

Chapter Two

Unstable Subjectivity Oscillating between the Semiotic and Symbolic Spaces

Where there is space there is being.
(Lefebvre 22)

With the expeditiously emerging explosion of feminism and feminist criticism around the globe, Anglo-American feminists endeavor to highlight sexist language “in their investigations of words, grammatical and syntactical rules and conventions, the use of discriminatory phrasing, and in their concentration on language as an empirical object” (Grosz 39), whereas French feminists uncompromisingly call into question the peremptory paternal structure and form of discourse, presenting their intrinsic, underlying foundation “against the grain.” Despite being called one of the “Holy Trinity” of French feminist theory (Oliver 16), Julia Kristeva, born in Bulgaria in 1941 to a middle-class family, maintains a negative and distant relationship to the current feminist debates, partly because what she asserts is explicitly different from what the other two distinguished feminists Cixous and Irigaray assert. As the most controversial one of all postmodern feminists, Kristeva “rejected ‘feminism’ as it is defined by French theorists and activists” (Tong 204). Her hostile opposition¹ can be attributed to the diversity of feminist thinking in approaches, perspectives, and frameworks. After being published in 1974 as her monumental doctoral thesis but being neglected in Anglophone countries, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (*La Révolution du langage poétique*) contains Kristeva’s earlier theoretical essays, in which the most cogent contribution to the signifying system

¹ As some critics recognize the most troubling aspect of her writing, Kristeva has reiterantly reprobated liberal and bourgeois feminists for their lack of radicalism and pursuit of phallic power. “[H]er clearly stated disapproval of the feminist insistence on the need to politicize all human relationships” (Moi 1986, 9) expounds her fear that any kind of political idiom, however liberal it is at the beginning, will necessarily be evinced as yet another master-discourse. Thus, she is arduously concerned to transmute the logics of power that used to cause women’s marginalization, into representations of difference that prevent individuals from being marginalized by enunciating their individuality in society. It is her failure, however, to probe into the differences among feminisms that critics reprehend most.

is her analysis of semiotic and symbolic processes within any production of meaning. Mostly influenced by Saussure's scientific study of language and sign-system and Freud's project of psychoanalysis, Kristeva molds her earlier writings under "Freudo-marxist" framework, in which she designates a contrast between the notion of the semiotic, a pre-Oedipal stage, and the notion of the symbolic, a post-Oedipal stage. However, her theory per se challenges the traditional Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis that accentuates the paternal function, such as negation and identification, as the principal springboard for the infant into the realm of language and subjectivity.

This chapter aims to interpret Winterson's *The Passion* from some pertinent perspectives of Kristeva's theory for the purpose of divulging the ways how Winterson demonstrates in the novel her own, unique feminine features which correspond to the contentious proclamation Kristeva strenuously holds. To be more specific, this chapter begins with the analysis of what the characters separately undergo in the semiotic and symbolic spheres, then recounts the importance of poetic language in the process of protagonists' voyage from innocence to self-awareness, and eventually displays the correlativity between Winterson and Kristeva, both of whom in my interpretation stress not the stabilized dichotomy but the dialectical oscillation of two ostensibly divergent realms as their capital position against the conventional, patriarchal episteme of binary opposition.

Before Kristeva's theory is elucidated, it is necessary to introduce some of Lacan's thoughts in advance. In light of Lacan's theory, only through entry into the symbolic order can the subject be formed, for the symbolic order is "the overarching structure of language and [of] received social meanings" (Barker 85). By means of experiencing the mirror stage and Oedipus complex in the imaginary state, the subject is granted the symbol of power, a transcendental signifier known as the phallus, to break up the mother-child dyad and further to voice his own position in the symbolic order dominated

by the Name-of-the-Father. “It is in the name of the father that we must recognize the support of the symbolic function which, from the dawn of history, has identified his person with the figure of the law” (Lacan 67). This law is connotative of an order of language, in which “[t]he phallus is the privileged signifier” (Lacan 287).

Like Lacan, Kristeva contends that “signification is organized [...] at two points: the mirror stage and the ‘discovery’ of castration” (1974, 46).² The mirror stage enables the subject, which can distinguish itself from the world, to substitute images or representations for its lived experience; that is, the mirror stage initiates the barest distinction between the fields of signifier and signified, positing them as two orders in signifying practices. The process of castration “puts the finishing touches on the process of separation that posits the subject as signifiable, which is to say, separate, always confronted by an other” (1974, 47). Unlike Lacan, Kristeva draws more attention to the complexities of the maternal body,³ of which the maternal function, prior to the Law of the Father, “contains both a negation and an identification that precede Lacan’s mirror stage” (Oliver 3). In other words, it is in the maternal body that the function of negation and identification has already launched earlier than the moment of subject’s entrance into language. In contrast to the paternal function composed of symbolic rejection, negation, and separation, the maternal function in the Body-of-the-Mother serves as an alternative discourse of maternity that has accommodated the primary maternal prohibition and identification in advance. Operating in accordance with the logic of negation, the primary maternal prohibition illustrates the infant’s relationship to its mother, especially to its mother’s breast, when she refuses to breast-feed the infant, an act of refusal that

² All subsequent parentheses with only publishing year and passage references in this chapter are from Kristeva’s works.

³ The idea of the subject in Lacan’s terms and in Kristeva’s terms differs in the fact that Lacan, when speaking of it, seldom refers to the semiotic space; rather, he places much emphasis on the symbolic space merely. However, Kristeva elevates the status of the semiotic as important as that of the symbolic when she discusses the formation of the subject.

vindicates the material rejection anterior to the symbolic rejection. Moreover, operating according to the logic of identification, the primary maternal identification relies on the necessity to fantasize a loving imaginary father for the sake of transition into the symbolic order. Since there exists the primary maternal negation, which is prior to and establishes the symbolic negation, inevitably there exists the primary maternal identification, which is prior to and establishes the symbolic identification as well.

This foremost and indispensable maternal body, in Kristeva's term, is called the semiotic, which "is linked to the pre-Oedipal primary processes, the basic pulsions [...] as predominantly anal and oral; and as simultaneously dichotomous [...] and heterogeneous" (Moi 1985, 161). Being a key term linking all Kristeva's thoughts, the semiotic (*le sémiotique*) derives from the etymology of the Greek "*sèmeion*," which signifies "a distinctive mark, trace, index, the premonitory sign, the proof, engraved mark, imprint [...], a distinctiveness admitting of an uncertain and indeterminate articulation because it does not yet refer [...] or no longer refers [...] to a signified object for a thetic consciousness [...]" (1980, 133). Furthermore, the endless flow of pulsions in the semiotic will ultimately converge in the chora, a territory that refers to an enclosed space or the womb in Greek and is characterized by "a nonexpressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated" (1974, 25). Borrowing from Plato's *Timaeus*, Kristeva defines the chora as "an essentially mobile and extremely provisional articulation constituted by movements and their ephemeral stases" (1974, 25). As a receptacle, the chora is "anterior to any space, an economy of primary processes articulated by Freud's instinctual drives through condensation and displacement" (1980, 6); it is also a space in which through the mediation of the maternal body, social and family structures make their imprint.

In addition, the semiotic chora, "as rupture and articulations (rhythm), precedes evidence, verisimilitude, spatiality, and temporality" (1974, 26), so that it can never be

definitively posited in our discourse. After appropriating Plato's concept, Kristeva claims that the semiotic chora is "not yet a position that represents something for someone [...]; nor is it a position that represents someone for another position [...]; it is, however, generated in order to attain to this signifying position" (1974, 26). In spite of lacking unity, identity, or deity, the semiotic chora is nevertheless subject to the mother's body, which functions as an ordering principle. Replete with oral, anal, and scopic drives understood as polymorphous and undifferentiated, positive and negative, creative and destructive, the semiotic chora, composed of non-signifying raw materials, exhibits an anarchic and formless circulation of sexual impulses and energies; both sexual impulses and energies portend "the precondition of the subject in process" (Lechte 129). Given that the semiotic chora precedes any binary oppositional structure or hierarchical form of organization, the seemingly Oedipalized speaking subject "is no longer considered a phenomenological transcendental ego nor the Cartesian ego but rather a subject in process/on trial (*sujet en proces*)" (1974, 37). Kristeva's notion of subject in process/on trial incorporates psychoanalytic theory of the split subject and theories of representation in order to pinpoint the aura of unified, stabilized, and rationalized subjectivity while simultaneously eliciting the magnitude of "a questionable subject-in-process" (1980, 135) manifest in poetic language only.

The function of bringing the subject into crisis and putting the subject on trial relates much to poetic language, within which "the semiotic element disrupts the unity of the [s]ymbolic and thereby disrupts the unity of the subject of/in language" (Oliver 13). Analogous to social or political revolt, the revolution in poetic language could occur with the help of Kristeva's favorite avant-garde texts.⁴ Kristeva believes that "only certain literary texts of the avant-garde (Mallarmé, Joyce) manage to cover the infinity of the

⁴ With regard to the avant-garde texts, Kristeva mostly discusses the poetry of Mallarmé and Lautréamont, the plays of Artaud, and the writings of Joyce in her works dispersively.

process, that is, reach the semiotic chora, which modifies linguistic structures” (1974, 88). Exemplified by the avant-garde texts, poetic language “awakens our attention to this undecidable character of any so-called natural language, a feature that univocal, rational, scientific discourse tends to hide” (1980, 135). In poetic language,

the semiotic disposition will be the various deviations from the grammatical rules of the language; articulatory effects which shift the phonemative system back towards its articulatory, phonetic base and consequently towards the drive-governed bases of sound-production; the over-determination of a lexeme by multiple meanings which it does not carry in ordinary usage but which accrue to it as a result of its occurrence in other texts; syntactic irregularities such as ellipses, non-recoverable deletions, indefinite embeddings [...]. (Moi 1986, 28)

Compared with the discourse of sacred texts, which merely attempt to stabilize a situation in decay or breakdown, the discourse of poetic language “challenges, traverses or transgresses the present ‘bounds of sense’ [through] its open-ended deferral of meaning and its refusal to congeal into a symbolic identity [...]” (Grosz 84).

In contrast with the semiotic, Kristeva’s symbolic (*le symbolique*) schemes the libidinal drives in the semiotic on the basis of a phallic sexual economy so as to establish “sign and syntax, paternal function, grammatical and social constraints, symbolic law” (1980, 7). As the domain of positions and propositions and as the site of unified texts, cultural representations, and knowledge, the symbolic demonstrates its peculiarity as “the regulated use and organized operations of [undirected] body in social production” (Wright 195). Moreover, given that it is “a social effect of the relation to the other, established through the objective constraints of biological (including sexual) differences and concrete, historical family structures” (1974, 29), the symbolic would make use of the relations between logical and grammatical convention, and of the differentiations

between meta- and object-language with a view to cohering and integrating the signifying elements from the semiotic. As for the subject manipulated by the phallic function in the symbolic, the subject is competent to locate its identity, to alienate itself from its fusion with the mother, to circumscribe its jouissance to the genital, and to convert semiotic motility into the symbolic order, only “at the cost of repressing instinctual drive and continuous relation to the mother” (1980, 136). To sum up, while the semiotic is generally conceived as belonging to the maternal space, the symbolic is defined as belonging to the paternal domain where, fraught with the notions of the symbolic father and the castrated mother, an order of naming, reference, meaning, enunciation, and denotation operates.

Due to the ambiguities and contradictions in her writings,⁵ Kristeva is prone to be misunderstood as one who single-mindedly propagandizes the antithesis between the semiotic and the symbolic, and without question in favor of the former personally. However, in the very first chapter of *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva has perspicuously clarified the symbiotic characteristics of the semiotic and the symbolic: “These two modalities are inseparable within the signifying process that constitutes language, and the dialectic between them determines the type of discourse [...] involved” (1974, 24). On account of the reciprocal reliance upon the semiotic and the symbolic, Kristeva, rather than replacing any one with the other, foregrounds that each is de facto dependent on the other. As she insists, “this semiotic heterogeneity posited by theory is inseparable from [...] the symbolic function of significance” (1980, 134). In other words, neither the semiotic nor the symbolic is original; rather, the latter paves the way for the

⁵ For example, Silverman, Stone, Kuykendal, and Grosz consider Kristeva’s theory an essentialist conception of woman and the feminine, whereas Ainley and Rose assume it undermines any essentialist idea of woman. Jones, Butler, Fraser, and Stanton regard her theory based on an essentialist notion of maternity, whereas Ainley, Ziarek and Chase conceive it indeterminate in the notion of maternity. Smith and Eagleton believe she promotes anarchy, whereas Fraser, Leland and Gidal think of her theory as conservative. Jardine, Ainley, and Chanter praise her theory for disclosing the possibility of change, whereas Leland, Grosz, and Gidal condemn it for closing off the same possibility. Fraser and Butler view her theory as ahistorical, whereas Lechte and Chanter regard it as dealing with the history of social structures.

former to express its energies, while the former offers the latter its raw materials and energetic impetus. Without the semiotic, there would be no provenience of primordial conglomerate composed by a flux of unnamable drives and energies in the symbolic space. On the contrary, without the symbolic, neither would there be any legitimate access for the semiotic to articulate its unregulated dynamism.

Also, the same symbiotic situation between the semiotic and the symbolic occurs in poetic language and the subject in it. On the one hand, “[t]he semiotic activity [...] into poetic language is [...] a mark of the workings of drives and [...] stems from the archaisms of the semiotic body” (1980, 136), while on the other hand, “[h]owever elided, attacked, or corrupted the symbolic function might be in poetic language, due to the impact of semiotic processes, the symbolic function nonetheless maintains its presence” (1980, 134). In view of this, poetic language favors neither the semiotic nor the symbolic, for both of them constitute and play identically important roles in any economy of meaning-production. Besides, by unfolding that “a poetic effect is achieved through a pluralization of the place assumed by the subject of the enunciation” (Lechte 72), Kristeva provides us with a precious method to examine how the subject in process/on trial counts on the maternal semiotic and the paternal symbolic synchronously. Were it not for the semiotic chora, the subject would never undergo the procedure of mirror stage and castration, let alone approaching the space of the symbolic later. Likewise, never would the subject possess any opportunity to liberate the semiotic pulsions were it not for the outlet furnished by the symbolic. Briefly speaking, since “the subject is always both semiotic and symbolic, no signifying system he [the subject] produces can be either ‘exclusively’ semiotic or ‘exclusively’ symbolic, and is instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both” (1974, 24).

More importantly, what Kristeva essays to accentuate between semiotic drive force and symbolic stases is the relation of their dialectical oscillation, by which all of the

signifying systems are driven. This dialectical oscillatory relation between two cardinal processes within signification, in my interpretation, elaborates the most prominent element whether in the signifying system, in the binary opposition structure, or in the avant-garde texts. Rather than emphasizing the incompatible conflict between two disparate stages, Kristeva instead employs the wavering between them as the underlying foundation of her theory in signifying practices. As she re-announces,

[A]lthough the collision between semiotic operations (those involving instinctual drive, phonic differentials, intonation, and so on) and symbolic operations (those concerned with sentences, sequences, and boundaries) may be thought of as a totalizing phenomenon, it actually produces an **infinite** fragmentation that can never be terminated. (1980, 174, emphasis added)

In view of this, only by unremittingly exploring the dialectical oscillation between these two ostensibly contradictory spaces in the signifying system are we able to observe the genuine essence of both.

The moment when Kristeva's theory is applied to overhaul Winterson's *The Passion*, there are three aspects in need of special attention: the respective function of semiotic and symbolic spaces upon the characters, the concussion of poetic language to the formation of characters' subjectivity, and the solution to the dilemma of swinging between maternal Venice and paternal Paris. Take Henri as the first example to authenticate the impingement of the semiotic and symbolic extents. During those eight years serving in Napoleon's army as the cook's assistant, Henri the soldier, unmanly as a coward, knows nothing about fighting or killing enemies but about stuffing a chicken and slowing down the cooking process. Even in the kitchen, others call Henri a dandy because he takes off his socks once a week to cut his toe-nails. Moreover, when leaving home and staying in the army for the first time, Henri cannot tolerate the feeling of being lonely, confessing, "I was homesick from the start. I missed my mother" (6). Besides feeling homesick, Henri

somehow has an unusual fear of darkness: “When I have to be out late at night, it’s not knives and kicks I’m afraid of, though there are plenty of those behind walls and hedges. I’m afraid of the Dark” (33). In general, Henri falls much short of what a qualified soldier should be in the army, though deeply inside he is in love with Napoleon. It is no wonder that Henri’s mother would comment on him: “You’re like I was, [...] No patience with a weak heart” (32).

Under Napoleon’s idiosyncratic charm and governance, Henri expresses his feminine features in an explicit way, inclusive of feeling sympathetic to the predicament of the abused prostitutes and feeling horrified by the war’s cruelty and inhumanness. Therefore, the obedience-oriented army, functioning as the symbolic, vindicates other soldiers’ identity with the effect of the phallic symbol that Napoleon stands for. In contrast to the others, however, Henri is delineated as a weak, even feminine, soldier, whose extremely obsessive passion for Napoleon implies that he has not only idolized Napoleon but been sexually attracted by Napoleon as well. The darkness and the inhumanness of war horrify Henri so thoroughly that the symbolic battlefield, to some extent, castrates Henri and further grants him no opportunity to articulate his masculinity but only room to make up stories about himself. As Henri says, “I liked my anonymity. [...] I made up stories about mine. They were whatever I wanted them to be depending on my mood” (11). In addition, when encountering Villanelle at first sight on the way back to Venice, Henri has been in love with her subsequently, but as being impotent and passive as before, he has no courage to express his love in front of her, to touch her while lying on the same bed, and to perform sexual intercourse with her. For instance, while discussing snowflakes with Villanelle, Henri recalls, “I did think of that [thinking of snowflakes] and I fell in love with her” (88). The climax of Henri’s exposed femininity appears in one situation: when Villanelle actively asks for sex, Henri cannot react but say, “I don’t know how” and passively surrenders to her domination. As a result, Villanelle

takes the initiative to say, “Then I’ll make love to you” (103).

From the analysis above, Henri possesses some distinct personal characteristics: fearful of the chickens’ eyes, cowardly in killing enemies, extremely afraid of darkness, obsessed with Napoleon, frightened by the battlefields, and passive in sexual intercourse. All of those characteristics make him a castrated, alienated, and devoiced character, who is deprived, by the symbolic warfare, of the masculine trait of acquiring a legitimated position in the symbolic order. Henri’s feminine inefficaciousness continues even after Villanelle has taken him back to her hometown, Venice. Accordingly, however much Villanelle explains the dispensability of the map in Venice and the idea of a changeable city to Henri, he seems puzzled and feels dislocated by her ridiculous remark: “It [the map] won’t help. This is a living city. Things change.” (113). As Henri graphically recites the reason why he does not belong to the city of Venice,

They say this city can absorb anyone. It does seem that every nationality is here in some part. There are dreamers and poets and landscape painters with dirty noses and wanderers like me who came here by chance and never left. They are all looking for a reason to stay. I’m not looking, I’ve found what it is I want and I can’t have it. If I stayed, I would be staying not out of hope but out of fear. Fear of being alone, of being parted from a woman who simply by her presence makes the rest of my life seem shadows. (122)

Henri has lucidly comprehended that wherever he is, there is no possibility of winning Villanelle’s heart, the only one he really desires. Hence, for Henri, not until he scoops the cook’s heart out and is sentenced to life imprisonment in San Servolo does he inaugurate the formation of his own subject-in-process, which is no longer a phenomenological transcendental ego or the Cartesian ego. It is exactly Henri’s subject-in-process, established in San Servolo, that makes him possess a magical ability, such as seeing and hearing the dead. As he says, “The dead are talking all the time. On this rock, when the

wind is up, I can hear them” (133). Obviously Henri’s subject-in-process enables him to do what others are incapable of doing—linking the world of the living and the dead—particularly in the space of the madhouse.

Therefore, San Servolo functions as the semiotic chora fraught with unceasing flow of impulses and energies, by which Henri can ultimately eradicate the control of Napoleon’s phallus and unflinchingly say, “I hated him [Napoleon]” (134). Although Henri is incarcerated in the madhouse, his subject in process/on trial challenges the notion of traditional Oedipalized speaking subject as a result of his anomalous capacity of seeing and hearing the dead there. Although Villanelle urges Henri “to shut them [the dead] out and concentrate on himself” (147), Henri maintains his indeterminate position beyond the binary oppositional system in San Servolo, thus indulging himself in the nonexpressive drives, with which he even almost smothers Villanelle one time. Moreover, another capability generating from lingering in the maternal chora lies in Henri’s interest in planting seeds in the garden of the rock. Unlike Josephine, who favors an artificial garden and strives to organize weeds, Henri cultivates “a wide field where flowers grow of their own accord” (155). His natural, unlimited garden, in correspondence with mutable Venice, manifests for one thing the freedom from the authorial supremacy that constitutes the symbolic order, and for another the emancipation of pre-oedipal drives that result in the construction of his unique poetic language.

In this sense, the way Henri modifies his rocky island from “a barbed tangle of thorns” (155) into “[a] forest of red roses” (160) is a kind of “metaphorical transformation of wilderness into a garden” (Seaboyer 494), which causes him to transform his experience from trauma into poetry. This ability of alteration patently discloses the genesis of Henri’s specific poetic language—his notebook—in which the most metafictional refrain “I’m telling you stories. Trust me.” is reiterated nine times throughout the whole novel. Furthermore, the refrain functions in a way that reminds the reader of its

questioned credibility and segmented narration, by which “Winterson presents an example of fragmented art” (Fahy 104). Due to its unconventional, nonlinear narrative, Henri’s notebook, written in the madhouse,⁶ parallel to Kristeva’s poetic language, interrogates the undecidable feature that univocal, rational, and scientific discourse undertakes to emphasize.

I [Henri] re-read my notebook today and I found:

I say I’m in love with her [Villanelle], what does that mean?

It means I review my future and my past in the light of this feeling. It is as though I wrote in a foreign language that I am suddenly able to read. Wordlessly she explains me to myself; like genius she is ignorant of what she does.

I go on writing so that I will always have something to read. (159)

The moment when he realizes the reason to keep writing, Henri fabricates the function of his poetic language to meet the needs of aesthetic and spiritual support, particularly posterior to the disillusionment of romantic relationships, religious practices and imperialism. More importantly, to problematize the historical objectivity of the master narrative in a discursive sense and to provide Henri with materials to read in a metafictional sense⁷ both signify how his fragmented and marginalized art—storytelling—offers an escape from the semiotic and the symbolic at the same time. In Henri’s case, Winterson furnishes us with an example of oscillation between maternal Venice and paternal Paris,

⁶ Although Henri starts to keep a diary soon after the disaster of Napoleon’s attempt to cross the Channel (28), he does not fully understand the meaning of his notebook until he is imprisoned in San Servolo. In other words, it is in the madhouse that he realizes the function of his notebook, which, similar to that of poetic language, presents the fragmented, nonlinear discourse.

⁷ In Christy L. Burns’ opinion, Winterson is good at “disrupting the reader’s escape from reality, persistently haunting her characters’ voices with references to reading, writing, and the impact of art” (292). Thus, some metafictional motifs like “I’m telling you stories, trust me.” appear in many of Winterson’s works like *The Passion*. In this sense, the famous refrain Henri keeps on repeating—“I’m telling you stories, trust me.”—can be regarded as an evidence for his way of speaking to the reader directly. On the one hand, Henri describes his stories in the first person narrative, while on the other hand, he jumps out of the role of a story-teller and asks the reader to believe what he has said. That might explain why the refrain contains a certain level of metafictional implication.

as Kristeva indicates the coexistence and irreplaceability of the semiotic and symbolic spheres. To sum up, Henri's art serves both as a bridge linking two different semiotic and symbolic spaces and as an alternative discourse in opposition to the History, where "old men blurred and lied making the past always the best because it was gone" (28).

Besides, another example to display Henri's unstable subjectivity lies in the passages recounting the function of his soldier's disguise. Once when going home from the army, Henri finds himself welcome in the hometown though he is only a chef's assistance in the French troops: "In my soldier's uniform I was treated with kindness, fed and cared for, given the pick of the harvest" (30). This is the first time that Henri feels how a person's external, rather than his internal, image generates his value in reality and affects others' standard of judgment. When Henri and Villanelle are on their way to Venice, they have a conversation about disguises. Villanelle says, "When we get through this snow, I'll take you to the city of disguises and you'll find one [disguise] that suits you" (100), whereas Henri speculates in his mind, "Another one [disguise]. I'm already in disguise in these soldiers' clothes" (100). Likewise, when Villanelle tells Henri, "This is the city of disguises. What you are one day will not **constrain** you on the next" (150, emphasis added). Apparently Villanelle has luminously indicated that Henri's subjectivity is no longer as stable as it seems and is interrogated by the extrinsic disguises, so that eventually he can only return to the consolation of his notebook, which constructs the meaning of his life.

Take Villanelle as the second example to explicate the influence of the semiotic and symbolic domains. Before Napoleon conquers Venice in 1797 and turns many Venetians into vivandière, the objects of soldiers' sexual comfort, Villanelle is living a life of mysterious androgyne. To begin with, during the time of working in the casino, eighteen-year-old Villanelle enjoys dressing herself as a boy for her own amusement as well as for her own protection "because that's what the visitors liked to see" (54). When

those visitors delight in the game of role-play by conjecturing “which sex was hidden behind” (54), Villanelle’s cross-dressing adumbrates one fact that “gender proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity it is purposed to be” (Butler 25). Just as gender identity has not been constructed in the semiotic owing to the lack of the stable binary oppositional system, Villanelle’s practice of drag⁸ in Venice sheds light on “the inauthenticity of all gender roles, foregrounding their performative dimension” (Palmer 112). As bell hooks affirms, “Cross-dressing, appearing in drag, transvestism, and transsexualism emerge in a context where the notion of subjectivity is challenged, where identity is always perceived as capable of construction, invention, change” (145). That is to say, the act of Villanelle’s dressing herself as a male or female at her will is not only a subversion to the dominant heterosexual-privileged culture but also the first evidence of her wavering between the semiotic and symbolic spaces.

Secondly, despite “reluctantly marrying a butcher who wants her to dress like a boy and be made love to like a woman” (Kutzer 138), Villanelle delivers her true passion to an unnamed woman, nicknamed as the Queen of spades, who is also the wife of a traveling collector of maps. So strongly is Villanelle crazy for the Queen of spades as to announce, “If you should leave me, my heart will turn to water and flood away” (76). Later, after being with Villanelle for nine nights, the Queen of spades takes the initiative to terminate their relationship, literally steals⁹ Villanelle’s heart away, and eventually

⁸ To be more specific, Villanelle’s practice of drag is only one of performative forms in the phenomenon of gender mixtures. There are other possibilities, such as a man’s dressing himself as a woman, as a dandy, or as a neutral person without particular sexuality, etc. So long as a person’s gender identity is socially constructed, the condition of breaking the gender boundaries can be seen as parallel to the condition of breaking the limits between the semiotic and the symbolic. In this sense, Villanelle’s cross-dressing can be regarded as the first example of her own oscillation between two diverse spaces.

⁹ The reason to use the verb “steal” here lies in the passage describing how Henri finds Villanelle’s heart back. When they stay in Venice, Villanelle asks Henri for a favor. She takes him to the house where she once spent nine days with the unnamed woman and asks him to search for the heart left behind. Henri at first does not believe that until she puts his hand against her chest and he feels no heartbeat. After entering that house and discovering “a silk shift wrapped round an indigo jar” (120), he returns and hands it to Villanelle, who uncorks it and “make[s] terrible swallowing and choking noises” (120). Then, miraculously her heart begins to beat again.

returns to her husband's arms as a traditional wife. By means of homosexual relationship with another woman and heterosexual marriage with a fatty, chauvinistic cook, Villanelle again subverts, proliferates, and reverses the limits of the heterosexually-dominated binary oppositional structure, in an attempt to present a performative aspect of gender acts. As the subject-in-process results from an anarchic and formless semiotic space constituted by non-signifying raw materials, the uncertainty of Villanelle's subject—urged by libidinal drive to be male or female at will—and the indeterminacy of her sexual preference—loving a woman and marrying a man—in maternal Venice can be attributed to the emancipated circulation of sexual impulses and energies, both of which are still not regulated by the symbolic power and are prevalent in the semiotic space.

Thirdly, the most convincing evidence of Villanelle's border-crossing the semiotic and the symbolic lies in her inheritance of boatmen's webbed feet, a physical feature that distinguishes her from other women and men in Paris as well as in Venice. For one thing, this tissue is so tough that "[t]here's no knife can get through that" (52). For another, since "[t]here never was a girl whose feet were webbed in the entire history of the boatmen" (51), Villanelle is gifted with an extraordinary capability, of which traditional women are deprived under patriarchal domination, such as the power to walk on water,¹⁰ the choice to determine her gender, and the strength to love the unnamed woman actively rather than be loved by Henri passively. Certainly, Winterson's invention of hereditary webbed feet in Villanelle's body becomes the most controversial issue in many critics' viewpoints. For example, Doan alleges that Villanelle is able to enter the male domain through a genetic inheritance which functions as "a prerequisite for male gondoliers" (149); del Mar Asensio contends that the conception of Villanelle's webbed feet "pinpoints the problematic use of the terms 'female' and 'male'" (278) in order to unravel

¹⁰ In the novel, Villanelle is described to be able to walk on water, but once Henri is surprised to find out that she does not know how to swim when they fall in water from the boat. As Villanelle responds to Henri's confused appearance, "That's right. I live on it, I don't live in it" (124).

the conventional male hegemony; Seaboyer proclaims that the “freakish mixture of human and animal” (506) of Villanelle’s body results in the fluidity of her gendered identity; Palmer announces that Villanelle’s webbed feet are involved with the leitmotif of the mermaid, “an ambiguous image of woman as beautiful seductress/unnatural monster” (110), which indicates the threat of female independence and lesbian sexuality. Although the aforementioned critics pay most of their attention to the aspect of gender problem on the webbed feet issue, the function of that mysterious webfoot, in my opinion, makes Villanelle able to oscillate between the semiotic and symbolic spaces back and forth, in opposition to the fixed role of a traditional woman in patriarchal society.

In addition, the puzzling inborn tissue between Villanelle’s toes can be seen as a social effect to defy the phallogentric definition of sexuality and to exhibit the fictiveness of sexual demarcation, for, as mentioned above, the distinct limits of male and female have not been drawn out until the entry to the symbolic. It is no wonder that Villanelle, though being sold by her husband to a Frenchman called General Murant, would rather endure the severe coldness of zero winter and walk back to Venice with Henri and Patrick than tolerate her husband’s chauvinistic abuses in the place to which she does not belong. Even Henri can not help but envy Villanelle’s sense of belonging after they arrive in Venice in May 1813: “Her eyes flickered from the domes to cats, embracing what she saw and passing a silent message that she was back. I envied her that. I was still an exile” (110). Unlike Henri, whose notebook clarifies his strategy to waver between the maternal and paternal realms, Villanelle’s androgynous and amphibious physical body constitutes her unique design to avert the aggressive effect of patriarchal power centered on Napoleon, the spokesman of the western enlightened society. Even though Villanelle is deprived of the writing power as Henri possesses in San Servolo, her grotesque body is full of such an unconventional power that Henri is aware of and “afraid of her body because of the power it has” (123). In a space flooded with pre-Oedipal pulsions, the

dialectical coexistence of Body-of-the-Mother and Name-of-the-Father in Villanelle's body, that is, physically female body with metaphorically phallic webfoot, illustrates her strategy of oscillation between the semiotic and the symbolic simultaneously. Though being covered by the boots most of the time, the body of masculine and feminine symbiosis is transformed to be Villanelle's poetic language, which not only destabilizes her subjectivity but also expresses her destiny of border-crossing. Only after crossing the boundaries between the maternal semiotic and paternal symbolic spaces can Villanelle lay bare the artificiality of male and female differences and further probe into more hidden possibilities within human sexuality, as Henri observes from her that "[b]eing with her was like pressing your eye to a particularly vivid kaleidoscope" (109).

In terms of the ability of oscillation, besides the protagonists Henri and Villanelle, another character with swinging ability is Patrick, a priest with the eagle eye, who "could look out across the Channel and report on the whereabouts of Nelson's blockading fleet and warn our practicing troops of any English threat" (22) on the top of a purpose-built pillar. Accidentally being given the miraculous eye while preaching a sermon, Patrick with his mysterious left eye can not only see as far as he wants but also see what others cannot see. For instance, when Napoleon launches 25,000 men to cross the Channel but ends in two thousand men drowned because of an unexpected storm, Patrick claims, "the Channel is full of mermaids [...] lonely for a man that pull so many of us down" (24). Also, one time Patrick witnesses in the woods three goblins "discussing their treasure, stolen from the fairies and buried under the ground within the ring of fire" (39). Moreover, Patrick "once claimed to have spotted the Blessed Virgin herself touring the heavens on a gilded donkey" (107). Generally speaking, the world of reality is regarded as a paternal space like the symbolic, whereas the world of fairy-tale, filled with many imaginary elements, is considered a maternal space similar to the semiotic. Therefore, the capability of abnormal vision attests that Patrick is living between two worlds, reality and fairy-tale,

in which he, a Napoleon's soldier, has no other skills but a telescopic eye for survival. Straddling both symbolic reality and semiotic fairy-tale fiction results in Patrick's subject-in-process, empowering him to perform Winterson's principle of subverting the notion of Cartesian subjectivity. His revolutionary vision functions like Henri's notebook and Villanelle's webbed feet, which aim to call the subject into crisis and put the subject on trial, as poetic language does. What is more, his gifted ability to see things ahead, in a sense, implies that Patrick is not merely a prophet but also a Christ-like character, who is destined to sacrifice himself for other human beings. Thus, Patrick dies of catarrh, a Venetian disease, and his death, in a sense, results in the survival of Henri and Villanelle, both of whom reach Venice safe and sound. In spite of the fact that his telescopic eye makes him oscillate between the symbolic and semiotic domains, Patrick is the only male character with additional ability that does not belong to common humans in all of Winterson's novels. "Incidentally, with the exception of Patrick and his telescopic eye, it is only women in Winterson's texts who possess supernatural powers" (Grice 7). Typically Winterson prefers to give her female characters some supernatural characteristics, such as Villanelle's webbed feet, and to utilize them as the most direct means to challenge the traditionally hierarchical system of sexual binary opposition. Patrick, however, is the only exception and can be regarded as a carefully designed device, by means of which Winterson avoids falling into the trap of another binary opposition she creates. That is to say, both men and women alike, in Winterson's delicate arrangement, have certain potentialities to interrogate the tradition of binary oppositional system artificially constructed by those in power.

Last but not least, the Emperor Napoleon bears a sort of pendular strategy similar to other characters, especially in terms of the symbol of passion. As the end of section two of the novel goes, "In between freezing and melting. In between love and despair. In between fear and sex, passion is" (76). This assertion has explicitly conveyed the fluidity

and mutability of passion. The reason why Napoleon is limned to have an unusual passion for chicken and to like Josephine in the same way as he likes chicken is that his anomalous appetite for chicken corresponds to his ravenous ambition for expanding as many territories as possible, the ambition to conquer all Europe but ends in failure. Moreover, his way of touching the globe accounts for his way of associating the passion for imperial power with that for sexual desire: “He [Napoleon] doesn’t notice me [Henri], he goes on turning the globe round and round, holding it tenderly with both hands as if it were a breast” (4). In this sense, once having mingled the passion for food, power, and romance, Napoleon cannot sustain himself without them, nor can he function as a phallic power that other soldiers take for granted. No wonder this situation of oscillating within different passions leads to a series of chained reactions: after the cook, who is adept at culinary skill, is transferred to the stores outside Boulogne, Napoleon divorces his beloved Josephine, and loses his battles as well as his crown in the end. In other words, when undergoing the ever-switching interrelationship of passions between chicken, empire, and lover, Napoleon constructs his own oscillatory position in face of symbolic Paris because “passion is used to break the limits of thought and the systems of value” (Wilson 71).

In addition to the comparisons of the characters, the divergences and contrasts between Venice and Paris in Winterson’s terms are similar to those between the semiotic and the symbolic in Kristeva’s terms. For instance, when Henri arrives in Venice with Villanelle and gets lost for five days, he comments that “[n]ot even Bonaparte [Napoleon] could rationalize Venice” (112), for it is a city of mazes, disguises, uncertainty, and madmen. What Napoleon exhibits in Paris is the axiom of reason, on the basis of which “[w]here Bonaparte goes, straight roads follow, [and] buildings are rationalized” (112). Under Winterson’s tour de force, Paris, rationalized by Napoleon, is outlined as a symbolic city founded on “sign and syntax, paternal function, grammatical and social

constraints, symbolic law” (1980, 7), whereas watery Venice is compared to a semiotic city replete with mercurial, hard-to-dominate drives flowing in the semiotic space. It is between these two cities that Winterson’s protagonists have to travel for the purpose of seeking a place where they might discover the meaning of life, existence, and passion on their own. Take Henri as an example. He determines to leave symbolic, rationalized Paris after suffering from the disillusionment that his passion for Napoleon is not sufficient enough to define his position in the patriarchal community. Identically, once Henri realizes that Villanelle will never love him as he loves her, he makes up his mind to leave semiotic, capricious Venice and to stay instead in San Servolo, where he ultimately unearths a special way to articulate his voice by keeping a notebook. In other words, physically Henri travels from Paris to Venice but sojourns in the madhouse, while metaphorically his storytelling art—his notebook—serves as the threshold integrating both the symbolic and semiotic spaces. The same situation also happens to Villanelle. At first in semiotic Venice, she works in the casino, purposely cross-dressing to blur her gender identity and manically falling in love with a woman. Later a wealthy cook marries Villanelle but sells her to a French general in symbolic Paris, where she comes to conceive that she wants not chauvinistic abuses but her freedom to play the role of a boatman’s daughter. Consequently she escapes with Henri and Patrick from that patriarchal as well as heterosexual society, heading toward the fluid city to which she belongs. Although physically Villanelle is content with staying in maternal Venice, her phallic webbed feet metaphorically signify the complexity of sexuality and a unique tool of merging both male and female features simultaneously as a challenge to the man-regulated dichotomy of sexuality.

In conclusion, after Henri, Villanelle, and Patrick are scrutinized as the exemplars to demonstrate Winterson’s emphasis on the importance of oscillation between the pre-Oedipal and post-Oedipal stages, we perceive more clearly the interchangeability and

applicability of two geniuses, Winterson and Kristeva, both of them in opposition to ostensibly legitimated heterosexual domination and in favor of chronically suppressed diversities of sexuality. For Kristeva, while the semiotic offers the source of unnamable drives and energies, the symbolic offers a legitimate access to express the former's dynamism. For Winterson, without Paris, the protagonists would never comprehend the inhuman cruelty of war and the illogic domination of hegemony; without Venice, nor would they witness so many possibilities of life, art, and passion under seemingly seamless episteme of dichotomy. For both Kristeva and Winterson, it is more important to emphasize the significance of oscillating between the semiotic and symbolic spaces than to privilege either space and to exhibit the oppositional characteristic in the same way as the traditional binary oppositional system does. In short, it is the phenomenon of oscillation, rather than that of opposition, that deserves our attention and further analysis both in Kristeva's theoretical and Winterson's literary works.