to reassert the primacy (or, at least, the equivalency) of oral over written forms of language, or of the demotic over the so-called ‘hieratic’ (or literary)” (2).

Dale observes that the novel’s language “gives the impression of simply recording verbatim a story exactly as it would be told verbally” (23). The narrative voice, with its “lyricism and cadences [derived from] the demotic” (Scott 14), embodies the rhythms of story and storytelling in the text. Storytelling is further emphasised by the many anecdotes, jokes and tales relayed to us by Morvern. Although she is largely taciturn herself, the working-class port community to which she belongs communicates primarily through storytelling. Its members’ primary access to other individuals is through the spoken word, as the community is a pocket of vestigial orality in a world dominated by print. The act of storytelling, as a method of explanation and communication, is a trademark of a predominantly oral community. Warner states that “the stories of the port culture are very strong,” despite the absence of educated intellectuals (qtd. in Dale 30). As Dale notes, one of Warner’s “prime concerns has been to represent the power of oral culture” which is precisely why “his novels are filled with stories and anecdotes that his characters tell one another” (29). Morvern responds to a boy mourning the death of his mother by telling him a story about her own foster mother’s funeral (*MC* 134), and The Argonaut instructs The Aircrash Investigator with a story about how Sweetbay received its name (*TDL* 172-172). The characters’ names, history, amusement, entertainment, advice, sorrow and joy are framed and experienced through story. Much laughter is provoked in pubs like “The Mantrap” and the “The Kale Onion” by the telling of tales that amuse and explain and alleviate suffering (*MC* 15-20, 57-60).

Morvern uses the Scottish and Irish Gaelic word ‘ceilidh’ to describe the interactions in the pub. ‘Ceilidh’ is a word used to describe a gathering where there is music, dancing, and specifically, storytelling. Most of the instances in which the word is used in the two novels refer to storytelling in particular. The evening events are defined by stories, told in stories and create more stories. In *MC* the Panatine tells the story of his severed pinkie in a packet of crisps (62), Coll about a fight with his own coat (63), and Cushion tells of how he threw his prosthetic leg and “best” shoe into the sea (66). Along with these humorous tales are stories shared about the often harrowing experiences of those living in the port. The women tell stories about their experiences of abuse by men and Morvern speaks about growing up as a foster child (*MC* 16-20). These realistic and often disturbing narratives are told alongside almost magical realistic tales from the port, such as Morvern’s story of the woman who was so aggrieved by her sons’ drowning that she cried until she lost an eye (1), or the tale of Morvern’s “special knee” (17-19). Although the causes of her glittery knee are revealed through the semi-logical explanation of Morvern grazing her knee on a glitter-speckled Christmas card when younger, her knee that “sparkl[es]” with “different coloured specks shining just under the surface” retains a surreal quality (18).

In *TDL* Morvern and the other characters also communicate through storytelling. Many of Morvern’s initial meetings with the other characters (such as The Devil’s Advocate, The Harbour, The Night Talker, and The Knifegrinder) are accompanied by stories. I will discuss how their names and nicknames function as stories below. Each character tells a story about themselves and the island, or a story from literature, local history, or religion. Morvern is told many stories about John Brotherhood before they meet, and Brotherhood himself is a constant teller of tales which disturb, enthrall, and manipulate. It is clear that many of the oral elements that are present in *MC* remain in the narrative voices in *TDL*. There are also many references to other stories such as those from literature (e.g. *Heart of Darkness* and *Pincher Martin*), religion (The Bible and the stories told by The Devil’s Advocate about the saints and sightings of religious miracles), the characters’ lives, and local history (the tale of Sweetbay *TDL* 172). Fantastic or magically realistic stories likewise abound in *TDL*.

The narrative style develops lyrically in *TDL*, adding a literary element to Morvern’s previously consistently ‘oral’ narrative voice. There is an increase in the use of punctuation, definitive speech markers and a heightened poetic colonising of the demotic, banal, or ordinary narrative recording. Morvern nevertheless maintains many narratorial habits from *MC*, including the use of extensive descriptive detail and literal narration. This can be noted in Morvern’s

description of how she undresses the child she rescues after they swim ashore from the sinking ferry: “I tugged her top up, the wetness in the lycra squeezing out at her tiny wrists before the sleeves both pop, popped up and dangled” (*TDL* 11). Similar oral markers and unique linguistic quirks are present in Morvern and the other characters’ voices. She continues to use the second-person pronoun instead of the first-person; definitive articles are omitted; and Morvern maintains her specific demotic style along with her own personal deviations from Standard English.

Another example of Warner’s emphasis on storytelling can be seen in the characters’ creative activity of naming and nicknaming. This is characteristic of close-knit oral communities and adds an element of humour to their often monotonous working lives. Each nickname makes reference to a character’s idiosyncrasy or lifestyle, and, as a result, the name itself serves as a storytelling device. Morvern describes a few of the people at The Mantrap, a club in the port, by listing their nicknames: “The Shroud” [. . .] “The King Prawn, Cheese, whos called suds since he started washing, Yellow Pages, The Dai Lama, [. . .] that hippy girl Snowballs at the Moon [. . .] Offshore, [and] Smiler” (*MC* 14-15). Other names include “Creeping Jesus” (*MC* 6), “Vanessa the Depressor” (*MC* 42), and “Laughs like Water” (*MC* 66). This use of naming is taken further in *TDL*, wherein almost every character is solely referred to by his or her nickname, such as The Aircrash Investigator, The Argonaut, The Devil’s Advocate, The Knifegrinder, Halley’s Comet, and many others. Lanna’s grandmother, Couris Jean, chides Morvern for not knowing the origins of her name before recounting the story of the Callars’ arrival in Scotland. “You don’t know the story about your own name?” she asks, as though not knowing one’s own story is tragic (*MC* 39). Couris Jean’s emphasis on the significance of knowing one’s story illustrates that the importance of names and naming is part of the cultural fabric of the port, not simply a practice carried out by the youth. When Morvern travels to London to meet Tom and Susan from the company which wants to publish her dead boyfriend’s novel, she finds their manner of speaking alien to the storytelling culture of the port community. She tells the reader that “Tom or Susan would ask a question” and, after she shrugged her shoulders in response, “they would answer the question themselves then argue about it. *They didn’t tell stories they just discussed*” (*MC* 164, my emphasis).

As has been argued, these demotic elements in both *MC* and *TDL*, along with the intertextual tales of the other characters and appearances of stories from metanarratives, together serve to emphasise the act of storytelling in the novels. This places considerable emphasis on the importance of re-telling, and serves as a re-visionary device in itself. As I will discuss in Chapter Four, Warner experiments with multiple references to mythology. These references are

revitalised through the demotic medium, as Morvern's narrative and the stories of the port and surrounding islands are portrayed alongside references to Christian and Celtic mythology. In the following section I will investigate Warner's merging of the demotic and the hieratic in his narrative style, a merging that serves to amalgamate the pre-texts of mythology with the contemporary story of Morvern.

The Blending of Demotic and Hieratic Discourse in *Morvern Callar* and *These Demented Lands*

Although there are many elements of the spoken word in Morvern's narrative voice, Warner does not attempt a purely demotic style of the sort that can be seen in the work of Welsh and Kelman. Critics and literary journalists have repeatedly noted that his style blends the prosaic with the poetic. Warner uses the cadences of demotic speech to add poetic lyricism to his narrative. This has the effect of fusing the ordinary with the extraordinary, and the contemporary with the mythological. Morvern's matter-of-fact narration, which places equal emphasis on the everyday and the otherworldly, combined with poetic language, creates a world where myth exists on the same plane as the ordinary, and challenges our understanding of mythology as belonging to an ancient or 'high' aesthetic incommensurate with everyday existence. Tellingly, when Morvern asks The Devil's Advocate – a supposed researcher into the canonisation and demotion of saints – if James Bond is a saint, he replies that "he might be the only one we've got on this earth" (*TDL* 55).

Scott notes that "Warner shows great delight in the lyrical potentialities of language and attempts a *fusion* of the demotic and the hieratic" (9, original emphasis). He argues that Warner is involved in a blending of the demotic, which he relates to "oral [. . .] forms of language," with the hieratic, which he designates as "literary" or written forms (3). In his discussion of *The Sopranos*, Crawford points out that there are many such moments "of prose-poetry [which] illumine the novel and give it a tenderness that complicates the girls' crude talk" (para. 9). Scott borrows the term "art-speech" from Crawford's article, and defines it as the slippage between vernacular Scots English and "direct talk" or 'Standard English' within a sentence, which amounts to a style in which the "English language is rule-breakingly adjusted to the environment" (Crawford para. 10). In *MC*, for example, Morvern tells the reader: "I woke. Getting off of the bed I stood on Lanna who was on the floor with both boys. I locked the door and boaked three times" (25). Developing this notion of art-speech, Scott describes it as "a very useful term to define the

narrative methodology and resulting ‘folk’ discourse upon which Warner alights” and to “distinguish this methodology from skaz,” which designates a more fierce devotion to the demotic characteristic of other Scottish authors (2).²²

While the terms “demotic” and “hieratic” will prove useful in a discussion of Warner’s use of language, it is also necessary to problematise them. It becomes evident that Scott associates demotic discourses with the prosaic and the specific voices of the characters, and the hieratic with the poetic and literary or the voice of the author/narrator (9). Although he concedes that these discourses “coexist peacefully” and fuse to create a highly inventive narrative style, he maintains that the two discourses belong to two separate parties, namely: the character and author. For example, Scott argues that Warner’s authorial voice (described as hieratic or literary) intrudes upon the characters’ (demotic) voices. His argument likens the hieratic language which Warner employs in Morvern’s narration with the discourse or voice of the implied author. According to him, art-speech can be defined “as an authorial narrative voice which is a hybrid of an idiosyncratic lyricism and the cadences of the demotic” (4). He also claims that while “Kelman forswears (almost) any hint of a sublime lyricism out of a fidelity to authentic representation of character, Warner embraces it fervently, and in doing so, embraces the ‘paternalistic’ authorial voice unabashed” (13). As a result, the gap between the narrator and the character is widened by these “stylistic indulgences” on the part of the author (Scott 14).

Thus, Scott implies that the dual use of the demotic and the hieratic (although effective and intriguing as a narrative style) is ultimately a slippage between the constructed voice of the character and the author’s intrusion on that voice. I prefer to describe the narrative voices in *MC* and *TDL* as not so much the product of authorial invasion, but instead as the product of hybridisation and an idiosyncratic literariness, accompanied by the rhythms of the demotic, and embodied in an individual voice. Scott describes Warner’s project as involving a “subtle allegiance to the tones and range of a Scottish demotic” while giving “a clear impression of a writer straining against the expressive limitations imposed (arguably) by this idiom and indulging a desire to ‘ascend’ towards the lyrical” (9). I would view both the demotic and the hieratic as components of Morvern’s voice, and thus disagree with Scott. I likewise assume that Warner would be uncomfortable with the line that Scott draws between the demotic and the ‘literary’ or written, and with his employment of terms such as ‘ascend’ in his discussion of the hieratic. Scott

²² ‘Skaz’ is the style of writing adopted by James Kelman and other Scottish authors. The term ‘skaz’ “comes from the Russian verb ‘skazat’ (to tell) and such words as *rasskaz* (short story) and *skazka* (fairy tale). Skaz has come to be used to characterise “oral narratives” and is used to describe works by “their origin in terms of [. . .] an oral context” (“Skaz Narrative”).

argues that “[t]he reader is spectator to a constant tug of war between an overarching demotic discourse and an undoubtedly accomplished and beguiling hieratic tone; i.e. between the prosaic and the poetic” (9). As will be elaborated below, it is often precisely the lyrical potentialities of the demotic, and the creative practice of inventing new words (especially in terms of Morvern’s unique penchant for this), which allows the ‘lyrical’ and the demotic to overlap in such significant and seamless ways in Warner’s work. What becomes apparent is a blending of the existing artful tendencies in both the demotic and hieratic. Scott does indeed make useful distinctions in his analysis of Warner’s narrative style, some of which I have employed above. And, while I maintain that no such “tug of war” or tension exists between the demotic discourse and hieratic tone in the texts, Scott and I agree that “Warner’s narrative voice is a complex hybrid,” an amalgam of different elements which differentiates him from his fellow Scottish authors, and results in a unique narrative style (Scott 9).

Warner has often lauded the poetic rhythms of oral folklore and everyday speech, observing that “there is infinite poetry in daily language, the same way there is in Nature” (qtd. in Dale 27). Crawford notes Warner’s approach to literary form and genre in an anecdote:

Some time before he published his first novel [. . .] Alan Warner submitted poetry to *Verse* magazine. As editor, I rejected it, and told him the prose of his biographical note was much livelier than his poetry. He sent back the note, rewritten as a poem. It was published. This anecdote reveals several things about Warner. First, he is a poet as well as a novelist, and for him poetry and prose can fuse. (Crawford para. 1)²³

The above anecdote reveals that Warner sees no rigid barrier between the crafts of prose and poetry, and has developed a method, through his deft use of the demotic and its linguistic idiosyncrasies, of combining the two. Many critics have noted Warner’s ability to “seamlessly [reconcile] Scottish slang and the lyrical vernacular with beautiful prose” (Weissman para. 4). Amanda Thursfield, for instance, has written that Warner’s “use of language is extremely rich and varied” as well as “poetic, linguistically stimulating, comic, macabre and, above all, haunting and startlingly original” (para. 13). Jenny Turner notes that Morvern’s language is “profoundly poetic” (“Multitudes of People!” para. 2), while Mellissa Denes claims that Warner’s writing features a “profanity [that] is always offset by a tenderness, and by a poet’s feel for weather and landscape” (para. 6). Warner’s use of dialect itself holds a “plummy, poetic richness, the hint of the

²³ The re-written biographical note read in part: “A. Warner born Oban. In his mid-twenties, Alan is a/ Guaranteed Free Range Poet with twenty four hour access/ To open pasture” (Warner, qtd. in Crawford, “Flower of Scotland” para. 1).

long-lost origins of [present day English] in words like ‘keened’ (peeped), ‘skelf’ (splinter), ‘chuddy’ (chewing gum) ‘oxter’ (armpit), ‘coory’ (cower, snuggle) ‘grallocking’ (disembowelling) [and] ‘jaloused’ (suspected)” (Thursfield para. 13). Crawford notes that the “rip-roaring energy and horror-hilarity of *The Sopranos* show that Warner can combine a passion for literary style with go-anywhere demotic humour” – a description which applies equally to *MC* and *TDL* (“Flower of Scotland” para. 5).

Warner’s fusion of prose and poetry is achieved primarily through the amalgamation of demotic register and poetic style. Curiously, these elements do not operate in opposition to one another, despite what critics such as William Fiennes have argued. Fiennes proposes that Warner’s first three novels are “characterised by the conjunction of the colloquial with the high aesthetic,” a combination which he declares “exist[s] in uneasy tension” (35). Fiennes’ “uneasy tension” however, might rather have to do with his own elitist assumptions about social class, rather than any glaring inconsistency within the narrative voices. For him, Morvern’s voice is original, but “being original is not the same as being true” (Fiennes 34). He claims that Morvern’s prose is a “trick, an artful ventriloquism” (34), and finds it highly unlikely that Morvern and the girls from *The Sopranos*, as working-class women, could possess the “extremely literate, aesthetic sensibility” which “Warner’s prose implies” (35). I would disagree with Fiennes: the two modes which he terms ‘the colloquial’ and ‘the high aesthetic’ need not exist in tension with one another (34). Warner in fact exploits the poetic and lyrical potential within the demotic, as well as the idiosyncratic speech patterns of his protagonist, Morvern, to complement his more hieratic insertions.

Using what he sees as the perennial poetry within everyday speech and idiom, and adding his own experimental constructions, Warner creates a specialised narrative form which speaks to both the ancient and profound, and the contemporary and ordinary in human existence. Thus, I would agree with Scott’s assertion that “there is no jarring effect” in Warner’s prose, “for there are no competing discourses to jar. The characters’ and narrator’s vernacular resonances [. . .] and the hieratic lyricism coexist peacefully, at ease with each other, in the prose” (13). For Warner it is “interesting to say important things using that so-called vernacular” (qtd. in Jones, “Interview” para. 8). He reads his sentences “to see how a character would say it,” he hears “the breath [and] the structure” of a sentence and observes that he finds “the way people say things incredibly attractive” (qtd. in Jones, “Interview” para. 9). As Crawford explains, Warner’s poetic prose “is a combination of muck and brio that is all his own,” in which the “scatological and the delicate are

fused” (“Flower of Scotland” para. 11-12). This ambiguous fusion of the prosaic and poetic is demonstrated throughout *MC* and *TDL*.

The poetic influence in these novels is due to a distinctly ‘Morvernian’ linguistic style and sensibility. Morvern’s acutely observant and obsessively documentative style of narration contributes to this hybridised narrative mode. For example, she notes that – while floating in the sea – she hears the water “cluck” around her ears (*MC* 208), and observes the “mother of pearl psychedelics” of “clinging snails shells” on a tree she mistakes for a biblical burning bush (211-212). As indicated in the previous section, there exist intentional elisions, solecisms and contractions in the narration, which serve to better represent the sound of words and sentences in speech. These actions can be seen as poetic techniques which derive from the demotic representation in the texts, notable in the creative contracting of words and phrases such as “whatevertop,” “darkwater,” and “*dreadweight*” (*TDL* 5, original emphasis). In other words, Warner’s use of the demotic challenges the notion that the “language is any way lacking in complexity,” and shows rather that “it is both complex and poetic” (Dale 23). Warner’s demotic stylistics combine with poetic elements such as repetition, the contraction of words and phrases, the creative invention of new words, “strange inflexions of familiar words for emphasis” (Thursfield para. 13), along with formal factors such as line breaks and the isolation of text and signs. These elements of poetic lyricism emphasise or add to the distinctively lyrical quality of Warner’s prose, and are often derived from the demotic language itself. This can be seen in Morvern’s use of words such as “deep-deeper” (*TDL* 25), and “perishingness” (*TDL* 19). Warner thus creates a synthesis between an inventive demotic discourse, and a highly creative literary stylistics.

Morvern demonstrates linguistic creativity by crafting new words, which one can observe in her use of “nighttimeness” (*MC* 51 and *TDL* 6), and “always summerness” (*MC* 51). Here Morvern has turned existing nouns into more generalised nouns that evoke the feelings and sensory experiences associated with the primary referent. A similar process occurs with “hushedness” and “baldiness” (*TDL* 4). Warner grants Morvern this inventive poetic speech in “a distinctly Joycean fashion by adding the suffix ‘-ness’” onto nouns and adjectives (Scott 10). Alternatively this same effect is achieved when adding the suffix ‘es’ and ‘ing’ such as in “darknesses” (*TDL* 5) or “splattering of craters” (*MC* 196). Morvern also creates abstract nouns by joining two words, such as “neardark” (*TDL* 3) or “the always-look of his brother” (*TDL* 20). Apart from nouns, Morvern alters adjectives, such as when she describes her cold breath as “shuddery” (*MC* 92), Tom’s tie as “skew-iff” (*MC* 164), and the telly-aerial repairers as “rackety”

(*TDL* 3). In particular, she repeatedly creates indeterminate adjectives for colours by adding ‘y’ in descriptions such as the “orangey street light” (*MC* 175), the “bluey height moving up forever above” (*MC* 195), and “turquoise bubbles” (*TDL* 6). Morvern’s use of colour is both poetically inventive and faithful to the ambiguity of conversation and speech.

Warner also makes deft use of verbs in Morvern’s narration of action. Rather than saying “swallowed twice” or using the present participle “swallowing,” Morvern prefers to narrate repetitious movements as she sees them occur. For example, “you saw his poorly shaved neck jumping as he swallowed, swallowed” (*MC* 193). Or, in describing her movements up an embankment, she tells us how she saw how the “campfire lifted out of darkneses as [she] heave-heaved up the bank” (*TDL* 19). Repetition for emphasis is common to both the demotic, or spoken word, and poetry. The use of “heave-heaved” creates a more complex verb to better describe her physical experience, while adding texture to the sentence, and complementing the experimental noun “darkneses”. These adaptations are coupled with the poetic descriptions of “cast little cups of shadow” (*MC* 199); “peacocks’ eyes of olive oil” (*MC* 200); “[b]ruised-blue sky” (*TDL* 6); “the luminous dayness in its depths and bulges” (*TDL* 3); and “a daddy-long-legs as frail as the filaments in a bulb” (*TDL* 117).

As I have indicated, it is often the demotic itself that creates or at least contributes to the poetic flavour of the prose. Each discourse lends something of itself to the other. For example, the poetic aspects are aided by the lyrical potentialities of the demotic, while the demotic offers a visceral quality to the poetic. Moreover, as I will demonstrate in Chapter Four, the poetic aids in endowing the ordinary with a mythic resonance.

I now wish to demonstrate the blending of the multiple factors at work in the texts, using the characteristics discussed above. I will begin with an analysis of an extract from *MC* in order to show some typical outcomes of this fusion. After burying parts of her boyfriend’s body across the hillsides outside of the port in what can be described as a contemporised pagan ritual, Morvern is visited by her best friend Lanna at her campsite. They decide to go swimming and both climb up to a high point above a pool before jumping into the water:

We plucked up the courage then I goes, One,
Two,
Three.

We both screamed. Air moved past me. I turned my head, saw that with the hand that wasnt squeezing mine Lanna was gripping her nose.

We hit water. Coldness punched my chest and there was a boom. Lanna pulled her hand away. I opened my eyes and saw:

Bubbles, the copperishness of the water with big bars of sun going through and through. I surfaced beside Lanna. The wave our splash caused was cupping against the cliff and sherbety bubbles were tickling up my thighs. (*MC* 101)

Here one can witness the demotic elements of “I goes,” and “wasnt,” combined with the creative wordplay of “copperishness,” and “sherbety,” as well as the repetition of “going through and through.” The strategic use of line breaks which separate the countdown to the girls’ jump slows the reader’s pace and builds suspense for the typographically informed leap which the reader must take with the protagonist. Likewise, the colon preceding what Morvern “opened [her eyes] and saw:” delays the next narrated image and mimics the action of the delayed opening of one’s eyes underwater. Both techniques serve to create an intimate, experiential connection between the protagonist and reader. The linguistic inventiveness of “coldness,” too, produces this effect, as Morvern allows this “coldness” to be an agent in the active “punched my chest.” These techniques and both the demotic and poetic inventiveness of this passage gives the prose a tactile quality the reader experiences as intimacy and immediacy. The language utilised in Morvern’s narration creates a sense of lived-experience not so much seen as felt, embodied, so that the reader shares Morvern’s experience as she has it.

Warner’s experiments in poetic prose get even wilder in *TDL*. In the first few pages, the ferry on which Morvern is travelling begins to sink. She rescues a child in the process of abandoning the ship. I have again reproduced this section in full in order to demonstrate a number of points:

I savvied right enough that the petrol tank would keep me afloat so, with the telly-aerial repairers sat like daft apeths, I stepped forward and drew a real squeal from the blonde child as I bunched her ribbons and ponytails in both my hands and hauled her up to chest level, threw a left arm around; she kneed me on the left bosom as I swung, huffed out a puff and grabbed the petrol-tank handle with the right hand – in two steps we were up
 on the transom, leaping, then,
 for the split second,
 soaring
 over moonless nightwater,
 with the blonde hair of the child in my arms,
 the brightest thing in such
 darkneses. (*TDL* 4-5)

Demotic words such as “savvied” and “daft” combine with the colloquial yet poetic rhyme of “huffed out a puff.” As in the extract from *MC*, line breaks introduce a poetic structure unusual in

novelistic prose. These line breaks also contribute to the overall rhythm of the passage and emphasise by isolation the experimental combination in words such as “moonless” and “nightwater.” The line breaks also serve to provide rhythm and to isolate words for emphasis such as “soaring.” In the above examples, Warner can be seen to skilfully bend the rules demarcating the demotic, the hieratic, the poetic, and the novel form.

The amalgamation of the hieratic and the demotic in Warner’s works enables a merging of seemingly disparate elements of genre. As is evident from the above extract from *TDL*, it is not only the elements of the demotic and hieratic in the text which overlap and combine. Warner interweaves the humorous “real squeal from the blonde child,” with the realist experiential detail of “she kneed me on the left bosom as I swung” (*TDL* 4), alongside the transcendent poetics of “moonless nightwater,” and the stark contrast of the blonde child’s “brightest” blonde hair against “such darkneses” of the approaching “blackwater” (*TDL* 3-5). One encounters within his writing the ordinary alongside the extraordinary, the humorous alongside the horrific, and consumer and popular culture alongside the mythological, surreal and fantastic. The following section will introduce Warner’s fusion of the banal and the transcendent, two elements which influence Warner’s blending of the mythological and contemporary.

The Banal and the Transcendent in *Morvern Callar* and *These Demented Lands*

The sticky-on patch had come away in the salt water and a dead eye, like a green jewel of frozen phlegm on some winters pavement, stared down at me from her beautiful little button face. (Warner, *These Demented Lands* 7)

As Thursfield demonstrates, Morvern’s “descriptions range from the banal” such as her description of her bottom “saturated wet-through on the sodden grass” (*TDL* 28) “to the poetic,” in her portrayal of “the purple bruises of bluebell banks” (*TDL* 147) (Thursfield para. 6). These metaphors and other utterances, which equate or associate two seemingly unrelated images, are used to describe moments in the texts where the crude and poetic or transcendent collide. For example, in Spain, Morvern throws a used condom out of the window and watches as it falls through the night sky:

It sparkled for split seconds and some separated then it slowly floated down into the darkness. I breathed in air and the model city was as glorious as anything. It was very still, the cooling towers of the high rises had cherry-coloured beacons on top and all the lights seemed to be a wee bit different in colour. It was all so beautiful I grabbed the railing. (MC 135)

This extract demonstrates an amalgamation of the abjectly actual with a beauty so sublime to Morvern that she has to grab the railing to steady herself. *MC* and *TDL* frequently fuse the ordinary and corporeal (such as descriptions of shaving, bathing, defecation, and other physical experiences) with the poetic or profound (such as in the references to landscapes and allusions to the supernatural, surreal or mythological).

Another example of these multi-voiced and seemingly-opposed discourses occurs when Morvern is sick at The Complex in the port. She reports:

I was going to boak: I made the window and opened it but most of the sickness hit the window-sill in a heap. I breathed in cold air and looked out across The Complex all covered in snow and moonlight on it. The Complex where I'd had to grow up. Where one young husband owned a camcorder so his four married brothers and him swapped porno videos of their unknowing wives. (MC 43)

This passage brings together the image of Morvern's physical sickness and a contrasting view of The Complex (a state-appointed housing apartment block) covered in snow, as well as her despair at the reality of Complex life and all the degradation its enforced hegemonies bring. This synthesis of the banal and the poetic, or the crude and the transcendent, is utilised by Warner for many different reasons. These descriptions bring together the seemingly incongruent aspects of the poetic and the debased, which, as I will show in the following chapter, often parallel or contribute to the merging of the mythic and the contemporary in the novels. In doing so, Warner allows characters and scenes conventionally disbarred from mythic poetics and transcendence to contribute to the "quality of myth" in the novels, and to be endowed with the significance or "permanence" granted to poetry and poetic moments. The blending of the demotic and the hieratic, which leads to the equation of the ordinary and transcendent, is thus crucial to understanding how Warner re-appropriates and revitalises myth in his novels. This eclecticism amounts to a unique form of re-telling, which will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

Chapter Four

The Quality of Myth in *Morvern Callar* and *These Demented Lands*

In Warner's two novels many scenes, situations and dreams are imbued with mythological resonance. These scenes offer a sense of the primordial or prehistoric, often drawing on pre-Christian or Celtic tradition. The portrayal of the landscape as a living repository of ancient myth and history helps to endow the sense of permanence which Warner associates with myth, and this paradoxically occurs amongst references to walkmans, contemporary music, and other modern or urban paraphernalia. Christian and Celtic mythologies are merged and transformed by their relocation in contemporary culture and the electronic age. I will begin this chapter by analysing the mythic characterisation of Morvern in both *MC* and *TDL*, follow with an examination of Warner's mythic portrayal of landscape, and close with a discussion of some of the multiple references to mythology in the novels. In doing so, I will demonstrate that Warner both exploits and undermines mythic narrative in his unique approach to re-telling.

Morvern Callar as Contemporary Goddess

a girl in the woods at darkness looking as divine as you . . .
(Warner, *These Demented Lands* 38)

Morvern Callar has been described as many things, including "monstrous" (Martin 206), "worldly-weary," a blasé "party chick" (Dale 13), and a "modern-day Moll Flanders" (Thursfield para. 9). Often simply viewed as a "twenty-first century bimchette with a passion for quirky clothes, CDs, shaving her legs and painting her toenails," she has been misunderstood as a stereotypical woman of the working-classes, with a casual attitude to sex, contraception, and drug use (Thursfield para. 9). Despite these often shallow readings of Morvern, she is undoubtedly one of the most memorable and unorthodox fictional characters to have emerged in recent years. Once again, Warner's affinity for eclecticism and ambiguity in his narrative style produces "a personality of astonishing complexity" (Thursfield para. 9).

It is my view that Morvern should be read as both an existential and mythical figure in the novels. In this way she can be understood as an emancipated female figure. It is unusual for an existential character in literature to be female, and Morvern is thus empowered by achieving

an existential freedom usually reserved for men. It is Morvern's position as an outsider, a wanderer, and as curiously untouchable, as well as her mysterious and recurring affiliation with the divine and spiritual, which allow her to be read as an existential character in possession of mythic qualities. Highly independent, she lives her life largely alone. She is an orphan, who maintains a self-preserving independence from her foster family. She always refers to her father as "Red Hanna," and she never drops the word 'foster' when she does call him father. Her foster mother died when she was young. There is something distinctly mythical about Morvern's silence, stoicism, and her solitary, but intensely physical, interaction with the world around her, as it places her outside the limits and codes of appropriate social behaviour. In *TDL* her status as outlaw is even more complex, as in this novel she is surrounded by characters as 'strange' and isolated as herself. Despite this, her implied divinity sets her apart from the characters on the island. She possesses a morality of her own construction, and refuses to conform to many oppressive social conventions. Her idiosyncratic ability to transcend societal norms and act without ideological bounds help to endow Morvern's life with both mythical and existential significance. It is this ability that enables her to create her own narrative, to escape subjugation and live in a way that departs from the norm for a working-class woman.

Warner has noted that he has been greatly influenced by European existentialists such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Friedrich Nietzsche, and often refers to his own works as possessing existential concerns (see "*The Sopranos: Existential Ecstasy*" para. 12 and para. 15). He has called *MC* "an old existential novel recast in today's colors" (qtd. in Weissman para. 3), which "taps into the absurd" (qtd. in Strachan para. 15). In an interview with Dale, Warner explains his preoccupation with existentialism:

All my books are about poverty, about people trying to get a few joys with not much in their pocket, and then they're about the moral vacuum when you have money. I see them firmly in an existential tradition. They get seen as books about young girls, but I see them as books about our lives – where do we go with our lives when we're going to die? I'm still led by Sartrean existentialism and absurdity, these philosophers I read when I was 16 or 17. It's interesting that the world of philosophy can be as fickle and fashionable as the literary world. Philosophy has moved on enormously but I'm still working through the implications of '50s existentialism because I don't think that's exhausted yet – I think I'm still grappling with those existential dilemmas! (qtd. in Dale 48-49)

As Warner points out, existentialism is inextricably linked with the absurd, a notion with which he engages in the novels. Morvern experiences the absurdity and despair of her situation, and often recognises the bizarre nature of societal constraints and rituals. *MC's* opening is absurdist,

highlighted by Morvern's matter-of-fact narration of both the banal and the traumatic. In a monotonous, blunt tone she describes the specific setting of the Christmas tree lights, the presents under the tree, the habitual need to take the last contraceptive pill in her cycle, and the bare body of her lover on the floor, dead (1-2). Referring to this opening scene, Warner explains that Morvern is "outraged at the absurdity of death, the fact that she has to jump over the body to get to the sink, the fact that she suddenly needs to take a crap, even though the man she loves is dead there in the midst of their (former) domestic bliss" (qtd. in Strachan para. 15). Morvern experiences the "absurdity of having to get dressed and put on makeup though he's dead" which "metaphysically outrages her" (Warner, qtd. in Strachan para. 15). This is why "she reports" the scene "so exhaustively and perhaps that's why she walks past the phonebox. She's rebelling against the absurdity of death, in that way she's heroic" (Warner, qtd. in Strachan para. 15). Likewise, Morvern's failure to contact the authorities about her boyfriend's death portrays an existential rebellion, and a refusal to take part in the ritualised conventions surrounding mortality, conventions which she views as equally absurd.

Morvern's refusal to conform to public understandings of morality, preferring to create and follow her own guiding principles, can be interpreted as an existential way of being in the world, as existentialists understand existence as "self-making in situation" ("Existentialism" para. 33). As observed in Part One, existential philosophers argue for the importance of being "the *author* of oneself as a unique individual" ("Existentialism" para. 30, my emphasis). An individual possesses existential authority when she acts in accordance with her own values and truths rather than with beliefs dictated by duty or obligation. As one can note in her narration and actions, Morvern is undeniably the author of her own existential narrative, which possesses an integrity and a moral code that she herself creates. Her self-authorship can be noted both in her actions (from her refusal to contact the authorities after her boyfriend's suicide to her disappearance to Spain), and in the reflective suggestion near the end of *MC* that the novel is Morvern's creation (228). *TDL* too operates as an existentially driven metafiction, as Morvern often refers directly to the mechanics of writing and includes a letter to her foster father, which emphasises the notion that her narration is 'written' and that she in fact is the author. This authorial process and metafictional awareness is made overt as Morvern questions her own use of apostrophes: "your jackets (jacket's . . . jackets?: do you need these comma things?)" (*TDL* 5). She is a heroine who "never sees herself as a passive victim but instead casts herself in the role of agent of her own destiny, telling her own tale in the book[s] that we read" (Dale 54).

Morvern's actions resonate with the existential "idea that freedom is the origin of value – where freedom is defined not in terms of acting rationally but rather existentially, as choice and transcendence" ("Existentialism" para. 40). Morvern assigns value experientially and creatively, not in passive obedience to cultural practice. Accordingly, she constructs her own rituals, which are narrated in obsessive detail. These can be seen in the many instances of bathing, preening and grooming, as well as in eating, swimming, dancing, listening to music, sexual activity, and in the religious rituals in which she takes part. Each incident is narrated by Morvern in precisely the same tone, with no one experience being elevated above another by being awarded more emotion or significance. This implies that she grants each (decidedly corporeal) experience equal value, as each provides her with experiential and sensual gratification. In doing so, she perceives experience as meaningful and valuable in itself. She does not participate in religious rituals as a sign of subscription to the beliefs involved, but rather for the experiential enjoyment of the process. She displays a seemingly spontaneous veneration for the attempt at purity, cleansing, and goodness which religious observance connotes. She is meticulous about her appearance, carefully choosing clothes and make-up and grooming herself sometimes twice or three times daily. She does this not out of vanity or because of an impulse based "on insecurity," but for the sheer pleasure that it offers her (Turner, "Fairy Lights" 23). Indeed, for Turner, these acts of bodily worship have little to do with the "male gaze," as the gaze cannot "intrude on an image of shameless, self-sufficient perfection" ("Fairy Lights" 23). Her routines become almost spiritual sessions which involve a worship of the body and bodily experience.

Warner evokes existential potential for individual freedom in his characterisation of Morvern, a potential she realises regularly. Morvern's refusal to conform to societal norms is evident in her unwillingness to placate her obnoxious and misogynistic boss in *MC*, Creeping Jesus. When he issues her with a lateness letter she simply puts in her walkman's ear phones and says nothing, as opposed to offering him a few polite words in accordance with social etiquette, or flirting with him which would likely work in her favour, as she knows he harbours sexual desire for her (*MC* 12). Later on in the novel, upon returning from Spain to find that she has lost her job, she throws a chair at him in defiance, enriching our understanding of her as an empowered and liberated individual. Her actions, including her moral decisions, are indicative of a highly individually-constructed self. As is evident in the narration, she prioritises the corporeal and sensuous over the emotional. In the face of an indifferent and unjust world, Morvern finds value in the cultivation of her responses to physical experience. She celebrates life as the vessel for experience, viewing the rituals of human existence as a worship of that life. Warner thus shifts

the usual emphasis “from [a lack of] hope to hedonism,” granting sensory pleasure authority in the novel (qtd. in Jones, “The Becoming” 66).

Significantly, the attributes which cast Morvern as an existential character are also those which aid in her characterisation as a mythical figure. John Leblanc views Morvern’s mythical characteristics as stemming from an “intuitive adoption of the character of the queens and druids of Celtic mythology” (145). It is important to note his use of the word “intuitive” here, indicating that these characteristics and subsequent actions are not consciously embraced by Morvern, but rather involve an implicit Celtic sensibility. Leblanc argues for a sensibility that reasserts mythical matriarchal or feminine power structures. In his article, “Return of the Goddess: Contemporary Music and Celtic Mythology in Alan Warner’s *Morvern Callar*,” he argues that ancient Celtic mythology and society are intrinsically matriarchal in structure. He gleans much of the basis for his argument from Peter Beresford Ellis’s book *Celtic Women: Women in Celtic Society and Literature*. For Ellis, as well as Leblanc, ‘Celtic’ refers to those traditions, mythologies, laws and rituals which were held and practised in Ireland, Wales, and Scotland. Ellis’s study maintains that prior to and even during the major invasion of Western Europe by first the Romans, then later the “Saxons, Franks and Normans, together with the influence of Western Christianity,” women in Celtic culture and tradition occupied an empowered space at odds with the rest of Europe at that time (18). It is thought that “[m]atriarchal Celtic culture enjoyed a brief ascendancy around the 5th century BC” before successive invasions by patriarchal groups – “who have remained in power ever since” – suppressed Celtic matriarchal sympathies through cultural colonisation (Leblanc 146). Ellis attributes this matriarchal culture to a number of factors: the attribution of creation to a mother goddess in Celtic mythology (21), the large numbers of goddesses, Druidesses, and saints of the early Celtic church and in myth, folklore and religion (15), as well as the historical existence of many powerful Celtic women such as Boudicca of Iceni (14). The Celtic mother goddess of creation, Danu, which means “Waters from heaven,” manifests in the worship of rivers or “divine waters” in pagan Celtic religion (Ellis, qtd. in Leblanc 146). Leblanc links this Celtic sensibility of female empowerment and fluidity to the genre of contemporary music, and more specifically, “New Age rave culture” (146). The similarity “between Celtic Mythology and New Age rave culture,” he argues, “lies in their shared matriarchal character” (146). The ‘chemical generation’ and rave culture in general challenge “patriarchal authority (through its rejection of Victorian ‘industry’ and its embrace of childhood),” and its “marginal and regressive character” is given “new relevance” through Warner’s depiction of it “as a potentially progressive force” (Leblanc 149). Leblanc therefore

maintains that Warner's novels bring together "in a postmodern fashion, ancient Celtic and contemporary 'New Age' worldviews" in order to reinstate a marginalised and matriarchal sensibility (145). Leblanc claims that *MC* renews

this Celtic emphasis on the feminine as watery source of wisdom, healing and life by having its female title character behave in ways that identify her with elements of Celtic mythology, especially Celtic goddesses (such as Morrighan and Morgen) and Celtic shamans (the druids). (146)

Although Leblanc's argument is often guilty of homogenising Celtic mythology and its influence on Warner's work, as well as stereotyping femininity,²⁴ I would agree that Morvern's uniqueness is largely due to her characterisation as a mythic figure. I would also affirm that Warner is involved in an amalgamation of the mythic and the contemporary in his novels; however, while there is some reference to electronic music and raves in *MC* I would not necessarily define the contemporary world Warner portrays as synonymous with 'New Age' worldviews and rave culture. It is my argument that Morvern can be associated with figures from both Celtic and Christian mythology, and that Warner uses these mythologies to empower Morvern, while her own idiosyncrasies revitalise and undermine certain mythological traits and narratives.

Morvern's independent behaviour and her affinity with both urban rave culture and the natural landscapes around her lead Leblanc to presume that the "Celtic sensibility is inherent within" her (153). The assumption of mythic and unorthodox matriarchal power by a character that one would normally describe as disempowered is, of course, significant. Warner places great emphasis on poverty and class struggle in both *MC* and *TDL*. Morvern is a young, female shelf-stacker in a large multi-store. The perspective associated with her socio-economic status is unusual in the novel, especially a novel which evokes the quality of myth. In *MC* she often alludes to the degradation of her job, the patriarchal and capitalist hegemonies which are firmly in place, and the entrapment she feels in the small port town. The task of passing her driver's licence is all-important to Morvern, and when she fails she views it as the missed opportunity to "drive out of the port forever" (*MC* 78). When she finally admits to Brotherhood that she has no money in *TDL*, she is put to work as a hotel maid. The Aircrash Investigator one day notes that Morvern "will be breathing in deep the real poverty of these lands, but breathing at a controlled

²⁴ Leblanc's designation of New Age rave culture as characteristically matriarchal, as well as his description of the matriarchal or feminine as "watery," is a problematic generalisation in many respects, especially in terms of what I would argue is Warner's feminist approach in his characterisation of Morvern as an autonomous and unique individual, rather than as a stereotype for all 'femininity'.

speed, with which she's learned to steady despair and not allow it to swarm over her" (*TDL* 149). Crucially, the association of Morvern with existential and mythological characteristics "transform[s] Morvern, who is imprisoned by the patriarchal order," and allows her to escape the confines of patriarchal and class-divided capitalist society (Leblanc 147). Leblanc links this resurrection of Celtic sensibilities to the overall trend of re-telling, or rather, to what he refers to as the re-introduction of previously marginalised perspectives and cultures. As he observes, writers all over the world are "resurrecting not only the Celtic culture but other repressed sensibilities that may offer practical insight on current problems" (153). They do so in order to offer legitimacy to "neglected viewpoints" such as Morvern's (Leblanc 153). Morvern, as a young female from the working classes, is empowered through this mythologising and is able to escape subjugation by the patriarchal class-system in which she finds herself.

Of the many attributes and incidents which characterise Morvern as a mythological character, it is her reaction to her boyfriend's death by suicide which both introduces and cements her outsider status in the novel and alludes to her mysterious divinity. Instead of calling the authorities, she operates outside of the law, telling no one and keeping his corpse in her apartment for as long as she can stand it. She enacts strange, often disturbing, rites with his body, including hanging his corpse from pulleys attached to the attic rafters and crashing him down onto his painstakingly constructed model of the village in which he grew up. After a while she dismembers him, and goes on a solitary camping trip to the rural lands outside the port where she buries parts of him all over the landscape. She passes off "His" novel as her own, claims the publishing rights, and uses the money to take herself and her best friend, Lanna, to the Mediterranean island of Ibiza.²⁵ Although some may view her actions as selfish, depraved, amoral, and grotesque as well as criminal, Leblanc views her behaviour as "unconsciously, an enactment of Celtic ritual, recalling not only the Celtic queens but also druidic practice as, like the druids, she wanders the world undergoing shamanic ordeals in search of wisdom" (147).

There is something distinctly ritualistic and mythological about the way Morvern deals with her boyfriend's body. She begins what can be described as a death ritual by entering into a specific state instigated by anaesthetics and alcohol, and supported by a mindscape of carefully chosen music (*MC* 80). This falls in line with the descriptions of shamans who would ritualistically achieve "a sensuous panic, deliberately evoked through drugs, chants, [and] dancing" (Morrison, qtd. in Coupe 51). A shaman is one who "mediated between man and spirit-world. Their mental travels formed the crux of the religious life of the tribe" (Morrison, qtd. in

²⁵ Ibiza is an island off the coast of Spain known for its dance clubs and rave culture.

Coupe 51). Coupe adds that the important thing about the shaman is that “in contrast to a conventional priest, he is not instructed in a body of doctrine; rather, he acquires his own powers. There is no *logos*, no fixed scheme or formula to hold onto: he has to trust the *mythos*, the narrative process of psychic exploration” (Coupe 51). This of course resonates with Morvern, who at every turn rebels against the orthodox and doctrinal in favour of the intuitive and experiential. She creates specific music compilations for both the dismemberment and the burial of the body, and there is an instant in which she dances to this music once the body is buried (*MC* 88). These actions can be likened to trances involved in paganistic rituals, which allow for mourning and transcendence through specific burial rites.

When Morvern dismembers her boyfriend’s body, she is naked apart from improvised protective clothing to make the experience more bearable; however, this attempt at estrangement from experience succeeds in making her perception of the moment even more surreal for both herself and the reader. As she is naked when dealing with the body, she notices her own menstrual blood trickling down her leg and mixing with his blood, a detail which evokes the role of blood in ritual and sacrifice (*MC* 81). The preparation of the body and the burial ritual itself seems to involve a contemporary inversion of ancient burial rites. Instead of chanting, singing or prayer there is a walkman filled with carefully chosen contemporary music to listen to as she dismembers and buries the body (*MC* 80). Her ritual cleansing before and after the burial involves a Bic razor and toenail polish (*MC* 85). She is calculated in her responses, and only once she has dealt with the body and cleansed herself does she read his suicide note (*MC* 85). His internment is carefully considered, and carried out to a pre-planned soundtrack and the “happy sound of Salif Keita doing Nyanafin” on her walkman (*MC* 88).²⁶

Warner has described how the music and music listings in the novels serve “a narrative function” in the characterisation of Morvern, and the music is shown to be a defining force in the novel (qtd. in Lawrence para. 2). She listens to, lists, and compiles music fixatedly, and “constantly refers to this music that accompanies her every action” (Leblanc 147). Importantly, the music “is not merely a diversion from her mundane existence but a key element of her identity, an element that allows her to establish a self beyond the limited role of store clerk that the patriarchal establishment grants her” (Leblanc 147). Leblanc argues that the music “serves this purpose through its ability to transport her to another level of consciousness, as she has specifically designed it to recreate for her an alternative world” (147). Her ritualistic music choices provide a space in which she can act autonomously and freely to create herself as a

²⁶ See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Pk6TACqnS8> for audio recording.

sovereign individual. When she initially walks past the phone booth instead of calling the authorities after her boyfriend's suicide she is listening to Miles Davis's "He Loved Him Madly." She narrates: "It was the feeling that the music gave that made me," indicating that it was the particular song that influenced her action that day (*MC* 5).²⁷ Salif Keita's music allows her to tell her own narrative of her boyfriend's death and burial, and reveals her unconventional reaction to the trauma. "Nyanafin" is joyful and up-tempo, and the Bambara lyrics are accompanied by loud and celebratory clashes of cymbals and brass instruments.²⁸

Morvern's narration of the burial shows that she possesses a distinct understanding of ritual and the importance of the body's relation to the natural world, as well as its place in terms of her cyclical understanding of life and death. She describes that his "[t]wo arms and a leg [are] buried on the cliff above the sycamore tree and higher up the torso and leg would be helping flower the sheets of bluebells below the dripping rocks. All across the land bits of Him were buried" (*MC* 91). This ritualistic burial indicates a significant move away from modern Western burial traditions, which generally do not confront the physical aspects of death and decomposition, and view death as an earthly finality as opposed to a physical rebirth within the natural world. To some, Morvern's handling and burying of the body may seem socially perverse. She, however, views the modern Western death rituals that she has experienced (such as her foster mother's funeral) as objectionable in their own way. For her, these rituals consist of "hard church seats," the words of the Bible getting "blown away in gusts," and people "bolting nips [small servings of liquor] at the bar" while they bicker over the deceased's money and jewellery (*MC* 29). The image of the insubstantial words of the Bible getting "blown away in gusts" (*MC* 30) shows the irrelevance of this scripture and its narratives in her time of grief, and it is this belief system and its practices that she resolutely avoids in her reactions to her boyfriend's suicide.

While Morvern's reaction to her boyfriend's death and burial can be viewed as ritualistic and shamanistic, it is important to note further reasons behind her behaviour. She does not display much fear and disgust towards the body of her boyfriend, and many have read this as depraved. When writing *MC*, Warner had

considered the idea that Morvern's relationship with her boyfriend might have been unhappy or abusive, or that Red Hanna might have abused her, but he decided against such slick solutions to the question as to what might have made her react in such a way to her boyfriend's death. Instead, the most immediate reason behind her coolness when faced

²⁷ See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VvBLg6nvKW4&feature=related> for audio recording.

²⁸ Bambara is a Manding language spoken in Mali, Guinea, Gambia, and parts of Senegal.

with his dead body comes from the fact that her work in the supermarket has brutalized her – she is used to handling carcasses, and well used to the sight of blood. (Dale 50)

As Warner explains, once her boyfriend's body is dead it “become like the meat of the packages she daily hoiks in the supermarket, so she goes on camping trips in the good weather to bury it” (qtd. in Dale 51). Morvern describes her time spent working in the butchery of the SuperStore:

You cleaned up each night. Afterwards you smelled of blood and it was under your nails as you lifted the glass near your nose in the pub. [. . .] Blood spoiled three pairs of shoes. You were expected to supply your own footwear. (*MC* 11-12)

This quotation, which portrays a profound sense of injustice, distaste and despair, reiterates that the novel is “about someone trying to escape from a mind-numbing, desensitizing job” in an insular and often violent working-class community (Dale 52). It is Morvern's brutalising job experience, as well as “the fact that she lives in a culture which is full of brutality, which Warner characterizes as male brutality against women,” which desensitises her to the disembowelling of her boyfriend's body (Dale 54). The corporeal reality of Morvern's traumatising experiences must not be forgotten here, as it shows Warner's unique synchronisation of working-class reality and mythic characteristics within his disturbing but spiritually stirring scenes.

Throughout both *MC* and *TDL*, Morvern is aligned with the sacred and divine. ‘Morvern’ translates to ‘maid’ or ‘virgin’ in Welsh, and ‘Callar’ is a Spanish word for “silence, to say nothing” (*MC* 125). This naming is central to understanding Warner's project of “revitalising” our myths in *MC* and *TDL*. Translated, the title of his first novel is thus ‘silent maid’ or ‘silent virgin.’ While Morvern is largely silent in the novels, the reader is allowed access into her world through her narration and interior monologue. The narration itself is transformative in terms of Morvern's association with mythic maidens, who traditionally remain silent and do not have the ability to narrate their subjective experiences, let alone their own lives, in an authorial capacity. Her association with spiritual and mythic figures is recognised early on in *MC*, when Couris Jean tells her that she looks “like an angel come to this earth” (38). Couris Jean's insistence that Morvern resembles an angel is reiterated when she is aligned with the virgin saint girl, a statue in Spain that is put out to sea on a raft and ritually burned. Morvern describes how “the pale model of the virgin saint girl seemed to float out the chapel in her heavy lace dress with tinkling bells. *She was as tall as me*. I stared at her face as she passed” (*MC* 154, my emphasis). Morvern's association with the angel, goddess and virgin figures recurs throughout *MC*, while in *TDL* she is

quite clearly depicted as an apocalyptic avatar of the Virgin Mary. Bearing in mind the significance of Morvern's name as 'maid' or 'virgin,' Morvern gives birth to a daughter (who is described as a seer or prophet) at an out-of-control Millennium party, in the back of a car filled with hay, with "Three Wise Kings" to witness the Nativity. It is incidents such as these that encourage critics like Turner to view Morvern as "a semi-mythic angelic/goddess idealized female figure" ("Fairy Lights" 23).

Furthermore, Morvern's seemingly self-absorbed, detached silence, along with her unflinching honesty when she does speak, is distinctly innocent and childlike. The reader may assume Morvern has perhaps been inadequately socialised, and thereby preserved an unusual sense of innocence. Her use of language and her effortless devotion to joy, pleasure and experience indicate a childlike sensibility and vigour. She uses words like "tum-tum" (*MC* 91 and *TDL* 29), "yum-yummy" (*TDL* 21) and "horsey" (*TDL* 34). Brotherhood describes how she uses the word 'Mister' "the way a child would" (*TDL* 70). As a result, Morvern's character is endowed with a paradoxical and off-balance innocence, and this innocence persists despite anything 'morally reprehensible' that she may do. In spite of her casual attitude to sex and drugs, she seems to remain mysteriously immaculate and unscathed. The strange request in her boyfriend's suicide note to "keep your conscience immaculate and live the life people like me have denied you" is fulfilled by Morvern at all times (*MC* 82). Another invocation of Morvern's otherworldly and supra-human status occurs when Morvern's boyfriend tells her that she is "better than us" in his suicide note (*MC* 82), an insistence reiterated in *TDL* when The Aircrash Investigator declares that "she is better than this world, better" (147, original emphasis).

In *TDL* Morvern continues to be associated with the divine. When she encounters the forester or Night Talker in the woods on her journey to the Drome Hotel he exclaims that it is "so warming" that Morvern trusts him, and describes her as "striding out of the dark East with some water stars over [her] shoulder," "a girl in the woods at darkness looking [. . .] divine" (*TDL* 38). In this same interaction Morvern herself proclaims her status as an otherworldly outsider who exists beyond the fixed assumptions of society. In her most direct and telling description of herself in either text she declares: "'I've kicked myself free of the earth long ago . . . I don't count,'" indicating her awareness of her free-floating existential status and her unearthly associations (*TDL* 39). In addition to these qualities, Morvern is also an oddly 'charmed' or untouchable character in the novels. She enjoys night-time adventures around the port, rural Scotland and the Spanish towns she visits, despite this being an atypical activity for a woman on her own. She is strangely self-assured and more fearful of the supernatural – such as the ghost-

sightings in *TDL* (126) – than of the more sinister real-life dangers which may easily befall her as a woman wandering alone in strange lands and large, unfamiliar cities. In both *MC* and *TDL* she is warned, on numerous occasions, about potential rape and violence, or simply the dangers of walking alone in the snow. When Lanna asks if she is afraid to be camping out in the hills around the port by herself, Morvern replies in the negative. She is also warned by a bartender of the dangers of walking far distances in the terrible cold, to which the already pregnant Morvern clairvoyantly replies: “Nothing’ll happen to me” (*MC* 224). This behaviour continues in *TDL*, when, warned by The Harbour of the long journey over hard land where she is sure to meet up with possibly insane and dangerous characters, Morvern strides off – pregnant – into the darkness, to walk for days without shelter and food (15).

Although the characterisation of Morvern as spiritual and divine seems to be at odds with her hedonistic activities, these attributes do not contradict one another in the texts. Despite accusations that Morvern is amoral, I would argue that her existentially informed system of values is consistent and complex.²⁹ Her ethics are premised on an existential desire for unfettered experience and her inexplicable spiritual sensibility. For example, in *MC* she clearly states that “on principle” she used the Superstore’s carrier bags inside-out so as not to advertise for them (50). This is in contrast to the many other instances in the novel where her co-workers unthinkingly carry the bags in the usual way, unaware that the action makes them somewhat complicit in their imprisonment in a capitalist class system. She also gives up many of her former obsessions and pleasures, such as smoking, when she is pregnant. Morvern always acts in good faith in accordance with her own morality, and in this way manages to maintain her integrity. She is able to go out with Tom and Susan in London, drink, take drugs and dance, yet she can still walk from the last club they visit into a nearby church and receive Holy Communion at early morning mass. After a period of prayer in the church, Morvern continues to a photo booth to take some “rampant” (arousing) pictures with Tom and Susan while she still has the taste of communion wafer in her mouth (*MC* 165-167). The old, churchgoing woman by the holy water is more comfortable with Morvern’s presence in the Church than she is with Tom and Susan, who

²⁹ Sara Martin describes Morvern’s behaviour as “marked by a monstrous callousness” and claims that she is both “cold and uncaring to limits that make the reader doubt whether she is human at all” (206). It is evident, however, that Martin’s glaring misinterpretation of the plot of the novel could account for these statements. Martin assumes that “Morvern puts herself in the track of literary fame by stealing the manuscript of a novel she finds next to the battered, dead body of her boyfriend, killed by a stranger” (Martin 206). In the novel, however, it is made clear within the opening sentences that Morvern’s boyfriend committed suicide and was not killed, allowing for a very different interaction with his death. Aside from Martin’s fallible postulations, Morvern’s promiscuity and recreational drug use have also been commented on by other critics, as well as her rather unusual reaction to her boyfriend’s death. These accusations have led to the description of her as an “amoral” woman (Weissman para. 1).

both look incongruent in the setting and receive scathing looks. Although not religious, Morvern intuitively knows how to behave in the church, respectfully imitating the old woman's actions with the holy water and genuflection (*MC* 165). For her, who has made religion and ritual out of experience, this is just another form of worship. She also prays often, increasing her characterisation as a saintly figure. Morvern's spirituality is imaginative, unorthodox and untainted by the constraints of organised religions such as Christianity.

Paradoxically, Morvern is aligned with both the characteristics of matriarchal goddesses and druidesses of Celtic mythology, and the immaculate and virginal qualities of saints and the Virgin Mary within patriarchally informed Christian mythology. These opposing mythologies designate Morvern as a neo-goddess figure, one who embodies the seemingly contradictory qualities of divinity from both pre-Christian Celtic mythology and Christian mythology. Morvern's name is again important here, as it further connects her to the virginal figure of Mary. Placing Morvern in the position of the virginal goddess is obviously a way of revitalising the religious myth, as she does not embody innocence in terms of sexual purity, but evinces a more nuanced, childlike form of innocence. In the re-working and converging of these mythologies Morvern is imbued with qualities of both the 'Celtic goddesses' and the Christian 'virginal figure', but many of the negative aspects of Christian mythologies for women, deriving from patriarchal prejudice (such as passivity, obedience and chastity) fall away in favour of the more matriarchal sensibility of Celtic mythology. This mythical re-creation, which joins together the empowered pagan goddess and the kind and innocent virgin, questions the reader's assumptions about the myths and stories that we use to understand life and spirituality. Morvern can thereby be identified as a contemporary and existentially-motivated goddess figure.

This association with Celtic goddesses or druidesses may seem contradictory "given [Morvern's] working-class status, her taciturn nature, and her obvious lack of schooling" (Leblanc 147). Warner's project, however, conflates the mythological and the ordinary, allowing a shift in the perception that mythology belongs to the cultural heritage of a certain class. This allows for a distinctive mythologising of the ordinary, and indicates that any character, object, or time of perceived "impermanence" or insignificance can possess the "quality of myth."

Warner is thus involved in extending the genre of re-visionary fiction, as he does not merely undermine existing narratives in order to subvert the ideologies which they represent, but also draws characteristics and qualities from these narratives in order to enrich his characterisations and scenes. He uses these qualities to empower Morvern and lend significance to scenes and people previously portrayed in a manner Warner calls "just realism" (qtd. in Dale

66). Warner enables Morvern, “like the druids but also like the disaffected British youth, [to] travel to other worlds, such as the resort island of Ibiza [and the Spanish coast at large], to gain wisdom” (Leblanc147). Morvern abandons the port, “leaving behind her current world which is ruled by older, aging, dominating, [and] dysfunctional men” (Leblanc147) for a new world of emancipation. Through her combination of both existential and mythic characteristics, she “take[s] initiatives which centuries have said she shouldn’t, refusing commitments, sure only of a few basic things – her right to decide where she’ll go, who she’ll have sex with, and her recognition that she’s alone” (Gifford, qtd. in Leblanc 151). Some might view the conclusion of *MC* as affirming the patriarchal order as it ends with the stereotypical idea of feminine fulfilment: pregnancy (Leblanc 151). Warner explains, however, that it is

assumed Morvern “fell pregnant” (and doesn’t that phrase tell us a lot about man made language?) but I actually think she could equally well have gotten pregnant by choice. However, the interpretations of her pregnancy have always been that she got pregnant unintentionally/helplessly etc. . . . in other words, critics’ interpretations of the book have assumed she wasn’t in control, but where is that stated? (qtd. in Dale 54)

Leblanc reiterates that Morvern may well have chosen “the pregnancy and its conditions on her own terms as a single mother who does not have to submit to the nuclear family paradigm” (151).

Morvern can thus be defined as a figure informed by both existentialism and Celtic and Christian mythology, a composite contemporary goddess figure who is empowered by both these sensibilities. Significantly, Morvern continually retreats to locations unpopulated by human beings as it is here, almost outside society, and surrounded by a silence to match her own, that she is most comfortable and expressive. Highly experiential scenes provide an escape from social structures of meaning to the eternal modes of being in the landscape. The following section will discuss Warner’s mythologising of the landscape in *MC* and *TDL*, through allusions to and invocations of the ancient and the infinite, as well as the surreal and fantastic.

Landscape, Antiquity, and Mythology in *Morvern Callar* and *These Demented Lands*

The whole island seemed to slip down through me like a disc, spread out round, saw otherside from up there, distant mountains lifting up as if explosions of steam, cloud pillars like spring blossom, the mountain range I was named after on the opposite side of the Sound that lay with a wet sun along in dazzling shimmers, up to where the water turned angry black – wide wide ocean that goes forever 'cept maybe for a Pincher Martin rock juttet out the teeth of ocean bed. I stood looking out into that sea that surrounded us. (Warner, *These Demented Lands* 49)

In both *MC* and *TDL*, Warner's settings and landscapes possess an air of sublime antiquity. As previously suggested, Warner equates the mythical with a sense of permanence, and thus his frequent evocation of the landscape (both rural and urban) as ancient, as well as possessing a surreal or otherworldly quality, alludes to this mythological permanency. Warner's depiction of landscape contributes to his blending of genre as it merges the ancient, evoked in the description of landscapes and structures, and the contemporary, invoked by references to modern brands and technology. As Dale explains, many critics have pointed out the "timeless nature of the landscape described in Warner's novels, and its contrast with the depiction of the details of day to day normality" (65). In addition, Warner's multi-voiced narrative discourse assists in the creation of supernatural, surrealistic worlds, which fuse the fantastical and realistic.

Morvern appears comfortable in both the novels' urban and rural settings, and is at ease with the sublime landscape, the overwhelming age of the universe, and the standard, imagined, and still unknown histories of the world. In *TDL* the reader is told that Morvern is named after a mountain range on the unnamed island, which strengthens her association with these ancient landscapes. This can be seen in her careful use of sheep tracks when walking through farmland and countryside (*TDL* 51), as well as her fearlessness and competence when camping alone outside of the port (*MC* 85-103). She also shows her affinity to the land when she tells Lanna that they should stay outside of the cities and villages, "[i]n Nature. Away from Creeping Jesus and the work. This place, it doesnt care, it's just *here*. [. . .]. All this loveliness. It's just silence isnt it?" (*MC* 104, original emphasis). Morvern seems to desire the "silence" of the landscape, which she herself embodies. She is 'street smart' in terms of her movement in urban spaces, such as on the bus in London (*MC* 161), and yet appears equally at ease in rural landscapes. Her association with the "immeasurably ancient" landscapes of Scotland and Spain aids in rendering both Morvern and her surroundings redolent of myth (Dale 65).

This ancient quality is clearly evident in Morvern's camping trip to the Highlands around the port to bury her boyfriend's body. Upon waking she tells the reader that she could "smell the night leaving the earth and everything waking. An ancient-looking sun was drumming up the loch and off of the water" (*MC* 95-96). Morvern seems intuitively to understand the incomprehensible age of the universe and the earth's place within it. She looks out over the "landscape moving without any haste," suggesting her understanding of the slow and unhurried movement of glaciers through time, and the immense mystery of these massive movements occurring with "no [known] bidding at all" (*MC* 90). On her journey from Ferry Slipway to the Drome Hotel in *TDL* Morvern plays constant witness to bizarre lights which seem to swim on the seabed all around the island, as well as move across the hills. While swimming towards shore after the ferry sinks, she notices "an echo of the flames up there above the cloud – the ancient and dour light of campfire, high on the ben sides" (8). Like the sun in *MC*, light is given the quality of agelessness. Later, Morvern sees that light "was jumping up behind the looming mountains further into the Interior" as she walks "into more mysteriousnesses of mist banks, darkness, the lantern sky behind and gold embers of isles strewn along the river with burn-out smoke rising in the cold dawning air, making the waterway look on fire" (*TDL* 44). Again, strange lights feature constantly and help characterise the island as an unexplained, surreal and mythological place.

TDL is a highly surrealistic novel. It takes place on an unnamed and imaginary island off 'the Mainland,' which one can assume to be Scotland. What Morvern and the reader encounter are the "demented lands" of a largely rural landscape, with the occasional small and semi-urban settlement inhabited by strange, storytelling locals. When Morvern comes across The Devil's Advocate at his campsite in the hills above the Drome Hotel, she tells him that the "island is crazy" and "all like a dream" (52). The island and its inhabitants, as well as the happenings which occur, are constantly described as dreamlike and unreal. Place names such as "Far Places," "The Inaccessible Point," and "The Outer Rim" increase this otherworldly quality of the island. At the Outer Rim Hotel and Bar the Aircrash Investigator asks Halley's Comet what exactly the hotel is the outer rim of, to which Halley replies: "The Outer Rim of *everything*" (169).

In my analysis of *MC* and *TDL* in Chapter Three, many of the selected quotations indicated the importance of water and watery worlds. This focus is extended in my examination of *TDL*, in which Warner develops the notion of a mythic underworld beneath the sea. Morvern and the Aircrash Investigator share a fear of and fascination with this underworld, which is alluded to when Morvern describes a sense she likes to call "The Rudder feeling" (50). The Aircrash Investigator explains this feeling as the fear of "underworlds where the seabed is the

earth, the unsteady surface a new sky, [. . .] and those rudders and propellers . . . their constant immersion, made them thresholds into that underworld” (50). The underworld is referred to many times in *TDL*, most notably when the Aircrash Investigator views the dive-tapes of the sunken plane, Alpha Whiskey, or in Morvern’s near drowning when the ferry sinks. In another instance, Morvern shoots at the Argonaut after her baby is born as she imagines that he is telling her that she is already dead, drowned in the “netherworld” or “purgatory” (212). When Morvern is submerged in water after the ferry sinks she notices that:

A landscape of colours was glissanding on the lunar seabeds way below; my black legs slowly kicking so thin in silhouette [. . .]. A constellation of pinkish bubbles rose up under my feet then drifted, swole, each bubble’s angle reflecting a diamond nova from both its north and south pole. (5)

This type of language not only evokes otherworldliness with its references to “lunar” and “nova,” but also alludes to the sheer size of the oceanic underworld in which Morvern finds herself. The description of her legs kicking “so thin in silhouette” presents Morvern as a small speck among the infinite “constellation” of bubbles, each with its own “north and south pole” reflecting a “diamond nova.” Morvern further describes this watery underworld: “[i]n the furthest distances of this universe the rising planets and blue stars from seabed geysers, a huge surface of tiny bubbles, wobbled under us lit by deepest flaring below: a coral reef gone insane in the colours of these killing seas” (*TDL* 6). Once again the reader is given the impression that this seascape is infinite and surreal, consisting of, or at least representing, the “distances of the universe,” planets, stars and so on. Later on when standing on a hill she looks out and sees “wide wide ocean that goes forever” (*TDL* 49). Thus, in *TDL* there exists an underworld in which one is constantly threatened with the possibility that one might never return to the surface. Despite this knowledge, the characters sometimes find themselves being able to visit this underworld for a time, much like in Greek and Celtic mythologies. Leblanc argues that it is the duty of the shaman or druid, in their wanderings, to “go beyond the everyday world to what Celtic mythology refers to as the Otherworld and the Underworld” (149). The Celtic Underworld is the Otherworld’s “more sombre counterpart,” which is “not so much like a Christian hell but a productive land of the dead” (Leblanc 150). It is a “primal, creative place where mortals and gods [. . .] enter into special relationships” (Mathews, qtd. in Leblanc 72). Significantly, the focus of this “underworld” is on rebirth rather than damnation. These otherworldly shamanistic journeys are more a function of Morvern’s mythic sensibility and her unique perception than something that is

bound to Scotland as a place. This is demonstrated in Morvern's description of her "nightswimming" experience in Spain:

You could hear water on rocks; you couldn't see the lights of the restaurants, only moon above the sharp cliffs and moon splattered across the sea I was in. [. . .] All was made of darkneses. My chest showed out the oily black surface. I angled my toes round so moon was rising out right between my bosoms. I let the coldish surface of the water cluck around my ears so's I was looking straight up at the sky. Stars were dished up all across bluey nighttiness. I let my legs sink down; my nudeness below in the blackwater; legs hung in that huge deep under me and the layer on layer of fuzzy mush of star pinpricks were above with the little buzz of me in between. (*MC* 208)

In this scene Morvern is isolated from the "temporal world of the restaurants behind her" (Dale 65), as she moves out past the lights and safety of a shoreline that is described as being made up of "volcanic" and "lunar" rock, which suggests that it is both ancient and otherworldly (*MC* 208). Morvern trades the artificial light of the coastline for the light of the moon, which she refers to without the definitive article. Dale argues that this absence of the definitive article "increases the sense of timelessness, and even myth – it's not 'the moon,' which can be defined and pinned down, but simply 'moon,' too powerful for analysis" (65). The ocean is then described as "that huge deep," an immensity in which she herself only exists as a "little buzz," caught between the depthless enormity of water below and layer upon layer of sky and stars above. She dives down, and when she breaks the surface from the stark "silentness" beneath she is rebirthed to "the sounds of the earth and all under the moon" (*MC* 209). As Turner describes it, in Morvern's "moments of greatest serenity" she is revealed as "herself a poetic image, centrifugal and spiralling ever-outward, crashing with the sky, the moon, the stars" ("Fairy Lights" 23).

As is the case in *MC*, in *TDL* the urban landscapes are given a mythological dimension. Morvern often mentions man-made objects and buildings such as "the multiple aerals of the old Tracking Station and Observatory: the upper structures of rusted satellite dishes lost in the mist or cloud" (*TDL* 25). These same structures are described as a "haze of disused masts [. . .] their different heights and rusted dishes sort of vertiginous monuments to the variety of private investors involved in the doomed station – whispers and frames of obscure aerals vivid in the morning sky" (*TDL* 193). These structures are made to feel at once modern but simultaneously surreal, primeval sculptures, a part of the ancient, fantastic landscapes they find themselves in. Later, The Aircrash Investigator describes a "silver Opel Manta ennobled with chrome wheel-fittings, tall aerals and fog-lights. Six or seven fat candles were placed on the car's roof – the

flame light made the vulgar car look strangely beautiful, as if it were about to be used in some religious procession” (*TDL* 166). The ordinary, “vulgar” and impermanent car (indeed, a few moments later it is driven off the jetty) is transformed here into something sanctified and worthy of participating in a religious procession.

The sense of antiquity about Warner’s landscapes is one of the ways in which he endows his works with a “quality of myth.” Although Warner’s novels are set in the 1990s, the ancient and mythological are not deadened by the immediacy of the hyperreal modern world. Rather, Warner creates an aesthetic environment in which these seemingly disparate worlds exist alongside each other. In *MC* and *TDL*, the rural exists alongside the urban, the spiritual alongside the depraved or ridiculous, and the mythological alongside the contemporary. It is often Warner’s depictions of landscape, and his allusions to the infinite, which create a sense of the mythological, ancient, and timeless in these novels. Popular cultural references and contemporary urban accoutrements sit alongside these landscapes, creating a contrasting immediacy and familiarity. Furthermore, the use of poetic language evident in the above examples smooths this blending of genre and allows a sense of the sacred or transcendent to infiltrate the mundane.

Re-telling in *Morvern Callar* and *These Demented Lands*

When our myths fade we need to revitalise them, understand?
(Warner, *These Demented Lands* 163).

As has been shown in the sections above, Warner endows his landscapes and characters with a distinctive quality of myth. Aside from the mythologising evident in his characterisation and narrative style, he also inserts numerous direct references to mythology into *MC* and *TDL*. *MC*, alongside its more subtly infused references to Celtic understandings and tradition, also provides references to Christian mythology. *TDL* teems with literary and mythological allusions and biblical references. In addition, these texts consistently refer to information and objects in the electronic age. *MC* in particular deals with issues such as class conflict and poverty in a capitalist system. This amalgamation of the contemporary and the mythological content leads to a revitalising and re-telling of both the contemporary and mythological elements in the novels. As is evident in the characterisation of Morvern, Warner’s utilisation of myth is disconnected and fragmentary, drawing on mythologies from conflicting epochs and cultures. This formally

undermines the tendency of mythic narratives to unify and order, and more accurately represents Morvern and the other characters' lived experiences.

The references to Christian mythology in *MC* are a complex blend of the positive characteristics of Morvern's distinctly nuanced divinity, and more subversive inversions of original biblical narratives and references. To begin with, after Lanna and Morvern are at The Mantrap at the onset of the novel, they move on to a party in the suburbs of the well-to-do. Morvern calls the boys they meet "disciples," as they are named John and Paul (25). Before Morvern goes into the bedroom to meet Lanna and "the two disciples...bare on the bed doing everything," she has "Oh little star of Bethlehem" playing on her walkman (25).³⁰ This reference to Christian mythology is echoed when she stares out the window of the bedroom and notes that the "dark sky above the port was empty of any little star" (26). These biblical references are introduced within a contemporary setting, in a town where inequitable class and social hegemonies are firmly in place, and as a result these mythologies are rendered absurd. As Morvern takes part in group sex with Lanna and the disciples, she sees the sky and the port below it as devoid of any guiding light. This absent star, traditionally an image of divine guidance, signifies an existential realisation towards a lack of meaning or purpose. The reference demonstrates the irrelevance or meaninglessness of biblical mythological discourse to Morvern's life. Importantly, however, this does not seem to cause her despair. She is smiling as she stares up and out the window at the dark sky of the port (26). As an existential character, she turns to pleasure derived from corporeal experience to escape the feeling of entrapment and despair that both the port and the metadiscourse of Christian mythology induce.

These inversions of biblical references and scenes may be understood as a subversion of, or challenge to, the original narratives. It is evident, however, in other parts of the novel, that some mythologies hold an important place in Morvern's life. Although much of the allusions to the positive function of mythology are subtle, this does not undermine its significance. As has been pointed out, Morvern is aligned with the virgin saint girl statue in Spain. She is also inexplicably drawn to the statue and the ritualised procession, which she follows and recounts in detail. The young girls of the community swim out to sea the following morning to look at the burned face of the statue staring up from the sea bed, and Morvern accompanies them. Dale observes that the statue is "if not the Virgin Mary, then clearly a symbol of renewal, rebirth, and fertility for the community" (60). Morvern's "dawn communion with her and the young girls

³⁰ The song "Little Star of Bethlehem" is written and performed by the music group Can, and is featured on the album *Delay 1968*.

suggests a longing for the maternal, both a mourning for her own mother(s) and an intimation of her own motherhood, yet to come in the book's story" (Dale 60). Although I would suggest that this is a slight over-determination of the scene, Morvern is certainly drawn to the statue, and her actions in the novel can be affiliated with the ritual's characteristics, such as renewal and rebirth. The first novel beckons a new beginning for Morvern after her boyfriend's death, in terms of which she escapes the confines of the patriarchally-defined port for her solitary pleasure-seeking journeys in Europe, where she becomes pregnant. Its sequel, *TDL*, culminates with the birth of her child, in a situation of her own choosing.

Warner alludes to another well-known biblical narrative towards the end of *MC*. While picking oranges in an orchard after staying out all night at the clubs in Spain, Morvern looks up to see "a burning bush blazing away ten feet in front" of her (211). The burning bush turns out to be a "beautiful blossom tree" which had been "strangled to death under the mother of pearl psychedelics of a couple thousand clinging shell snails" (212). The above is an example of an interesting narrative technique in which Warner mythologises ordinary scenes and objects by describing them in ambiguous terms, or by alluding to a distinct mythological narrative or event (in the above case it is the biblical tale of Moses and the burning bush). He then demythologises these objects and images by revealing their true nature. In the novels, many moments which appear to be fantastic and mythical at first are 'demythologised' through further explanation. Importantly, however, these explanations do not wholly demystify these moments. The scenes and events retain their mythical mood, resonance and significance despite their being brought back to reality via explanation. This leaves a residue of the mythic and symbolic within even the realist dimension of the novels. An example of this mythologising and subsequent 'demythologising' can be seen in Couris Jean's story of the incident which caused her to go silent for four years. When she was sixteen she awoke at midnight in a heat wave, and, naked, went down to the beach to experience the sea breeze. Then

out of the water in front of [her] in that bluey light, up rose the great white horse moving its head from side to side as it came over the sand towards [her] and more horses came bursting out the water, [. . .] a dozen, two dozen, [. . .] two score more horses came out the sea. [. . .] the sand shuddered from all the hoofs galloping. (39-40)

At first the horses appear to have come directly out of the sea to gallop around the young Couris Jean, but it is shortly revealed that a ship has been wrecked just offshore and that the surviving cargo of horses swam to the safety of the beach. A similar example of this technique occurs when Morvern encounters strange lights in the opening sequence of *TDL*. Morvern cannot understand

what she has seen beneath the surface in her near-drowning, but later it is explained that what she has witnessed is phosphorus pollution in an underwater dumping ground. In both these situations logical cause cannot quite diffuse the impact made on both Couris Jean and Morvern, and these moments continue to inform and affect both their conscious and subconscious experiences. This technique also allows contemporary scenes such as the Millennium rave to retain a mythic dimension.

In *TDL*, Warner's numerous biblical references are complex and confused, much like the plot of the novel and the representation of the island itself. There are multiple allusions to Greek and other mythologies, and references to the Bible and other literature, which overlap and coalesce in strange and imaginative scenes. As discussed in the previous section, Warner's depiction of the island itself is mythopoeic. It is a surreal, fantastical place, where Morvern and the Aircrash Investigator encounter a zoo whose animals keep escaping, while phosphorus beds with their strange and poisonous lights surround the island, and Cycloptic whelk pickers with halogen lamps on their heads engage in their strange, inebriated harvest on the shoreline. The island's inhabitants too can be read as mythopoeic. The reader encounters characters such as the Devil's Advocate, a religious man who is described as an "investigative journalist for God" (9). He is said to be involved in the canonisation and demotion of saints. It comes to light that the Advocate has journeyed to the hills above the Drome in order to watch over Morvern and await the "time of [her] confinement [to] come to an end" (*TDL* 189). He has intuitively known that she is pregnant for the duration of the novel. It is not certain why he takes up the position as caretaker to Morvern, except for the fact that he is involved in the canonisation of saints. His involvement demarcates Morvern and her child as saintly or spiritual entities, with the child becoming the physical embodiment of Morvern's divinity and status as a goddess figure. He also plays a role as one of the wise kings at the nativity scene, and cements the notion that Morvern's daughter is a messiah or 'chosen' figure – for whom or what exactly the reader is never told.

In contrast to Morvern's extraordinary divinity, Brotherhood, the owner and manager of the Drome hotel, is constantly associated with the Devil through the characters' stories and references to works of literature. Morvern, for instance, writes in the concluding letter to her foster father that the foot print in the sand that Robinson Crusoe thought belonged to the Devil "more likely" was made by Brotherhood (*TDL* 187). Two other characters, First Spoken and Most Baldy, warn Morvern of Brotherhood by way of quoting Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. They assert that there are "plenty of men worse than devils to make a hell of this earth" (25), a quotation which identifies Brotherhood as a Kurtzian figure. Every inhabitant of the island

has a story about Brotherhood, most frequently a tale of warning about his perverse cruelty and his skills as a master manipulator. The Knifegrinder, too, declares that “there’s no rules binds that man to the earth” (48). This comment links Brotherhood to Morvern as she too is a character who has “kicked herself free of the earth,” or abandoned societal obligation and morality. She, however, remains associated with the divine, while Brotherhood correlates with the Devil.

The Aircrash Investigator plays a larger role in the text, and shares the narration with Morvern through his documentation on “pages that never had the months, just the useless, mixed-up dates” (*TDL* 16). His name refers to his occupation as a representative for the Air Accident Investigation Branch, although it comes to light that while he is investigating a particular air crash that occurred between two aeroplanes above the Drome Hotel ten years earlier, there is no record of him ever being employed by the branch (112). He is also described as “mad” as he believes Brotherhood is hiding part of an alien spaceship from him (*TDL* 114). In addition, he can be read as a Jesus figure, as well as an Icarus and Odysseus figure. These many mythic characterisations and references overlap and blur in a fragmented and seemingly illogical manner. He undergoes a “faux-crucifixion” at the hands of the Argonaut, as the Argonaut is told by Brotherhood that The Aircrash Investigator planned to con him with a fake Department of Transport form. The Argonaut straps the propeller of Alpha Whiskey onto The Aircrash Investigator’s back and places a “large clear jellyfish with purple central tracings” on his head as a replacement for the “crown of thorns” which Christ bore (*TDL* 178). Upon discovering that Morvern is pregnant, The Aircrash Investigator begins his neo-Odyssey back to the Drome Hotel, a journey which will take him two or three days walking with the heavy propeller forcing him to hold his arms outstretched. As he walks away from the Argonaut’s domain, he witnesses an incident reminiscent of a biblical plague. The Argonaut’s “keep cages” for crabs are rigged with explosives because divers keep stealing his harvest (178). The Aircrash Investigator watches as the “keep cages exploded in a low plume of white water,” and “shattered crabs [rattled] down out of the sky onto the coloured tiles on the roof” (178-179). After his ‘crucifixion’, Morvern views him as a Jesus-figure, and tells her foster father that she’d “crossed Europe” for “the Jesus [. . .] in the hotel” (184). She describes how she is

haunted by the day [she] saw his Christ figure appear on the skyline, arms outstretched like some Icarus as he jogged down the slopes of 96-Metre Hill, past the stunted larch, the trousers torn where he had stepped over the barbed wires, his face beaten by the ones over at the New Projects. (*TDL* 189)

In her imaginative perspective on his crucifixion and subsequent “Odyssey,” Morvern often thinks of The Aircrash Investigator’s journey in physical terms, which adds a distinctive aspect to the re-vised myth which is taking place (191). She imagines “a flame, bright and warm as a sirius-glint in the frozen air: a burning at the base of his long spine, always knowing if he stumbled forwards on his front he may never rise again” (191). She knows that he would be unable to drink water from streams and puddles for “fear of man’s ability to drown using inches of water” (192). The Aircrash Investigator dreams of his own death by drowning, and describes in visceral terms his body’s potential decomposition in the watery underworld (193-194). Importantly, Morvern tells how the nuns who were “waving from the windows of their Morris Minor, missed the latest new miracle” as they passed by The Aircrash Investigator (195). The fact that the nuns missed this “latest new miracle,” this re-telling of the most famous myth of their religion, seems significant. Indeed, the nuns are the primary protectors of these mythologies and miracles, yet they failed to see the sight as they were looking in the other direction. It is only the lost people, the possibly insane and the ordinary men and women in Warner’s novels who are granted the seers’ vision and made party to these revitalised myths and miracles, as opposed to the nuns, priests and academics who are generally custodians of such narratives. This places the re-vised and reclaimed myths in the hands of creative and unhinged visionaries such as Morvern and the Aircrash Investigator, who rebel and reclaim the images from the orthodox doctrines which monopolise the mythologies for their own ends.

Although the millennial obsession with the apocalypse is not directly referred to, the novel as a whole is notably apocalyptic. The Devil’s Advocate shouts to Morvern that he thought her to be more than one who “wanders these demented lands *in days of end*” as she walks towards the Drome Hotel for the first time (59, my emphasis). She goes into labour at the turn of the millennium, a detail that, with the multitudinous allusions to the biblical narratives of Nativity and the subsequent references to the “Messiah” (212), must be read in terms of myths surrounding the ‘second coming.’ Before this ‘nativity’ takes place, Morvern describes the other significant biblical re-telling in the novel: the crucifixion of Christ. Thus the novel concludes with a crucifixion, odyssey and nativity, all amongst the apocalyptic fervour of the millennium rave party.

The revitalised nativity occurs shortly after The Aircrash Investigator’s return to the Drome Hotel, and a strange reunion of the faux-Mary and faux-Jesus figures occurs. It begins with Morvern going out on the thirtieth of December to walk among the ravers at the New Year’s Eve celebrations. The party is a typically apocalyptic affair, with loud rave music characterised

by its repetitive beats, exploding bonfires, fireworks, and strange sights such as bewildered, plucked peacocks, drugged out youths riding on ponies, and a horse-drawn coffin filled with red-sauced spaghetti (*TDL* 204-206). Near dawn there begins a reunion of sorts, when all the novel's characters reconvene at the millennial rave. Morvern meets "two tribester lassies" with whom she smokes marijuana and takes two "trips" from (*TDL* 207). This is significant as it means that she is under the influence of drugs, most probably a hallucinogenic such as LSD, during the birth of her child. Importantly, she has not engaged in any drinking, drug-taking or smoking for the duration of her pregnancy, indicating that the taking of drugs just before the birth of her child is wholly intentional and carefully considered. Just before her water breaks, Morvern goes into the hotel kitchen to fulfil Brotherhood's deceased father's final wish: destroy the Drome hotel. She sets the deep fryers on high which will result in the building's burning, kneels, and says "a wee prayer" (209). After leaving the hotel her water breaks and the forester/Night Talker carries her to the garage, kicks in the doors and lifts her in the "rear seat of a Volvo hatchback that's been filled with hay" which signals the beginning of this unusual re-telling of the Nativity (*TDL* 210). Morvern gives birth to a daughter, a significant inversion of the Son of God from the biblical narrative, while the hotel burns and the fire spreads to nearby plantations. The child is born on New Year's Eve, in the midst of a rave and amongst apocalyptic burnings (*TDL* 210). Morvern narrates:

my child was born in a burst of blood and the forester whirled her free, the smeared face of an ancient prophet or seer came close to mine, smearing a mucous blood across one of my tits, nipple erect in smoke-driven breeze while the inferno of trees fell, some of them across the airfield, some of them collapsing into the graveyard, swiping down the grievous angels. (*TDL* 211)

This description of her daughter's birth invests the scene with apocalyptic qualities. There are direct parallels with the Nativity scene in the Bible, as well as translations of these references into contemporary terms, such as the Volvo replacing the traditional stable, and the three "wise kings," and the Argonaut following "the light in the eastern sky" which is Nam the Dam's helicopter "hovering overhead" (*TDL* 212). This re-working of the biblical narrative introduces the notion that Morvern's daughter is an "ancient prophet or seer," while simultaneously offering a graphically realistic description of the birth, all delivered with Warner's characteristically macabre humour and transcendent poetics (*TDL* 211).

As has been demonstrated, the myths to which Warner alludes in these novels have been re-told and redefined. What they are being transformed into, however, is never made wholly

clear. What Warner does make clear is his intention “to leave huge silences in *Morvern Callar* – the way any sort of faith will leave us with just silence, when we grasp our last, and also to reflect Morvern’s taciturn scepticism” (qtd. in Dale 35). This sentiment is echoed near the end of *TDL* when Morvern asks her foster father to “[f]orgive [her] elliptical style,” but that she wants him to “die in the maximum possible confusion” – a fate which also belongs to the reader (215). In *TDL* the splintered pastiche of mythologies and texts is characteristic of postmodern fiction, and its numerous references inserted into a fantastic, and yet contemporary and realistic, framework is characteristic of re-visionary fiction.

In both *MC* and *TDL*, however, Warner is somewhat atypically involved with the re-telling of narratives and mythologies. He extends the re-visionary project as he does not merely undermine existing narratives in order to subvert the ideologies which they represent, but also draws characteristics and qualities from these narratives in order to empower Morvern and lend significance to settings and people which have been previously portrayed in the mode of “just realism” (Warner, qtd. in Dale). As well as this, he undermines myth’s tendency to master and cohere by formally dispersing mythology in a haphazard, fragmented manner, which better represents his characters’ view of the world. Like Winterson in her autobiographical mythologising in *Weight*, Warner at times evokes the mythological in order to reinvigorate, revitalise and empower his disempowered protagonist. Although Morvern is emancipated more especially by her Celtic goddess-like qualities, one cannot deny her affiliation with the virgin saint girl in *MC* and the Virgin Mary in *TDL*, as well as the churches she visits, and the prayers she prays, all of which are linked to Christian mythology. Thus, Warner simultaneously uses mythology to revitalise and empower, providing significance, legitimacy and longevity to “the impermanent,” whilst debunking certain aspects of these myths and their relevance to contemporary generations.

The adoption of the mythic in his writing seems to take up the same challenge that wrought the adoption of demotic language in Scottish fiction – that is, portraying and legitimising a marginalised group or constituency. As shown in Chapter Two, the mythic is most often portrayed in a distinctly ‘high aesthetic,’ whereas in Warner’s novels it is rendered through the author’s curious blend of the demotic and hieratic. The traditional form and content of myth is challenged in his novels, where mythology belongs to people like Morvern, whose experiences are at times transcendent and at times physical: who get hungry and thirsty and defecate and despair. The contemporary woman, the working-classes, and the reality of the body are not

isolated from myth in Warner's works, but become a part of these re-mythologised tales in an attempt to redefine the mythic as a dimension of the ordinary.

Conclusion

As has been demonstrated, Warner's works abound with references to mythology, presented with varying degrees of subtlety. Many of the effects of his specialised re-telling in the novels are due, in large part, to the language he uses and the differing discourses he amalgamates. Whether in his characterisation of Morvern as a goddess figure, the depictions of the landscape as ancient and otherworldly, or in direct parallels between contemporary characters and settings and the mythological, *MC* and *TDL* undoubtedly achieve the distinctive quality of myth of Warner's own imagining.

While human beings continue to crave myth as a way of understanding their world, and as an attempt to explain the inexplicable, myths need reworking when they become inadequate or "fade" (*TDL* 163). Warner's revitalised mythologies attempt to represent the inexplicable whilst fearlessly facing the viscerally real aspects of life. In doing so, the author has obeyed the Argonaut's recommendation to the letter. He writes renewed mythologies set in worlds which flit between the fantastic and realistic, with strange and semi-real characters who deal with the agony of existence in both the existential and physical senses. Instead of taking narratives from myth and re-working them in resolutely positive ways, Warner engages with both the positive and negative aspects of our mythologies. The mythological parodies and pastiches empower a supposedly disempowered individual such as Morvern, and add an unusual significance to her life and actions. An equally important outcome of Warner's re-telling is the 'democratising' of myth. While the mythic is often associated with the 'high aesthetic,' the demotic element in Warner's writing, as well as the overt mythologising of ordinary scenes and characters, undercuts this association. As Warner demonstrates through both the form and content of his novels, myth, like poetry, belongs to everyone, and can be derived from perceived 'impermanence,' just as it can from the ancient narratives of the past.

Conclusion:

‘Always a New Beginning, a Different End’

While works of literature which revise their pre-texts in transgressive ways are often viewed as dissident, they are also in danger of contributing to a new set of conventions and thereby supporting a new status quo. Likewise, texts which revise well-known narratives can, at times, become as hackneyed and conventional as the texts that they attempt to subvert. This is certainly true of the fairy tale, to the extent that James Poniewozik noted in *TIME* magazine (2007) that in much popular culture, particularly in the film industry, “parodying fairy tales [has] become the default mode of telling them” (54). The prescribed formula for ferment can become a form of paint-by-numbers parody in which re-visionary texts are seen as mere counter-discourses that lack a certain originality of their own. In this regard, Derek Attridge claims that re-visionary works “offer themselves not as challenges to the canon, but as canonical – as already canonised, one might say. They appear to locate themselves within an established literary culture, rather than presenting themselves as an assault on that culture” (169). As Attridge indicates, re-visionary texts have the propensity to prop up the literary canon since, although they are counter-discourses, they nevertheless continue to legitimise the pre-text’s canonical status. Plate agrees, noting that re-visionary works often add “to a canon’s cultural capital rather than transforming or overturning it” (397).

While the above argument holds weight for many re-visionary texts, it is evident that both Winterson and Warner avoid such pitfalls in the works under study in this thesis. Their novels exceed the somewhat limited parameters designated to re-visionary fiction, since, as I have shown, these authors introduce their own motivations for revitalising past narratives and transgressing hegemonic discourses. This thesis has argued that although Warner and Winterson have participated in forms of re-visionary fiction and fulfilled certain of its aims, they extend or depart from the genre in notable ways. Neither Winterson nor Warner is guilty of producing uncomplicated counter-discourses by merely ironising, satirising or parodying canonical texts, but they rather enter into an imaginative relationship with these pre-texts and create their own distinctive narratives. Accordingly, they offer the reader works that are not solely concerned with upending their pre-texts, but which seek to integrate them into their narratives in transformative ways.

In Part One, I investigated the extent to which Winterson’s *STC* and *Weight* fulfil the characteristics of re-visionary fiction. As was shown in Chapter One, Winterson re-envisions

British history by channelling seventeenth-century events through the Dog-Woman's marginal perspective, and endorsing a rejection of the heroic explorer narrative in her depiction of Jordan. In doing so, *STC* exhibits many characteristics that are typical of historiographic metafiction – a genre which I have argued is itself a sub-set of re-visionary fiction. The novel also shares many of the aims of feminist re-visionary fiction, which is most evident in Winterson's grotesque characterisation of the Dog-Woman, and her distinctive re-imagining of the classic fairy tale, "The Twelve Dancing Princess". In both cases, Winterson significantly undermines the patriarchal ideology inherent in much of historiography and a variety of literary genres, including the fairy tale. *Weight*, too, fulfils the subversive aims of re-visionary fiction in its transgression of generic convention. In this novella, Winterson violates the boundaries of the epic form, myth, and tragedy in order to liberate the pre-textual characters from these generic formulations. In her reworking of the Atlas myth, she breaches the boundaries of the epic by using a considerable amount of scientific and technological language, thereby conflating and thus revitalising these seemingly opposing discourses. In doing so, she invests scientific discourse with the ancient quality of myth, while simultaneously injecting a scientific dimension into the mythic pre-texts.

While Winterson shares the aims of re-visionary authors, her motivations for re-telling are much larger in scope. The most significant of these motivations, I argue, is Winterson's desire to encourage the reader to recognise that her reality and identity is rooted in narrative, and so can be remade through narrative. She achieves this in both of the novels under study by drawing attention to restrictive metanarratives and to what Hutcheon defines as the "dubiousness of the positivist, empiricist hierarchy implied in the binary opposing the real to the fictive" (Hutcheon, *Politics* 77). Furthermore, Winterson foregrounds the narrativity of metadiscourses, not only to initiate her re-visionary subversion of them, but also to encourage the reader to recognise the self and the world as a story she can tell – and re-tell – herself. Because she takes the "individual subject [. . . to be] a fictional self-construction" (Makinen 85), Winterson believes that literature is a "way into other realities, [and] other personalities" (*Art Objects* 25-26). Since it foregrounds narrative's inherent ability to create and shape our existence, the act of re-telling, therefore, is a device which aids in the re-creation of identity and the transformation of perception.

Warner's *MC* and *TDL* may be read as works of re-visionary fiction as they subversively revise narratives from various seminal texts, including those in Celtic and Christian mythology. In Part Two, I have shown that his first two novels, although not obviously re-visionary, keep their pre-texts "in clear view" and involve the "socio-political" or subversive "thrust" which re-visionary fiction requires (Widdowson 502, 505). Indeed, Warner is decisively transgressive in

his re-vision of biblical and mythological archetypes. By formally dispersing mythology in a disjointed manner, he undermines the tendency in mythic metanarrative to master and cohere, and better represents his characters' experience of the world. Warner's re-telling both supports and exceeds the aims of re-visionary fiction, however, as he draws on, or uses, as well as challenges, or abuses, his pre-texts. Warner's paradoxical use of myth in *MC* and *TDL* indicates that he resists reducing his characters to archetypal symbols from mythology, and challenges the hegemonic mode of mythic narrative. At the same time, he imbues his characters with mythic authority. Consequently, the mythological elements in the texts are decidedly fragmented and often not explicit, but exist instead as a redolence of mythic quality.

While his novels undermine mythic structure, and subvert the patriarchal ideology often associated with biblical mythology, they also diverge from re-visionary fiction in important ways, as they do not simply seek to undermine their pre-texts, but also endeavour to exploit the authority of these existing mythologies. In doing so, Warner uses these pre-texts to empower his primary protagonist, Morvern. Likewise, his use of mythology grants working-class individuals the "permanence" he ascribes to myth and thus the ability to contribute to new, contemporary mythologies. Warner also diverges from conventional formulas for re-vision in that, rather than using the original narratives from history or mythology as a base upon which to construct his re-telling, he utilises the mythic as an overlay for his own original narrative. In doing so, he fulfils his project of giving the "impermanent the quality of myth" without reducing the impermanent to a mythic structure. In addition, it became clear in my analysis of Warner's acts of re-telling that he appears less intrigued with fulfilling the social and political aims of re-visionary fiction – or even new Scottish fiction – than he is with using these various pre-texts to produce a hybridic style of writing, and to create highly eclectic settings and characters. Furthermore, instead of taking conservative ideologies from myth and re-working them in ways which raise consciousness about the negativity of these past ideologies, Warner engages with both the negative and *positive* aspects of our mythologies.

Thus, while the novels under discussion in this thesis seek to 'write back' to the "still potent literary texts of the past" in order to "revise cultural history by way of re-visioning its master-narratives" (Widdowson 506), they make evident that re-telling can provide new thematic and discursive possibilities for the craft of writing itself. Both Winterson and Warner exhibit innovative literary forms and thematic concerns, which, I have argued, are an equally significant motivation for re-telling. The authors' respective re-tellings, although decidedly dissimilar, are both achieved through a hybridic and transgressive use of genre and language. Although in

largely different ways, both authors are preoccupied with the existential and narrative creation of identity and reality, and both concern themselves with the effect that this preoccupation will have on the reader. Consequently, these authors foreground the act of both storytelling and re-telling as a primary means to author the self and interpret the world.

My findings in this thesis indicate that these authors are involved in a nuanced form of re-visionary fiction, or rather, that the re-visionary dimension of their work is only one aspect of their overall project. Winterson and Warner may, therefore, represent a new class of re-visionary writers, whose aim is not solely to subvert the pre-text but to draw on its generic discourses and thematic conventions in order to demonstrate the generic and discursive possibilities inherent in the act of re-telling. As has been noted in the preceding chapters, these novels occupy a unique space in literature since their work denies any final classification. Overall, in the act of re-telling, these authors' novels make evident what Maurice Blanchot argues is the "essence of literature": its ability "to escape any essential determination, any assertion that stabilizes it or even realizes it: [literature] is never already there, it always has to be rediscovered or reinvented" (201).

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