

“We were always helpless, whoever was in power”: Cultural Materialism and Thatcherism in *The Passion*

Introduction

In *The Passion*, a fantasy novel set against the tumultuous backdrop of the Napoleonic Wars, Winterson’s narrative weaves political awareness with the principles of cultural materialism, a theory well-articulated by Alan Sinfield in “Cultural Materialism, Othello, and the Politics of Plausibility.” Sinfield suggests that cultural materialism examines how “the specific historical conditions in which institutions and formations organize and are organized” (758) shape societal interactions and cultural norms. Through Henri’s navigation of the military complex and Villanelle’s resistance to the cult of true womanhood, Winterson explores how individuals resist and subvert the repressive constructs imposed by authoritarian regimes. Their resistance is emblematic of a broader critique of conservative politics, which often glorifies war and suppresses individuality through rigid definitions of identity and role.

Patriarchal Masculinity in Napoleon’s Dominant Military Paradigm

For conventional men in the Napoleonic era, hyper-masculine qualities thrive in the military; strong, unsympathetic, and aggressive men typically held leadership positions. Scholar Ronald O. Craig identifies three key traits of the hypermasculine personality prominent among Winterson’s military men: viewing violence as manly, perceiving danger as thrilling, and exhibiting callous behavior towards women, while considering emotional expressions as feminine (Craig “Hypermasculinity”). Winterson’s Napoleon epitomizes these traits, embodying the hyper-masculine archetype to its fullest and extending the paradigm of idealized insensitivity beyond individual behavior to shape broader power structures. Likewise, Sinfield describes systems across all of history with material patriarchal power as able to “dominate the institutions that deal with ideas...[and persuade people to] believe things that are neither just, human, nor to

their advantage” (748). Historically and within the novel’s narrative, Napoleon maintains control through material means such as conquering countries and commanding obedience from his subordinates. The novel dramatizes Napoleon as a power-obsessed maniac, willing to take any lengths to assert dominance. Napoleon strategically manipulates his surroundings to create an impression of superiority, exemplified by Henri’s description, “[Napoleon] kept small servants and large horses” waiting on him (Winterson 1). This strategic arrangement not only enhances Napoleon’s perceived stature—making him literally and figuratively tower over his attendants—but also symbolizes his immense power through the ownership of imposing horses. The deliberate disparity between the diminutive servants and the majestic animals emphasizes his authority and magnifies his regal presence.

Winterson’s Napoleon enforces a hypermasculinity that glorifies strength and sacrifice at the expense of the soldiers’ individual survival and agency. Napoleon’s command to launch 25,000 men into the English Channel without regard for the men’s safety indicates how the soldiers are conditioned to prioritize collective victory and their leader’s objectives over personal well-being. In this environment, dissent is equated with weakness, leaving the soldiers trapped in a system that demands unwavering endurance and submission to hierarchical power. Their emotional and physical dependence on Napoleon mirrors a parasitic bond: they rely on him for purpose and identity, even as he exploits and dehumanizes them. Henri’s reflection—“No one said, Let’s leave him. Let’s hate him” (25)—reveals the depth of their valorization of brotherhood and internalized allegiance to Napoleon’s violence, driven by a patriarchal system that equates masculinity with resilience in the face of suffering. Ultimately, their inability to resist or break away underscores how hypermasculinity erodes their humanity, turning them into expendable tools in service of a leader who values dominance over their lives. This

demonstrates, from a cultural materialism perspective, how the military institution perpetuates such conditions by valuing aggression over individual welfare.

Henri's Change in Status: Navigating Patriarchy Within and Outside of Napoleon's Army

At the beginning of the novel, Henri's initial status as a soldier-cook serving Napoleon demonstrates his submission to hierarchical military life. In fact, the position of army cook amplifies the patriarchal system, placing Henri in a typically feminized role as caretaker for his fellow soldiers. In this asymmetrical relationship between ruler and subject, Henri finds himself subjected to the patriarchy and degraded as both a person and a man. While Napoleon cares little for his subjects, the soldiers' lives depend solely on him. In fact, Winterson conflates the military ruler-subject relationship with the traditional domestic, husband-wife relationship, suggesting that the soldiers are metaphorically "in love with him" (Winterson 8). Winterson's choice to change Henri's diction from neutral to effeminate language emphasizes the feminization of the soldiers. Specifically, when the cook questions the soldiers about their experiences with women, Henri notes, "Most of us blushed, and some of us giggled" (9). This contrast is stark compared to descriptions of the soldiers as "impassive" while on guard (13). Thus, in Winterson's view, the military's power structure emasculates the soldiers, reducing them to roles akin to "wives" of Napoleon. Henri has a particularly wifely role: cooking for Napoleon. Despite Henri cooking chicken for Napoleon at his beck and call, Henri is left with no food and is "lucky to find a wishbone" (4). Moreover, Napoleon demonstrates the exploitative aspect of his leadership as he orders Henri to stockpile an excessive amount of chicken, while the soldiers go hungry and cannot access Napoleon's food. Henri's catering to Napoleon's chicken cravings mirrors the subservient behavior expected of women dictated by patriarchy. Henri's status is multidimensional—while he earns respect from other French subjects as a soldier in the army, he

also falls victim to patriarchy as he works in a feminized role as a cook under another man's authority.

However, Henri loses faith in Napoleon's ideology when he confronts the cruelties of war in "the unimaginable zero winter," a torturous and deadly period for the soldiers trudging towards Russia (80). When Napoleon's army reaches Moscow and sets the city ablaze, Henri's love for Napoleon morphs to feelings of hate, doubt, and disappointment. Henri's abrupt repulsion towards the violent deeds he has witnessed initiates his journey towards self-discovery as he asks himself: "[H]ow could you have ever loved this?" (84). The sudden feeling of disgust directed at the neutered, dehumanized "this" encompasses not only the terrors perpetuated by the army and Napoleon's ruthless actions but also implicated Henri himself for allowing his judgement to reach such extremes. In each passing day following the burning of Moscow, Henri contemplates more introspectively, experiencing a growing self-disdain for allowing himself to reach such depths of subservience and reflecting on the motivations driving his military commitment.

Henri's subsequent desertion from Napoleon's army signifies his reclaiming of self and defiance against the imposed patriarchal system. However, Napoleon's skillful authority even undercuts Henri's insubordination later, as "dissident potential derives ultimately...from conflict and contradiction that the social order inevitably produces within itself, even as it attempts to sustain itself" (Sinfield 752). For example, Henri initially finds himself seduced by Napoleon's machismo, expressing his awe by that his leader saying: "[Napoleon] spoke in aphorisms, he never said a sentence like you or I would, it was put like a great thought...Even when I hated him, he could still make me cry. And not through fear. He was great. Greatness like his is hard to be sensible about" (Winterson 30). Henri's characterization of Napoleon's charismatic

articulations illustrates the leader's seamless alignment with Sinfield's recognition that "ideology has always to be produced" to maintain its tyranny (752).

Winterson's portrayal of Napoleon's tyranny can be understood as a critique not only of Napoleon, but of the political climate in which she was writing, particularly the conservatism of Margaret Thatcher's Britain in the 1980s. Much like Napoleon's demand for unquestioning loyalty, Thatcher's conservative policies demanded submission to authority and adherence to strict social norms, including rigid gender and sexual expectations. Winterson's depiction of Henri's subjugation under Napoleon reflects a broader criticism of how conservatism demands conformity, whether through literal expendability in war or through figurative submission to societal norms. Henri's journey from obedient soldier to a man reclaiming his autonomy parallels a rejection of the authoritarianism and traditionalism of Thatcher's Britain, where individuality and dissent were often suppressed in favor of preserving a particular national order.¹

Symbolically, however, setting flame to Moscow serves as a metaphor for Henri's reclamation of self, vividly representing the burning away of his devotion for Napoleon and paralleling the burning of his own internal transformation. The parallel between blazing city and Henri's flaming heart suggests a profound emotional upheaval, signifying the intense and transformative nature of Henri's shifting allegiances, from serving Napoleon to serving himself. Henri's urgency to leave the army becomes more pronounced when he asks Domino, a wounded soldier, to desert Napoleon's army with him. After Henri's conversation with Domino, Henri definitively announces: "I don't want to worship him anymore. I want to make my own mistakes. I want to die in my own time" (86). Henri's declaration not only reinforces his reclamation of his individuality, but also underscores his distinctiveness as a character within the historical

¹ See Hugo Young in "Margaret Thatcher," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 25 Oct. 2024, for more comprehensive discussion.

backdrop of the French Revolution. Although Henri's earlier status of soldier in the army reflects his acceptance of the patriarchal power dynamic, his departure from the army enables him to reassert his autonomy. Through Henri's story, Winterson critiques both the historical tyranny of Napoleon and the contemporary conservatism of Thatcher, highlighting the dangers of sacrificing personal autonomy for the sake of maintaining power structures that demand conformity.

Henri's Challenging of Masculinity in the Napoleonic Era

Henri's passion and fluidity of character challenges conventional notions of masculinity and established gender roles of the Napoleonic Era. During Henri's time in the army, he describes himself as surrounded by "heartless men" (Winterson 83). The characterization, where men are perceived as "heartless" and violent by Henri, contributes to his own feminized portrayal. Henri's unique passion for another man enhances his status as an example of transcending traditional notions. While numerous soldiers respect and follow Napoleon due to his leadership qualities, Henri's feelings toward Napoleon carry a more intimate depth, particularly given Henri's role as personal cook for Napoleon. The exclusive physical proximity he enjoys with Napoleon adds an extra layer of distinctiveness to Henri's affection; other soldiers do not have the same physical closeness to their leader. Furthermore, Henri views his role as miraculous, stating, "I had been chosen" (19).

In contrast to Henri's defiance of conventional masculinity, Napoleon embodies patriarchal standards through territorial ambitions and displays of dominance over his subordinates. However, this dominance is not exclusive to Napoleon, as other men in the narrative also exhibit obsessions with power; the evident heartlessness among men in the novel becomes particularly apparent in minor characters. For instance, when young recruit Henri first

arrives at the army camp in Boulogne and encounters the military head cook, the head cook's perverted desires manifest in his abusive treatment of women in the brothel, involving physical violence and coercion. On the flip side, Patrick the defrocked priest, in coping with the harsh realities of war, succumbs to alcoholism. His reliance on alcohol stems from an inability to manage himself through the dire circumstances, leading him to make morally compromised decisions, such as accepting a jar of alcohol in exchange for taking the life of a peasant who wishes to die with his family in the cold.

The head cook and Patrick assert dominance in ways that reflect a power structure resonant with Marxist interpretations of social hierarchy, particularly in terms of the novel's gender dynamics. Marxist feminism posits that those who control material production also shape ideological norms.² Within the military's microcosm, men in power reinforce existing hierarchies, thus perpetuating patriarchy as the prevailing social order. According to Marx, the ruling class not only controls material wealth but also molds ideological frameworks—thereby casting gender roles as fixed and inherent. The enforcement of patriarchy, which promotes male dominance and female subordination, is not a natural truth but a constructed ideological standard. In examining how the head cook and Patrick exercise their authority, their behaviors exemplify Sinfield's claim that “the class which has the means of material production at its disposal, controls concurrently the means of mental production” (Sinfield 748). Through their actions, Patrick and the head cook emulate the ruling class's ideology, exerting power over others within their reach. Marx's ideas explain that the ruling class governs ideology itself, meaning that the dominant ideas of the ruling class orchestrate the societal structure. This control

² Meyers, Diana. “Philosophical Feminism.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 8 Sep. 2014. Accessed 19 February 2025.

asserts a patriarchal view where all gender dynamics support the notion of male dominance and the consequent subordination of women as an ideology portrayed as natural.

While most men in the novel harbor passions based on dominance and control, Henri's passions are less distinctly patriarchal; he longs for a sense of belonging. In a society based on heterosexuality, Henri's fixation on Napoleon appears homosexual, bordering on romantic infatuation. Whenever Napoleon speaks, Henri displays feminine, emotionally charged reactions, including crying at Napoleon's speech, as Henri confesses: "he could still make me cry" (Winterson 30). Additionally, when characterizing Napoleon, Henri employs contradictory language, such as "He is repulsive and fascinating by turns" (13). The incongruity of "repulsive" and "fascinating" reflect Henri's internal turmoil and his uncertainty about how he should process his emotions, suggesting that his feelings for the emperor go beyond mere admiration. Meanwhile, the phrase "by turns," implies Napoleon's constant vacillation between the two qualities, almost like the ebb and flow of "a romance" (13).

Furthermore, Henri's jealousy toward Josephine reveals his emotional attachment to Napoleon: "She belonged to [Napoleon]. I envied her that" (Winterson 36). Sinfield's observation that "the concept of female identity" is "something fathered upon women by patriarchy" enriches our understanding of Henri's divergence from traditional masculinity (Sinfield 748). His portrayal as a "gentle man" (Winterson 147) by Villanelle reflects his departure from the dominant male archetype of his time. Henri's passivity and reluctance to assert control align him more closely with the feminine roles of his era, challenging rigid gender binaries and suggesting that identity is socially constructed rather than innate. His character disrupts the traditional framework of masculinity, demonstrating that gender is fluid and capable of transformation.

Villanelle's Resistance to Patriarchal Status Expectations

Villanelle, a Venetian woman who serves as an opposing narrator and foil to Henri's perspective in *The Passion*, embodies a resistance to the patriarchal and heteronormative systems that define Napoleonic Europe. Early on, she articulates the limitations imposed on women under such a system: "There aren't many jobs for a girl" (Winterson 53). To access the same privileges afforded to men in Venice, Villanelle cross-dresses, challenging gender norms to navigate a world structured by male authority, a character reminiscent of William Shakespeare's many cross-dressing women. In fact, Villanelle's struggle arguably mirrors Desdemona's in Shakespeare's *Othello*, as highlighted by Desdemona's divided duty to the men in her life within the patriarchal setting of Venice. Both Shakespeare and Winterson's use of Venice as a backdrop for female oppression—despite neither author having visited the city—reinforces a shared recognition of patriarchy's pervasive influence, even in imagined worlds. Sinfield's description of the "official doctrine" in *Othello* captures how women, like Desdemona, are confined to roles dictated by male-dominated structures, where "a woman must obey the male head of her family...then her husband" (Sinfield 753). Though Desdemona exhibits some agency by choosing her husband, her fate is ultimately bound by the patriarchal framework that defines her worth through her relationships with men.

However, Villanelle's journey diverges from Desdemona's, as Villanelle not only grapples with patriarchal expectations but also manages to break free from them. In *The Passion*, Villanelle initially conforms to the heteronormative "official doctrine" by presenting herself as a man to escape societal rejection of her true identity. Her uncertainty about revealing her gender to the Queen of Spades reflects her internalization of compulsory heterosexuality: "Should I go see her as myself and joke about the mistake and leave gracefully?" (Winterson 65). Yet, unlike

the societal constraints that ultimately lead to Desdemona's tragic end, Villanelle's decision to reveal her bisexuality is met with acceptance, allowing her to transcend the rigid gender and sexual norms imposed by Napoleonic society. Villanelle's resistance to these norms not only highlights her autonomy but also critiques the broader patriarchal order that seeks to suppress individuality, aligning with Jeanette Winterson's broader criticism of Thatcherism in the 1980s. Much like Napoleon's tyrannical demands for obedience, Thatcher's conservatism demanded submission to authority, imposing strict gender and sexual norms that sought to maintain a particular social order.³ By drawing parallels between Napoleon's authoritarian rule and the constraints of Thatcherism, Winterson subtly comments on the conservative ideology's insistence on conformity, even at the cost of personal freedom.

Villanelle's self-determinism, bisexuality, and refusal to adhere to patriarchal expectations contrast sharply with Henri's malleability, shaped by his submission to figures like Napoleon and his parents. Despite enduring trauma, Villanelle remains committed to defining her own path, rejecting the "official doctrine" of compulsory sexuality⁴ and patriarchal control throughout the novel. Her bold declaration, repeated twice—"There is no sense in loving someone you can never wake up to by chance" (95, 122)—encapsulates her determination to live authentically, on her own terms. By positioning Villanelle as a figure of resistance against both patriarchal and conservative ideals, Winterson critiques systems of power that demand conformity, emphasizing the importance of personal autonomy in the face of oppressive societal structures.

³ Weaver, Katie. "Feminism under Duress: Was the Thatcher Government Bad for the Women's Movement in the U.K.?" *Women Leading Change: Case Studies on Women, Gender, and Feminism*. Accessed 19 Feb. 2025.

⁴ For more information on compulsory sexuality, see Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal*, vol. 40, no. 4, 1988, pp. 519–31. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3207893>. Accessed 29 Nov. 2023.

Villanelle's Defiance of Gender Norms and Literary Tropes

As an androgynous, bisexual nonbinary character, Villanelle directly challenges the conventional notions of heterosexuality and the typical literary tropes assigned to female characters. Her name alone, a blend of the villainous “villain” and the feminine “elle,” defies conventional female roles in literature, where girls are seldom portrayed as villains. Additionally, her name echoes the structured poetic form of a villanelle, traditionally associated with themes of love and death—themes that are central to *The Passion*. The dual nature of the term, referencing both a fixed poetic form and an Italian dance, emphasizes Winteron’s exploration of fixed versus fluid identities, enriching Villanelle’s complexity and thematic relevance.

Unlike modern-day psychology which distinguishes a person’s sexuality as multi-dimensional, involving sexual identity, sexual attraction, and biological sex, such ideas were perceived as singular and fixed—or else pathologized or criminalized during the Napoleonic Era. However, Villanelle defies the one-dimensional beliefs of her time. First, while her physical appearance aligns with that of a woman, Villanelle cross-dresses and has webbed feet, a characteristic of male boatmen in her culture. Second, Villanelle exhibits nonbinary characteristics as she identifies as both male and female. In a moment of self-reflection, Villanelle questions, “Was this breeches and boots self any less real than my garters?” (Winteron 66). Here, breeches and boots symbolize a male identity, and garters represent a female identity. Villanelle embraces both aspects of her identity and sees herself in both items of gendered clothing. Finally, Villanelle sleeps with both genders, as she “[takes] pleasure with both men and women” (60). Although Villanelle transcends conventional notions of female identity, she still embodies feminism, particularly the principle of autonomy.

In contrast, Henri falls short of attaining Villanelle's level of autonomy, as he persistently attempts to assert a masculinity he lacks: "he had no notion of what men do" (148). Henri even grapples with loneliness in his final thoughts in the novel, "I don't ever want to be alone again" (152). Conversely, Villanelle expresses a different perspective, stating, "Perhaps I would never sense other lives of mine, having no need of them" (144), deliberately choosing solitude. Hence, Villanelle successfully navigates hardships independently, maintaining her personal identity, whereas Henri's identity appears shaped by external influences, whether through Villanelle or Napoleon. Henri cannot quite embrace the level of self-determinism Villanelle has found; he cannot see the binary as the problem—as Villanelle does—but still faults himself.

Throughout the novel, Villanelle actively pursues her passions and strives for rights equal to those of men. Villanelle's defiance of traditional gender roles and her bisexuality serve as a critique of Thatcherism, particularly its oppressive stance on LGBTQ+ rights. Under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, Section 28 of the Local Government Act (1988) prohibited local authorities from "promoting homosexuality," marking a significant regression in tolerance and inclusivity. This law reflected Thatcher's belief that "children who need to be taught to respect traditional moral values are being taught that they have an inalienable right to be gay" (Thatcher). Section 28 was a stark contrast to the progress made by the British LGBTQ+ movement since the decriminalization of male homosexuality in 1967. Villanelle's character, by opposing societal norms and literary norms while embodying personal autonomy, stands in opposition to the regressive ideologies of Thatcherism, reinforcing the importance of inclusivity and equality.

Villanelle's Literary Tropes

In *The Passion*, Jeanette Winterson uses literary tropes not just to shape her narrative, but to challenge broader ideological frameworks that encompass gender, religious, and societal norms. Through these tropes, Winterson encourages readers to question conventional sanctities, such as those of marriage and divinity, using her narrative as a tool to critique the rigidity of traditional forms and identities. *The Passion* serves as more than just a story; it is a critique and a re-evaluation of how personal autonomy and self-discovery are framed within our cultural structures.

Despite embodying certain tropes, Villanelle fails to conform to any of them seamlessly. Villanelle initially attempts to conform to the same faithful wife archetype as Desdemona, but she runs away from her abusive husband after two years. Villanelle's character also resonates with biblical figures like Mary, mother of Jesus, in resisting simplistic categorizations and challenging societal expectations around motherhood. However, Villanelle diverges from the nurturing mother archetype by displaying notable maternal ambivalence. Her relationship with her daughter lacks the supportive instinct, evident in her reference to her child as "the baby" and her expression of incapacity to shield her from potential harm: "I cannot save her from the Queen of Spades nor any other" (Winterson 150). Villanelle departs from the typical sense of belonging associated with motherhood, refraining from addressing the child as "her" baby. Furthermore, she lacks the conventional nurturing instinct, as opposed to the standard maternal inclination to protect children from harm, as impossible as it may be. Villanelle's departure from maternal protective instincts highlights her non-conforming approach to motherhood and womanhood as a whole.

Villanelle's defiance extends to her embodying characteristics typically reserved for male heroes in literature, such as the divine hero archetype illustrated by Jesus walking on water—an archetype least expected for her to assume. The Jesus divine hero archetype marks Jesus, who walks on water after a windstorm⁵; Villanelle's act of walking on water after braving a storm of emotions and the murder of her ruthless husband symbolizes a manifestation of her independence and ability to transcend societal limitations. By removing the shoes concealing her webbed feet to steer the boat carrying Henri and the Cook, Villanelle signifies her escape from the constraints imposed by men and her willingness to take on roles traditionally reserved for them in her culture. Symbolically, the boat carries the two men who inhibit Villanelle—Henri, who desires to possess her, and the cook—her ex-husband who possessed her in the past. Villanelle's act of liberation also carries a deeper meaning, suggesting that it takes women extraordinary circumstances, something nearly impossible like walking on water, to overcome the barriers of patriarchy.

Villanelle's unique position evokes the Madonna-whore binary frequently employed to categorize women in literature and art, placing them into either highly virtuous or extremely promiscuous roles with no middle ground. Winterson's portrayal of Villanelle as a character defying classification highlights what both Shakespeare and Sinfield overlooked: the possibility of freedom beyond the hold of power systems. While Winterson acknowledges the "wild card" possibility of freedom through Villanelle's relationship with the Queen of Spades, Sinfield and Shakespeare remain constrained by archetypal thinking, failing to recognize characters' ability to subvert expectations (144). Unlike Desdemona, Villanelle escapes the prison of patriarchy and traditional tropes. In vesting Villanelle with so much meaning, Winterson rather explores the

⁵ Luke 8:22-24

structure of making meaning. Villanelle is all of this and not quite any of it, which means she must be taken on her own terms and resists typical character archetypes.

In the broader sociopolitical context, Villanelle's resistance to traditional female archetypes juxtaposes the views held by figures like Margaret Thatcher. Although Thatcher herself broke significant gender barriers in politics, she maintained that "the battle for women's rights has largely been won," in a 1982 speech, suggesting a cessation of the feminist movement.⁶ Thatcher's perspective starkly contrasts with the thematic explorations in Winterson's narrative, which champions individuality and resistance against societal norms. In essence, Winterson's narrative utilizes literary tropes not only to enrich its narrative but also to engage in a profound critique of the structures that define and often confine individual identity and autonomy.

Conclusion

Through a cultural materialist analysis of *The Passion*, the shifts in social status and expressions of sexuality explored by Henri and Villanelle emerge as acts of defiance against patriarchy and Napoleonic Era power dynamics. More broadly, Jeannette Winterson wrote *The Passion* in the context of the 1980s United Kingdom, a period marked by political shifts, the LGBTQ+ rights movement, and Margaret Thatcher's conservative ideology, which also led to movements of resistance. Additionally, Sinfield's articulation of cultural materialism helps readers understand the context of the 1980s and how Winterson's work fits into the broader literary and social landscape of the time. Winterson's demonstrations of two protagonists who defy social conventions illustrate how the characters thrive and fail. While Henri's social standing diminishes when he leaves the army, Villanelle's status increases as she liberates herself

⁶ Thatcher, Margaret. "Women in a changing World" 1st Dame Margery Corbett-Ashby Memorial Lecture, 26 July 1982, central London. Speech.

from male influences and ultimately buys a house. Additionally, Henri challenges societal norms by embracing feminine traits despite serving as a soldier, whereas Villanelle transcends binary expectations as neither completely male nor female. Featuring two characters with contrasting struggles against rigid societal expectations, the novel raises questions on the possibilities of creating a world that maintains structure while simultaneously encouraging innovative thinking and diverse viewpoints. By exploring how Winterson's work engages with and challenges the cultural and social norms of the 1980s and Napoleonic Europe, readers can gain a deeper understanding of the novel's significance in its historical context, prompting questions of what insights *The Passion* may offer readers today.

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