Questing After Strange Fruit An Examination of the Quest Motif
in Jeanette Winterson's
*Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* and *Sexing the Cherry*

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## ABSTRACT

Writer Jeanette Winterson once stated in an interview that "It's very important for me to find a form which fits my content," and in four of her six novels that form is an altered but still recognizable version of the quest paradigm. Her content reflects her desire to contest normative definitions of gender behaviour and sexual expression, and in *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* and *Sexing the Cherry*, Jeanette Winterson adopts the traditional quest-myth to portray the progress of her characters as they journey through a world in which gender and sexuality are deliberately foregrounded. *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* is the story of a young girl who grows up lesbian in a rigidly heterosexual religious community. The narrative, which weaves traditional fairy tales with Grail legend, follows the young girl's attempts to create a mythology to help her make some sense of her situation. In *Sexing the Cherry*, Winterson calls attention to the traditions of the quest-myth—the masculine subject of the quest, the rigid gender divisions, the inherent heterosexism, the objectification of women—through one narrator who wants to create himself in the image of the traditional hero but cannot, and through another narrator who is entrapped by these same social attitudes. In her novels Winterson favours the strategies Rachel DuPlessis terms "writing beyond the ending," as she uses familiar fairy tales and myths as springboards for her own rewritten versions which call attention to the political and religious ideologies that construct and constrain the subjectivity of her characters. The frequent sexism of traditional myths and fairy tales is deconstructed, in her rewritten versions, to reveal the underpinnings of social and sexual conformism.

This thesis examines Winterson's forays into the world of the quest-myth, and focuses on two novels—*Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* and *Sexing the Cherry*—in particular. The Introduction offers a brief look at Winterson's penchant for rewriting fairy tales and myths in four of her six novels, and examines several recurring motifs in her fiction. Chapter One contrasts the traditions of fairy tales and of the quest paradigm (as delineated by Northrop Frye and Joseph Campbell) with Winterson's own

in *Sexing the Cherry*. Using vividly contrasting narrators, Winterson scrutinizes not only the sexist paradigm of the traditional quest, but also the ideological forces that construct normative definitions of love and desire. In the Conclusion I contrast the quests of the two novels. My intention in this thesis is not to question why Winterson uses the quest motif so much as study her use of the traditional quest paradigm to deconstruct how religious and political forces often conspire to force a certain form of conformity in the subjectivity of her characters.

Examiners

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# Contents

# Introduction

## The quest motif in the novels of Jeanette Winterson

> The past cannot be recorded, it can only be retold. Re-telling the past 10 years is not for me a calendar exercise. It is a metaphysical exercise. I want to know what changes have taken place in the way we think, what has happened to our imaginations.
> —Jeanette Winterson [1]

In 1985 a novel entitled *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* was published in Britain. In it, a young girl named Jeanette tells a story about her life with her mother and father in a working-class town in the north of England, narrating these events with frequent recourse to a world of mythology and fairy tale. The story of this young girl's life bears striking resemblances to the life story of the book's author, Jeanette Winterson. Not only do they share similar biographies as adopted children of repressively religious parents, but both Winterson and the protagonist of *Oranges* demonstrate a deep fascination with exploring issues of gender development, the quest motif, and with "rewriting" myths and fairy tales. Indeed, in each subsequent novel Jeanette Winterson has written since *Oranges*, her interest in the development of gender identity and the youthful quest for identity as well as a profound concern with the "nature" of fairy tales and myths have proven to be prominent motifs.

In four of the six novels Jeanette Winterson has written—*Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* (1985), *Boating For Beginners* (1985), *The Passion* (1987), and *Sexing the*

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[1] "All Teeth 'N' Smiles" (32).

*Cherry* (1989)—gaining a sense of selfhood and the quest for identity are the predominant themes. The intriguing manner in which Winterson develops an evolving sense of identity within each of her characters moves through the rhythms of the traditional quest. My reading of how Winterson explores this sense of identity is indebted to de Lauretis' introductory comments in *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*:

> Self and identity, in other words, are always grasped and understood within particular discursive configurations. Consciousness, therefore, is never fixed, never attained once and for all, because discursive boundaries change with historical conditions.
>
> In this perspective, the very notion of identity undergoes a shift. Identity is not the goal but rather the point of departure of the process of self-consciousness, a process by which one begins to know that and how the personal is political, that and how the subject is specifically and materially en-gendered in its social conditions and possibilities of existence. (8-9)

Identity existing as process, as a "point of departure" rather than a "goal," is an integral issue in Winterson's novels. The consciousness of her characters, as Winterson demonstrates, is interpreted within a vast network of differing meanings and representations. That is, the identities her characters develop are profoundly influenced by their specific social situations. Identity, for Winterson, is never fixed, instead, it is a continually evolving, continually developing process.

Winterson's use of the quest for identity is a central issue in her work, but her radical treatment of myths and fairy tales is most pertinent to my study. In the tradition of such authors as Angela Carter, Anne Sexton, and Sara Maitland, but with considerably more comedic emphasis, Winterson's novels draw attention to their feminization of traditional myths and fairy tales. Her gender-based reading of both the figures and the literary conventions of these genres is intended to scrutinize their ideologies. She toys with notions of how characters come to grips with their identity and sexuality, and how they balance their resulting interpretations with the demands placed upon them by their culture. The dialectic relations Winterson develops between her characters and the social narratives surrounding them draw our attention to the hierarchical relationship between cultural normalcy and cultural acceptance. These cultural narratives encompass the often insistent social pressures that attempt to dictate how a character's life should be conducted. These pressures generally concern issues of marriage, sexuality, and suitable gender behaviour,

particularly for the women characters. I take this preoccupation with the social structures that form gender behaviour to be one of Winterson's primary fictional interests. In an interview with Helen Barr, she remarks that "the story we are told about ourselves" is "prescriptive" and "debilitating," and she maintains that we should be "encouraged to tell our own stories" about ourselves. "How many people," she argues, "can honestly say that they have made their own choices, their own decisions?" (Barr 31).

Winterson's technique of "rewriting" stories opens a space in which she explores how cultural stories are constructed and circulated. This becomes most apparent in her treatment of sexuality and gender. She uses the human body as a space, a space to be experienced and explored. The cultural inscription of sexuality and gender, namely the ways in which gender perception inscribes itself on the body, particularly with regards to women, forms an important part of Winterson's fictional forays. Through her feminizations of mythology and fairy tales, as well as through her ironic "rewriting" of history, the body that emerges from her novels is one that reflects, while refusing, the limitations of cultural prescriptions. The body is no mere passive instrument: it is a body that sets aside official versions in order to write its own version, that demonstrates how identity should be "less a matter of final discovery than perpetual reinvention" (Fuss 7). To use the words of Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Jeanette Winterson is "writing beyond the ending" (x).

Teresa de Lauretis posits that "the body is continually and inevitably caught up in representation," as it is "the supreme object of representation" for a vast arena of socio-cultural practices (12). One of the most important features of Winterson's fiction is her exploration of the differing ways in which the body, the female body in particular, is represented across history. Using gender as a description of the social organization of the relationship between the sexes, Winterson takes the physical bodies of her characters and explores the many ways of how gender is inscribed and proscribed on them. She plays gender as we would a game, shaping and shifting the categories that distinguish feminine from masculine, masculine from feminine.

Gender becomes, in this manner, not so much a destiny as a possibility, a hypothesis. Winterson presents her characters as playful pawns in her game of gender-bending, and molds their bodies in the furnace of her imagination. "I like to look at those things we hold dear—marriage, the church, sexuality—and bring them into the area of debate," she says in one interview (Anshaw 17). Those "things" reveal Winterson's penchant for exploring the discourses of major societal practices through her narratives. Yet there is no definitive sense of closure or finality to her queries in any of her novels, which

seems a deliberate move on her part. "I see my books as gateways, as opportunities beginnings, not ends," she remarks. She goes on to say that her books are "for the reader to think about, to make up their own minds" (Barr 31).

In each novel, Winterson takes considerable license with myths and fairy tales, yet she also manipulates realistic conventions and historical facts to suit her fictions. We recognize the characters that populate her stories as figures from history books, the critical tradition, mythologies, and fairy tales. They are posited as characters—Napoleon, John Tradescant, Northrop Frye, Noah, Artemis, Orion, and the Twelve Dancing Princesses—telling stories while commenting on the progress of their narratives with remarkable awareness. Winterson's fusion of mythology, fairy tale, and history results in deliberate constructions that point to the debilitating effects, and subversive potential, of the cultural narratives on the lives of her characters.

The fairy tales, myths, and histories Winterson draws from are not obscure. In their familiar versions, they stand behind Winterson's fictions as palimpsests. By radically changing their tone without, however, altering their essential plot-lines, Winterson writes over them and through them. "Everyone who tells a story tells it differently, just to remind us that everybody sees it differently," writes the narrator of *Oranges*. "Some people say," she continues, "there are true things to be found, some people say all kinds of things can be proved. I don't believe them. The only thing for certain is how complicated it all is, like string full of knots. It's all there but hard to find the beginning and impossible to fathom the end. The best you can do is admire the cat's cradle, and maybe knot it up a bit more. History should be a hammock for swinging and a game for playing, the way cats play" (91). And so it is with all Winterson's narrators. They tell stories about the daily events of their lives, yet they tell these stories in such a way that the tales which emerge from their reconfigurations reveal the relative nature of their own construction.

In *The Passion*, the boundary between reality and fantasy is deliberately foregrounded by the characters themselves. There are several characters who voice the same phrase, and this phrase—"I'm telling you stories. Trust me"—points to the relativity of credulity, for some of these "stories" go beyond the boundaries of credibility as fantasies, yet are actual facts in the narrative. For example, the Venetian boatgirl, Villanelle, is born with the webbed feet that we are told is characteristic of Venetian boatmen, who are apparently able to walk on water. Villanelle is matter of fact about this anatomical feature, yet when it surfaces in Henri's narrative, it is presented as a fantastic story, woven for the "wildest dreams" of the peasants he and Villanelle are lodging with. "Patrick and I could hardly swallow our laughter," he comments, "one even risked excommunication by

suggesting that perhaps Christ had been able to walk on the water thanks to the same accident of birth" (104). The various ways in which these "stories" are presented, and how they are in turn received by other characters, demands a more discerning analysis of how such concepts as "history" or "reality" are determined [2]

Winterson's emphasis on the constantly shifting context of perspective extends not only into her analysis of myths and fairy tales, but also into her use of history. The relativity of historical discourse becomes a metaphor for Winterson's own designs, a fact she readily acknowledges: "The principle of my work is to suggest that we can never really know what did and didn't happen, that the boundaries between history and story-telling, between reality and dreaming, are always being blurred and muddled" (Thomson 5). The subjectivity of the narrative voice becomes, then, a motif that merges the historical with the fabulous, leaving us with a palimpsest of Wintersonian proportions. One gets the sense that Winterson's motive is not so much the rewriting of history as the rewriting of those conventional notions of perception that determine historical discourse. In *Oranges*, Winterson makes a deliberate reference to the deceptive objectivity of historical discourse: "In some ghastly way," Jeanette writes, "Pol Pot was more honest than the rest of us have been. Pol Pot decided to dispense with the past altogether. To dispense with the sham of treating the past with objective respect" (92). The inscription of history, as Winterson deftly illustrates, is informed by the values and beliefs of its inscriber. Under the apparent objectivity of the historical account lies the inevitably biased opinions of the historian. The ideological assumptions of the writer and of the culture in which historical accounts originate cannot help but inscribe themselves into these narratives. Hayden White, in "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact," emphasizes this point: "[T]here has always been a reluctance," he argues, "to consider historical narratives as what they manifestly are—verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much invented as found and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences" (42).

Thus, by fictionalizing history, Winterson implies that history itself is a form of fiction. In her novels, history is presented as the "official version" which then merges with mythology and fairy tale drama. One example of this occurs in *The Passion*, where Henri, a fictional soldier from Napoleon's Grande Armée, presents us with a narrative that

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[2] See Hayden White's *Metahistory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins P, 1978) or Dominic LaCapra's *History and Criticism* (Ithica, New York: Cornell UP, 1985) for a closer examination of the deceptive "truth" in historical accounts, while Michel Foucault's analyses of socio-cultural structures, particularly in *The History of Sexuality* and *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Pantheon, 1977) provide numerous examples of the ideological underpinnings inherent in social values.

emphasizes the worst aspects of war, instead of the heroism and bravery we commonly associate with Great Battles of bygone days

> Nowadays people talk about the things [Napoleon] did as though they made sense As though even his most disastrous mistakes were only the result of bad luck or hubris
>
> It was a mess
>
> Words like devastation, rape, slaughter, carnage, starvation are lock and key words to keep the pain at bay Words about war that are easy on the eye
>
> I'm telling you stories Trust me (5)

Winterson's characters direct our attention to the process by which we interpret stories and events, but they also pose questions as to whose point of view determines the official version of history One example of this manipulative rendering of history can be seen in *Boating for Beginners* This is what Gardener, an archeologist reflecting on the plausibility of Noah and his family actually surviving the Flood, says "'Damn good story,' thought Gardener as he drank his coffee Absolutely plausible once you started to go along with it" (158) The irony of this comment lies in the fact that Judaeo-Christian religion has "gone along with" this "damn good story" for centuries, without questioning the possibility of a boatload of people actually surviving such a catastrophe Another example is also related to this biblical theme An orange demon in *Boating for Beginners* (an incubus-like figure who apparently exists as a "plot elemental"), tells the novel's protagonist that "'[w]hat seems outrageous to one generation becomes a commonplace to the next later, when it's history, no one will be surprised'" (96-7)

In this thesis, then, I intend to concentrate on Winterson's feminization of myths and fairy tales through her use of the quest motif, specifically in the context of *Sexing the Cherry* and Oranges.[3] These novels are dominated by the search for identity, a quest that often takes place within a hostile or unreceptive climate Winterson uses the quest motif in particular to examine stereotypes of masculine and feminine behaviour, and to critique what she terms "the great division" between "the heroes and the home-makers" that "ma[kes] life possible" (*Sexing* 131) These stereotypes, "rewritten" as they are by Winterson, are

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[3] By "feminization of myths and fairy tales" I refer to the manner in which Winterson transforms these formulas from male-centered narratives to include characters of both sexes, and should not be confused with a feminist treatment of myths and fairy tales In these feminized stories the emphasis is less on a woman-centred narrative than on a narrative that incorporates voices of many characters—female or male

shown to be disabling attitudes that her characters have internalized in their efforts to develop a sense of identity. The effects of these stereotypes of gender behaviour and sexual expression appear both in chance phrases and moments of extreme lucidity in the narratives. In addition to questioning stereotypes of behaviour and expression, Winterson makes the quest motif itself and its traditional parameters another contentious issue in her fiction. As Jordan, one of the narrators in *Sexing the Cherry* says, stereotypical notions of "how it's supposed to be" for the typical hero can be very difficult to shake off. Jordan's dreams of being famous are not supported by the reality he encounters:

> When Tradescant asked me to go with him as an explorer I thought I might be a hero after all, and bring back something that mattered, and in the process find something I had lost. The sense of loss was hard to talk about. What could I have lost when I never had anything to begin with?
>
> I had myself to begin with, and that it what I lost. Lost it in my mother because she is bigger and stronger than me and that's not how it's supposed to be with sons. But lost it more importantly in the gap between my ideal of myself and my pounding heart. (100-101)

This chance phrase—"that's not how it's supposed to be"—so innocent, yet so deeply ingrained with suspect attitudes and perceptions, becomes emblematic of the destructive forces that constrain and contain these characters' consciousness. As I hope to demonstrate, the quests of these characters are one and the same. Questing, in Winterson's novels, is all about breaking the "magic spells" of the cultural mythologies that encourage a certain type of conformity or behaviour from the individual in the society. These cultural mythologies are evident in many aspects of society, they frequently take the form of an imperative: this is how it should be. Although there are many affiliations and similarities with the quest paradigms of Joseph Campbell and Northrop Frye, Winterson's characters have clear deviations from the traditional quest paradigm, for instead of conforming to socio-cultural tradition, they must learn to disregard it. And whether male or female, her protagonists appear as "heroes."

You will note that I refer to the female protagonists as "heroes," and not as "heroines." As Rachel Brownstein says: "The paradigmatic hero is an overreacher, the heroine . . . is overdetermined. The hero moves toward a goal; the heroine tries to be it. He makes a good name for himself, she is concerned with keeping her good name," (82-83). I call Winterson's characters "heroes" because I want to avoid the connotations implied by

the traditional "heroine." The hero is an active figure in the traditional quest, while the heroine is frequently a passive player. Instead, I want to focus on Winterson's reformulation of the equation of the traditional hero with the masculine gender. It is evident that the female protagonists of her novels are not heroines in the conventional sense of the word, but rather active seekers after their own developing identities.

In the subsequent chapters that follow I will focus on how Winterson feminizes the quest motif and fairy tales in order to explore the development of gender and identity. Chapter One examines Winterson's adaptation and deconstruction of the conventions of the traditional quest paradigm. The traditional theories of Joseph Campbell and Northrop Frye form the background of my understanding of the traditional quest paradigm, while recourse to the recent work of Dana Heller helps me analyze how Winterson uses the quest motif in her fiction[4]. One of the ways in which Winterson deconstructs the traditional quest is in her deliberate focus on the relationship between cultural acceptability and the perceived "success" of the quest. Through her "rewritten" histories, quests, and fairy tales, a new form of the quest emerges. This new quest, unlike the traditional quest, rejects the measurement of success through recourse to socially acknowledged achievements, and instead focuses on the integrity of individuals, no matter what marginal world they might inhabit. Winterson's scrutiny of "those things we hold dear" (Anshaw 17) manifests itself in her choice of quests for her characters, as the institutions of marriage, heterosexuality, and the Christian Church are held up to the intense gaze of her literary zeal.

Chapter Two is a study of Winterson's use of the lesbian body as a site of contention in *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*. Here I deal with how the narrator portrays the fundamentalist vision of her Church and the power it has in constructing a discourse of acceptable gender behaviour and sexual desire. More specifically, I explore how the narrator uses the language of mythology and folklore in an effort to develop a nurturing "mythology" of her own when her budding sexuality develops in a way that, according to her family, is most emphatically *not* the way "it's supposed to be." My reading of *Oranges* is partially indebted to Maria Tatar's *Off With Their Heads*, which is an examination of the meaning of cultural narratives—folktales in particular. The conclusion of this novel is of particular interest when examining how the "success" of the traditional quest is measured, and if Winterson points to a different direction for rebellious female questers.

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[4] My use of the theories of Joseph Campbell and Northrop Frye might seem contradictory, given that I am attempting to demonstrate Winterson's radical treatment of myth and fairy tale, but it is essential to understand how the structure of the traditional quest lies at the center of Winterson's own adaptations, however radical they might be. In addition, both Frye and Campbell elaborate on the psychic processes of the quest mentality in a manner most invaluable to my argument.

Chapter Three analyzes Winterson's unusual treatment of the physical body as a space to be explored and mapped in *Sexing the Cherry*. The construction of the body and its excesses as well as the excesses of desire form the focus of this chapter. Using vividly contrasting narrators, Winterson first deconstructs the traditional paradigms of the quest, and then subsequently attempts to reconstruct a feminized quest motif that allows for a more heterogeneous expression of desire. She uses her narrators to deconstruct conventional images of body/gender construction and inherited attitudes of desire and excessive gender behaviour. Her resulting interpretation of the quest motif speaks of a new quest hero, and it is a hero of limitless potential. My reading draws from Marjorie Garber's *Vested Interests*, which is an indepth study of transvestitism and transsexuals. If *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* is Winterson's first foray into the conventionally gendered world of the quest-romance, then *Sexing the Cherry* represents a more radical scrutiny of the nature of desire, the search for identity through myth and fairy tale, and the cultural approbation necessary for a "successful" quest.

The Conclusion to this thesis attempts to provide a synthesis of Winterson's theories of gender and identity formation through specific reference to the quest paradigm. The question I attempt to deal with here concerns whether or not the feminized quest that Winterson posits merely replaces one gendered paradigm with yet another gendered paradigm. Does she replace one essentialist narrative with her own equally essentialist vision? Or is she able to negotiate the essentialist paradigm (noted by many critics) with, shall we say, "success"?

# Chapter One

## Quest Heroes and Talkative Princesses

*The Quest*

Winterson's use of the quest theme, particularly with regards to her female characters, raises many questions about quest heroes and the traditional quest paradigm. According to both Northrop Frye and Joseph Campbell, quest heroes are always male. This feature of the traditional quest is dealt with extensively by Dana Heller. "The prescribed patterns of the quest," she comments, "would appear to indicate that identity *is* an exclusively masculine attribute. Women's roles remain significant only in relation to the heroes whose identities they strengthen. they have no desires except to be chosen and adored by heroes" (4). The masculine character of the quest hero is an issue with which Winterson deals extensively. Her characters, be they male or female, and their quests depart from the paradigmatic models of the traditional quest. Winterson alters the quest hero pattern to suit the gender of her female characters. The typical quest hero of Winterson's fictions is no longer the virile male whose success is measured by his strength, bravery, or cunning, nor is the typical quest journey measured in terms of wealth or power. In Winterson's novels, the typical quest hero, together with the ongoing progress of self-actualization, deconstructs both the structure and the ideologies of the traditional quest.

The quest pattern described by Northrop Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism* follows a very similar format to the quest formula described in Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. According to Frye, the quest has three primary stages. "the stage of the perilous journey and the preliminary minor adventures, the crucial struggle, usually some kind of battle in which either the hero or his foe, or both, must die, and the exaltation of the

hero" (187). Campbell's analysis, if we use the chapter headings from *Hero*, is virtually identical: "Departure," "Initiation," and "Return" (ix). Thus, the hero must venture from his community, achieve a successful measure of his quest, and return to be welcomed by his community. Quests, in this manner, are about the successful negotiation of the hazards and perils that threaten the cohesion of the social unit. The hero is the individual who can vanquish these dangers to the greater benefit of his society, even if it means his eventual demise.

The character of the hero speaks, then, to the conformity required of the hero. Conformity, in this case, is determined by the particular configurations of his society. The essential qualities of the hero revolve around bravery and strength, but what emerges from an analysis of both Frye and Campbell's theories is the underlying relationship between cultural normalcy and acceptability. The qualities of the hero never allude to homosexuality or gender confusion. The hero is always a stereotype—strong, white, and male. An examination of the pattern of the traditional quest reveals, in this instance, the traditional ideological underpinnings of this particular literary form. In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye provides a gloss of the traditional quest-romance: "The central form," he comments, " is the dragon-killing theme exemplified in the stories of St. George and Perseus. A land ruled by a helpless old king is laid waste by a sea-monster, to whom one young person after another is offered to be devoured, until the lot falls on the king's daughter: at that point the hero arrives, kills the dragon, marries the daughter, and succeeds to the kingdom" (189). It is a condition of the quest that the hero must venture away from his community into the arena of the unknown, whether it be an unexplored forest, a voyage across the seas, or a trip to foreign lands. Thus the central form of the quest involves a dialectical movement between the hero and what happens to him. This pattern not only follows a specific trajectory, it also manifests an acute tension between the hero, who is invariably male, and woman, who is inevitably an accessory in the hero's quest.

A comparison of Winterson's quest heroes, particularly her female heroes, with those of traditional quest literature raises questions with regards to gender and sexuality, but also to the terms of success by which the traditional quest is measured. Success, in conventional terms, is measured in the reflection of a typically male desire. "In the picture language of mythology," asserts Joseph Campbell, "[woman] represents the totality of what can be known" (Hero 116), and Winterson takes this statement literally in her feminized quest. To her male characters, the women in their lives frequently represent a "totality" of knowledge about love and life. The female characters are often stronger, emotionally and physically, and wiser than their male counterparts. That gender is of

overwhelming significance in Winterson's novels is evident when comparing her quest heroes with heroes from traditional quest literature. This fact has not gone unnoticed by Annis Pratt. In *Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction*, Annis Pratt notes that, when using quest patterns described by Frye, Campbell, and Jung "to plot structures of women's novels," one observes "more than surface" differences (5). Women's fiction, according to Pratt, "reflects an experience radically different from men's because our drive towards growth as persons is thwarted by our society's prescriptions regarding gender" (6). Woman's "desire for selfhood," Pratt goes on to say, "comes up against the assumption that a woman aspiring to selfhood is by definition selfish, deviating from norms of subservience to the dominant gender" (6). These comments are reflected throughout Jeanette Winterson's work. Her female characters are constantly challenged by constricting social definitions of femininity and sexual behaviour. Yet this challenge is also reflected in Winterson's male characters, who are similarly thwarted by conventional definitions of masculine behaviour.

What emerges from Winterson's novels, then, is an altered form of the quest. Traditional affiliations are evident, but recognizable changes can be observed in the resolution of the quest plot. Winterson's heroes are usually figures on the fringes of their culture, who, because of their sexuality or their character, are considered marginal or deviant in their social milieu. Her female characters in particular are prime examples. In traditional quest literature, the hero emerges from obscurity to become, through the process of his journey, a central figure of his society. In the fiction of Jeanette Winterson, the quest hero also emerges from obscurity, but where the trajectory of the traditional quest culminated in the glorification of the hero and his reintegration with his community, in Winterson's novels the quest never achieves a formal completion, but remains an ongoing process, and her characters remain, by choice, fringe-dwellers.

Winterson's explorations of identity through the quest motif manifest a significant change in social and ideological implications of the quest paradigm. Battles are no longer defined as brave encounters between heroes and the dragons snorting fire at them. Suffice to say, one of the difficulties facing the modern quest hero in Winterson's novels lies in battling the "dragons" of definition that have traditionally governed male and female behaviour. The relationship between cultural normalcy and the traditional quest hero, who, in the conventional quest paradigm, is generally reintegrated unproblematically back into his community, becomes foregrounded in Winterson's explorations. The form of the quest, in Winterson's novels, founders in the apparent disjunction between her heroes and their often inhospitable communities. These difficulties are noted by Dana Heller: "[t]he

transformation of the quest-romance from a form that precludes the female subject to one that speaks directly to woman's changed position in the public sphere is a clear indication that the very concept of heroism needs to be critically scrutinized and redefined for a feminized age" (13). Winterson makes deliberate reference to this "concept of heroism," but she stresses the frequently debilitating effects of societal definitions that pertain to masculine as well as feminine behaviour. She portrays the concept of hero worship as being, for her characters, one of the most debilitating obstacles in their paths to self-awareness, particularly in regards to the male figures in her novels.

One of the most poignant examples of male heroism thwarted by societal conventions is found in *The Passion*. There are two narrators in this novel: a woman, Villanelle, and a man, Henri. Villanelle is a wonderfully strong and vibrant quest hero. She, unlike Jeanette in *Oranges*, is uncrushed by her traumatic encounters in the course of the novel. Henri, however, stands in complete contrast to Villanelle. He is a gentle, passive man who is completely unprepared for the gross reality of war. Henri decides to sign up with the recruiting officer from Napoleon's army. "When the army recruitment came," he remarks, "it was a brave band of us who laughed and said it was time we saw more than the red barn and the cows we had birthed. We signed up straight away and those of us who couldn't write made an optimistic smear on the page" (6). He expects to discover a brave new self in the course of his service to Napoleon, but it is not until he loses an eye in battle, and literally begins to "see" things differently, that he is able to view the nature of his hero worship for what it really is. The events which follow touch Henri in ways that radically transform his innocent character. At the novel's conclusion, he refuses to leave the island prison on which he has been incarcerated, preferring instead to wreathe himself in the ghosts of his dead friends. "I don't ever want to be alone again," he says, "and I don't want to see any more of the world" (152).

The most frequent feminine depictions in quest stories revolve around a slut or saint pattern of exposition, and this is an issue Winterson deals extensively with. Her interest in exploring "those things we hold dear—marriage, the church, sexuality" (Anshaw 17)—is particularly visible in her choice of female characters and their situations. Marriage is a clear target in her fictions, particularly in *Boating for Beginners*. The institution of marriage is presented here as a stifling and creatively inhibiting force for women that is rarely considered for what it is—a social option—instead, it is represented as a cultural imperative. The cultural dictates surrounding the institution of marriage are summed up in the character of Mrs. Munde, Gloria Munde's mother. Gloria's mother had, apparently, "found romance," but "it wasn't enough" (67). Mrs. Munde "was not free-thinking in a

sense that would have allowed her to question the institutions that made her moody her family, her marriage, her career prospects," and so she takes up religion, because it offers her "the space to be safe and eccentric at the same time" (67). Mrs. Munde, who merely substitutes one unsatisfactory institution for another, is an example to her daughter, who is equally unsure about where her allegiances should lie. In this context, Winterson's diatribe against marriage is clothed in a shrewdly conceived satire:

> Gloria ... had read about orgasms but she thought they were something you only had with men ... She didn't know that you could have them by yourself or in the supermarket. Bunny Mix sometimes spoke of the strange thunderclap on the wedding night, when the bride more or less melted and her new husband rolled over in tenderness and triumph—because of course the girl had never experienced the feeling of true love ...
>
> Bunny Mix called it [sex] a terrifying force and cautioned all her readers not to be ensnared too soon. She felt that even in marriage it should be measured out, otherwise, she said, it made you limp and without ambition if you were male, unnatural if you were female. Babies, she said, should keep your mind off it. (34-35)

Gloria has internalized the worst aspects of gender stereotypes, to the extent that she believes everything she reads. Orgasms are mysterious "thunderclaps" that should occur in the sanctity of marriage (and in the presence of a man). Women are filled with "unnatural" urges that are best stifled by marriage and motherhood. It is not possible, it would seem, to be a female quest hero and be married. But it is even harder to be a quest hero and have to change the baby's nappies. What Winterson does in *Boating* is to use her female characters to expose specific institutions for what they are—inhibiting cultural ideologies. Mrs. Munde is too timid to really question the institutions of marriage and motherhood—she merely does what is expected of her. In much the same spirit, her daughter Gloria also lacks the "free-thinking" spirit, at least until a variety of strange occurrences combine to bring her out of her lethargic and apathetic boredom.

The combination of marriage and motherhood is another area in which Winterson's quest heroes deviate from tradition. Mother-child relationships provide a way in which Winterson can explore her preoccupation with the difficulties facing the modern quester, but these are by no means traditional relationships. As an adopted child herself, Winterson's penchant for fictional foundlings is evident—very few of the mother/daughter

relationships are biological relationships. In her fictions, giving birth is not a prerequisite to being a mother. Nevertheless, her fictional mothers often represent old-fashioned notions of love and sexual behaviour, and the advice they give their children reflects the way they themselves have internalized cultural constraints. The admonishments facing the modern hero have very little to do with witches and wizards, but the emphasis is the same: sexuality is dangerous. 'Don't touch yourself Down There,' these mothers tell their daughters, pointing somewhere in the region of their apron pockets.

The confusing advice of their families is one of the hurdles facing Winterson's modern quest heroes. In *Oranges*, Jeanette is completely dismayed by the advice of her aunt, who tells her that "[t]here's what we want ... and there's what we get" (72). In Winterson's fictions, the female quester learns to disregard this kind of social dialogue that beset her at every opportunity. Yet, as Winterson's novels are studies in interpersonal relationships, there are many opportunities for her female characters to get waylaid. In *Boating*, Gloria is torn between the "Emotional Baby Bio" of her romance fiction and the intrusive "Gross Reality" that has very little resemblance to her romance novels, and which is infinitely less reassuring than her romance fiction. The challenge facing Winterson's female quest heroes, from the woman who is gambled away by her husband in *The Passion* to the twelve women who are forcibly married to twelve princes in *Sexing the Cherry*, is to fight the cultural proscriptions that seem to define them at every opportunity. Similarly, the challenge facing the male quest hero requires an intense scrutiny of what it means to "act like a man," and of the drastic effects a rigid adhesion to this dictum brings.

In *Boating for Beginners*, the quest facing Gloria Munde is a parodic version of what happens in *Oranges*, but with a stronger satirical emphasis on gender and sexuality. Winterson "rewrites" the Flood story, using Gloria, an intimate observer of biblical events, as her narrator. Gloria's identity is initially informed by her literary infatuation with the Harlequin-like novels of Bunny Mix. Through the plot mechanisms Winterson introduces to stir up Gloria—transsexuality, unfulfilled marriages, masturbation—we follow Gloria through the process of developing an identity that is not predicated on the delusive aspects of Bunny Mix's heterosexual romances. At the close of the novel, Gloria's transsexual friend Marlene asks Gloria about the direction of her "inner life" (152). "'I feel I can continue it after the flood,' replied Gloria evenly. 'I can think, I can string sentences together and I hope one day to manage a whole paragraph without losing my theme'" (152). This statement reflects the same emphasis on the continual process of the quest for identity that is so characteristic of Winterson's fiction.

The emphasis on the continual process of the quest for identity is very strong in *The Passion*. The quest heroes in *The Passion* are shown in differing stages of their journeys. The setting is Europe during the time of Napoleon, evidently a heady time of heroes and whores, of wars and unhealed wounds. Of the two narrators, Villanelle is more reckless, more flagrantly adventurous. Villanelle, as one critic has observed, wants every day to be Pentecost (Barr 33). The metaphor of gambling dominates Villanelle's narrative. As she says:

> Gambling is not a vice, it is an expression of our humanness.
> We gamble. Some do it at the gaming table, some do not.
> You play, you win, you play, you lose. You play. (73)

Villanelle views life much as she views her hometown of Venice—as a place where disguises abound. Villanelle has a remarkable ability to don a disguise, and this accounts for her equally remarkable ability to transcend the traumatic events that occur in her life. What is stressed through the twin narratives of Villanelle and Henri is the performative abilities necessary in their quests. Villanelle is a performer, an acrobat in her quest for identity. Henri, in contrast, is not a performer, although he longs to perform. What separates their quests is a willingness to gamble the "valuable, fabulous thing" (94) in their lives. Henri wants to be reckless, but cannot. Villanelle can, and does. The difference between them lies in Villanelle's casual philosophy. "In spite of what the monks say, you can meet God without getting up early," she says (74). At the conclusion of the novel, Villanelle continues to play with "[t]he wild card. The unpredictable wild card that never comes when it should" (144). Henri has gone mad with what he has lost. Villanelle, in contrast, has all the strength and assuredness of a true quest hero, and, as a result, she survives. She is wiser, but still a gambler.

Winterson's use of the quest motif raises, as I have shown, questions regarding gender and sexuality. In most quest literature, female characters are polarized in stereotypical patterns that merely serve to enable the hero's journey. They tempt or torment him, but they never act independently. Winterson deconstructs this pattern through a recourse to strong female heroes, and to male heroes who are our narrative witnesses to the variety of feminine forms awaiting them in their quests. Winterson's female characters, as we will see, are often larger than life. The feminized form of the quest, then, is a quest that acknowledges the need to develop quest patterns that do not stipulate a culturally acceptable male hero. It is a quest that acknowledges the fact that characters on a quest must tell their

own story, and if that story goes against the grain of tradition, then the grain of tradition must be altered to accept new definitions of quest patterns and quest heroes.

*Rewriting Myths and Fairy Tales*

The "rewriting" of cultural stories is of particular importance in the quests of Winterson's heroes. In *Oranges*, Winterson uses fairy tale adaptations and the Grail legend as developmental tools in a young girl's *bildungsroman*. In *Boating for Beginners*, she takes the Flood story and writes a parody that treats Noah as a tyrannical entrepreneur who accidentally creates God through the convergence of a bolt of lightning and a pool of melted Black Forest Gateau. *The Passion* is specifically concerned with "rewriting" the myth of Napoleon Bonaparte, and with the myths of war and male heroism. *Sexing the Cherry* returns to this theme of "rewriting" old mythologies and fairy tales, and uses the Twelve Dancing Princesses from the Grimms' fairy tales as characters in its storyline.

Winterson's "rewriting" strategies differ from those of other feminist authors in specific ways. What we are presented with, in Winterson's fictions, is a deliberate attempt to expose the ideological underpinnings of myths and fairy tales. Her point is not to call attention to a specific feminist discourse, but to reverse the historical and cultural weight of heterosexism with her own discourse of equal intensity. She contests the sexual specificity so visible in myths and fairy tales through recourse to lesbian characters and, in particular, characters who resist the categories of conventionalized gender behaviour. In this way, she argues against the universalizing heterosexist narratives that attempt to dictate the lives of her characters. These characters assume positions as authoritative, speaking subjects who counter the totalizing power of universal points of view with their own blends of sexuality.

Winterson's revisions use the original, familiar versions as frameworks, and the strength of her argument depends in part upon the reader's knowledge of the original. Her methodology begins with a displacement of the familiar. This displacement involves a strategic evolution of character portrayal, and in many cases her characters are emphatic parodies of myth and fairy tale figures. What follows, then, is an attempt to deconstruct the cultural and sexual specificity of the familiar story. In many cases, Winterson offers a specifically lesbian perspective. At times her characters delve into an alternate sexual

perspective through recourse to cross-dressing. Winterson also demonstrates her fascination with foundling children and with mothers who have not biologically given birth. Her exploration of these avenues raises questions about the socio-cultural acceptability of the unconventional family unit.

While her rewrites, particularly in *Boating for Beginners*, *The Passion*, and *Sexing the Cherry*, maintain a fascination with the extreme, what her novels articulate is the relationship between cultural acceptability and conventionality. The "affirmation of dominant culture," which Rachel DuPlessis posits as the "central function" of myths (107), is Winterson's continued focus. DuPlessis states that "myths are considered the most universal, describing deep structures of human need" (106). Both Patricia Dunckert and DuPlessis hold that myths are "culturally specific" narratives that offer a specific narratorial perspective on events. Dunckert states that myths "legitimate power structures, endorse and justify existing social arrangements [and] explain politics through symbols and metaphors" (133). These comments are central to an understanding of Winterson's rewriting of myths and fairy tales. It is precisely the affirmation of dominant culture that Winterson's quest heroes take issue with.

In *Myths to Live By*, Joseph Campbell asserts that "the moral orders of societies" are founded on myths, and that myths are "canonized" in religious precepts (10). Rebellious women, and rebellious lesbians in particular, are largely absent from traditional myths and fairy tales. Traditional fairy tales in particular are often noted for their inhumane treatment of individuals who deviate from the norm. The focus of myths and fairy tales is predicated, as Jack Zipes notes, on issues of power, oppression, and cultural conformity (8). Maria Tatar, in *Off With Their Heads*, makes an interesting point that many fairy tales seen to be "replayings of one biblical masterplot: the Genesis account of the Fall" (96). Tatar goes on to comment that the usual female role speaks a strict ideology of acceptable behaviour:

> Bawdy tales of proud women brought to a fall by spurned suitors focus on the problem of getting even and restoring the "natural" order in the hierarchy of gender. From an initial position of social inferiority, the heroes succeed in recovering their social status while at the same time putting brides in their proper place—somewhere beneath them. Cleaned-up literary versions of these tales also show old scores being settled, but they so sharpen the didactic point in these narratives of revenge that the characters themselves teach and preach. (105)

The temptation to "rewrite" mythology and fairy tales, seen from this perspective, might well seem obvious. According to Jan Montefiore, the appeal of rewriting mythology, "especially for feminists, lies not only in its archaic prestige, but in its strong connections with human subjectivity, so that using this material seems to be a way of escaping the constrictive hierarchies of tradition and gaining access to the power of definition" (56). Human subjectivity, from Winterson's perspective, emphasizes a more heterogeneous display of sexuality and gender images. Sexuality and the "acceptable" expression of it are key concerns of her "rewriting" strategies.

As a lesbian, and as a writer, Winterson's motives for rewriting myths and fairy tales might be obvious to a feminist-minded reader. Her novels affirm a culture with a difference, one that is largely forgotten in the mythological celebration of "dominant culture." In the style of Monique Wittig, whose *Les Guerillères* could be seen as a possible influence on Winterson, Winterson's "rewrites" allow her to develop strong and powerful female characters. Winterson, as is Wittig, is deeply concerned with her "task" as a writer, and her beliefs that the reader must be shaken loose from conventional perceptions evokes, with an amazing similarity, Wittig's remarks in "The Trojan Horse":

> Shklovsky ... said that the task of a writer is to re-create the first powerful vision of things—as opposed to their daily recognition. But he was wrong in that what a writer re-creates is indeed a vision, but the first powerful recognition of words, not of things. As a writer, I would be totally satisfied if every one of my words had on the reader the same effect, the same shock as if they were being read for the first time. It is what I call dealing a blow with words. (72)

Compare that statement with this excerpt from a conversation Nicci Gerrard had with Jeanette Winterson:

> Her self-appointed task is to "challenge the way people think, not just about big things but about little daily things as well—to free them from a time from gravity" ... There are two religious roles according to Winterson, who specializes in epigrammatic virtuosity: that of the priest and that of the prophet. The priests "have all the words written out already and only have to read them". The prophets, on the other hand, "are always on the edge, crying

> in the wilderness—and often what they say isn't wanted Art should be shocking—otherwise, all you are left with is entertainment—like a baby with a dummy" (13)

Both Winterson and Wittig proclaim their intention of dealing with a powerful vision of words, and in Winterson's case in particular, with a powerful reworking of cultural myths and stories that focus on the deconstruction of the dominance of heterosexist culture [5]

The heterogeneous expression of sexuality takes center stage in Winterson's novels She uses transvestites, transsexuals, lesbians, and asexual beings as primary characters In *Boating for Beginners*, a transsexual named Marlene teaches Gloria that confusion over gender identity is not the horror Gloria imagines it to be In *The Passion*, Villanelle dresses as a man and falls in love with a woman In *Sexing the Cherry*, a young girl, condemned to death for the incestuous relationship she had with her sister, teaches a young man on a quest that heroism is not the rigid formula he imagines it to be Every Winterson novel stresses the constraining social "myths" surrounding women, and the absolute necessity of "rewriting" the patterns of women's lives Yet what we see through Winterson's "rewrites" is the importance placed on the character of the hero, who is never typically beautiful or conventionally brave, but is always very different from the rest of his or her community Winterson's "contention of authenticity ... helps give power to the retold tale and authority to the teller, both necessary for confronting the cultural weight of Western civilization" (DuPlessis 108) Her novels, to use the words of Dana Heller, "exist not as sites of a substantive category of woman, but as culturally specific performative acts that speak from within and in relation to the very complex discursive and material structures that create the effects of gender identity" (120) As Heller notes, the question is not so much "who are we talking about when we talk about ... women questing," but rather "who haven't we been talking about?" (120) The answer to this question, in Winterson's fiction, is evident In Winterson's novels, the fringe-dwellers of society get their chance, and, as we will see, their narratives bear strange and thoughtful fruit

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[5] Not only do Wittig and Winterson share artistic concerns, they also have a similar interest in writing and rewriting fairy tales and myths See Monique Wittig's *L'Oppoponax* or *Les Guerrilleres*

# Chapter Two

## Born of Strange Fruit: Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*

Identity is defined by role We are offered patterns of behaviour to follow, menaces if we transgress The divisions between mothers and daughters, between sisters, between all women, are the cornerstones of patriarchy, and the fairy -tales endorse these divisions with sinister predictability
—Patricia Dunckert (153)

Questing, a woman dares to reinvent herself
—Dana Heller (1)

*Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* is a *bildungsroman* that traces the childhood and adolescence of its narrator, Jeanette Winterson employs Jeanette's lesbianism as the site of the novel's contention, a contention that develops when the religious values of her parents collide with Jeanette's "unrepentant" lesbianism *Oranges*, then, is the story of Jeanette's search for identity, her quest for definition within a community whose loyalty disappears in a puff of smoke at the merest whiff of what they consider deviant behaviour Jeanette is brought up with an intensely, fervently, and devoutly Evangelical community that divides the world into two categories Good (with reference to its members) and Evil (including everyone else) Needless to say, the members of this community, including Jeanette's parents, do not respond well to Jeanette's "deviant" sexuality This is the primary issue of the novel, and through the conflict we see Jeanette's imaginary explorations into an alternate universe of fairy tales and quest-myths in order to make some sense of the confusion that arises when she steps away from the rigid logic of her Church Every story she creates is deeply scored by themes of acceptance and tolerance Her quest is an attempt to reconcile her lesbianism with her fundamentalist upbringing As we will see, Jeanette's

quest is profoundly influenced by the rituals of Christian tradition, yet it is also a quest that is radical in its scrutiny of that same tradition.

The narrative structure of *Oranges* requires some elucidation. Using the titles from the first eight books of the Old Testament as her own chapter headings, Jeanette narrates the events of her childhood and adolescence along similar thematic lines. Her allusions to the Old Testament take on a greater significance as the events of the novel progress from innocent childhood to disillusioned adolescence. Interspersed throughout her narrative are fairy tales and legends which Jeanette has adapted for her own purposes and which she uses as emotional shields when the "reality" of the outside world shakes the foundations of the litany of religious fundamentalism she has learnt from her fanatically religious mother. She patterns events of her life in the form of a quest, but it is not, as we will see, a traditional quest.

The influence of Christian doctrine must be taken into account in any examination of the novel's structure. *Oranges* is the story of a young girl raised in a heavily Christianized atmosphere. The quest that develops through Jeanette's narrative has strong religious overtones as it concerns her awakening realization that if she is to accept her lesbian sexual identity she must attempt a deconstruction of the dogmatic fundamentalist attitudes of her Church. Her quest explorations in many ways are a radical and searing indictment of the contradictions in the Christian doctrine as interpreted by her Church. It becomes evident that Jeanette cannot remain in the community as a overtly lesbian woman, and her decision to challenge the interpretation of her Church's Christian values forms the foundation of her quest. Thus, the influence of the Christian religion on Jeanette's quest manifests in the fairy tale motifs she chooses. Each motif argues for a greater examination of the Christian injunctions of tolerance and acceptance and for a less hypocritical application of those same injunctions. Winterson uses Jeanette's "rewrites" as tools that generate greater consideration of the difficulties Jeanette faces in her Christian community if she is to remain both a Christian and a lesbian. Christian values, as interpreted by her Church members, are deeply scored with hypocrisy and selfishness.

The surface contradictions of Jeanette's quest explorations are noted by Yvonne Klein, who argues that while Jeanette bends and stretches the language of Christian mythology in her quest, ultimately she remains trapped by "the mythic structure of Judaeo-Christian religion" (334). Jeanette, Klein contends, "ransacks romantic myth for a story to replace what she has lost. But neither fairy tale nor romantic legend leads her anywhere save a resigned acceptance of her lot" (336). Klein argument touches upon several important points, but she appears to subsume the fairy tales and "romantic legend" Jeanette

uses under the rubric of the Judaeo-Christian mythology, which is misleading. Judaeo-Christian mythology did not evolve independently of the wealth of mythology preceding it, and the roots of the Judaeo-Christian mythic tradition are heavily influenced by many mythologies. What I think is more to the point is that it is the patriarchal atmosphere of the Judaeo-Christian tradition hampering Jeanette's quest, this atmosphere is reflected in the tableaux she creates. Klein infers that Jeanette's questing leaves her with nothing but "a resigned acceptance of her lot," yet I would argue that Jeanette's attitude is not one of resignation. In direct contrast to the conclusions of most fairy tales, the problem raised by Jeanette's quest is not one that can be magically resolved. Jeanette's quest is more than simply finding a place within existing communities—it is a quest that challenges the foundational parameters of her Church's belief system—and as such it not a quest that can be easily resolved by one individual. Her return to her mother at the novel's conclusion demonstrates her own growing tolerance for the contradictory and often hypocritical attitudes of her mother, and this, I would argue, is not an attitude of resignation, but instead it is an attitude of genuine tolerance and acceptance.

*Genesis*

Jeanette's attempts to establish an independent identity in relation to the distorted world of her mother's religious vision form the primary events of the narrative. She thematizes, in a rebelliously comic way, the events of her life in the form of a quest. Her quest, largely because she has been raised by her mother to believe that she has the ability to change the world, becomes synonymous with her desire to mythologize her life. Although her "birth" is, like the traditional hero's birth, both mysterious and full of strange portents, she is actually adopted by Louie and her husband. "I had been brought in," Jeanette notes, "to join [my mother] in a tag match against the Rest of the World" (3). We later discover that Louie has adopted Jeanette not from any maternal impulse but with the specific intention of using Jeanette as an offering to God. Here is Jeanette's description of how her mother, Louie, "found" Jeanette and became her mother:

> And so it was that on a particular day ... she followed a star until it came to settle above an orphanage, and in that place was a crib, and in that crib, a child. A child with too much hair.

She said, 'This child is mine from the Lord'
She took the child away and for seven days and seven nights the child cried out, for fear and not knowing. The mother sang to the child, and stabbed the demons. She understood how jealous the Spirit is of flesh.
Such warm tender flesh.
Her flesh now, sprung from her head.
Her vision.
Not the jolt beneath the hip bone, but water and the word. (10)

Jeanette narrates her adoption, in a twist of gender reversal, with an unmistakable reference to the birth of Christ.[6] But she also thematizes her "birth" with a deliberate allusion to a Biblical event of extreme import—God's creation of the world—but, in Jeanette's account, God the father is instead God the mother. Jeanette foregrounds the fact that her mother has adopted her with a specific purpose, but her depiction of events implies a purpose. In contrast to traditional quest literature this excerpt centers around the birth of a heroic female figure. Her employment of this particular motif—the birth of Christ—infers that, like Christ, Jeanette sees herself as a redeemer, although initially it is not clear what avenues Jeanette's redemptive strategies will follow.

To complicate the drama of her birth, Jeanette introduces what will later become an issue of extreme significance—the child's "warm tender flesh" the mother is so protective of. The attitude of possession that exists between Jeanette and her mother from the beginning is foregrounded here, and the lack of maternal solicitude in Jeanette's description of her birth/adoption seems deliberate. If Jeanette is the hero of *Oranges*, Louie represents the obstacles that Jeanette has to surmount. Susan Suleiman comments that, as a fictional creation, Louie is "a triumph for the novelist" but that as a character within the novel, "she is more disastrously hampering to her daughter than any male. . . . Although I am simplifying somewhat . . . I think it is not a misreading to say that the mother is represented here as being wholly on the side of patriarchy, indeed as the most vigorous defender of patriarchal values" (1990, 137). This is a common critical remark of the relationship between Jeanette and her mother. Louie is, as Suleiman notes, completely "in thrall to male authority figures. God, and his earthly representatives, a few fundamentalist pastors.

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[6] There are, however, references to other "births" in Jeanette's narrative. Athena, Greek goddess of war, who sprang fully grown and fully armed from the head of her father Zeus, and Gargantua, who also sprang from the head of his mother (her left ear in fact), in Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel*.

Fortunately for her, these authorities are quite distant, which allows her to wield considerable local power while disclaiming it" (1990, 138)

From the beginning Jeanette seems to unconsciously exceed the codes of conduct upheld by her mother and by her community Not only is she born "with too much hair," but she is also born with a strong combative will that defies the rules of her society Winterson develops Jeanette's quest in many ways that deconstruct cultural proscription, and nowhere is this more evident that in the relationship between mother and daughter The class values and societal expectations facing Jeanette are quite traditional in that they involve marriage and motherhood Although the expectations of Jeanette's mother are quite different—she wants Jeanette to become a missionary—she still expects a certain type of behaviour from her daughter Part of this behaviour involves a rigid intolerance to anything remotely sexual, and the combative stance Louie held in Jeanette's "birth" extends itself into the advice she gives her daughter about sex and sexuality When Jeanette is invited by the two women who run the corner shop to accompany them to the beach, Louie refuses without explanation, and Jeanette later overhears her mother telling a friend about the incident "She said they dealt in unnatural passions," Jeanette reports, "I thought she meant they put chemicals in their sweets" (7) It turns out that these women are rumoured to be lesbians and Louie wants them to have no influence on her daughter Her attempts to protect Jeanette from "the fruits of the flesh" come to little avail, though, as Jeanette's narrative later demonstrates

Another example of Louie's prurient attitudes towards sex comes when Jeanette, her mother, and Mrs White overhear the noisy love-making from the next-door neighbours

> One Sunday morning, just as we got in from Communion, we heard strange noises, like cries for help, coming from Next Door I took no notice, but my mother froze behind the radiogram, and started to change colour
>
> ...
>
> 'They're fornicating,' cried my mother, rushing to put her hands over my ears
>
> ...
>
> I didn't know what fornicating was, but I had read about it in Deuteronomy, and I knew it was sin But why was it so noisy? Most sins you did quietly so as not to get caught (51-52)

This example foregrounds Jeanette's initial attitude towards sex—"I took no notice"—but what her neighbours seem to be doing contradicts what she has read in Deuteronomy. Her natural curiosity is piqued by the disjunction between how her mother and Mrs. White regard the act of fornication and how her neighbours apparently observe it. She is also curious to see that even though her mother and Mrs. White seem repulsed by the fornicating going on Next Door, they make deliberate attempts to listen, placing wine glasses against the wall and listening intently. When Jeanette returns from a trip to get ice-cream the noise has stopped, and, in an attempt to further chastise her neighbours, Louie leads Jeanette and Mrs. White in a deafening chorus of religious songs. The neighbours complain loudly and the scene culminates when Louie, in a fit of zealous fervour, insults one of the neighbours with the first bit of Scripture she thinks of. The neighbour is a spotty-faced lad, and Louie's remarks are unfortunately apt. "'*The Lord will smite you with the boils of Egypt, and with the ulcers and the scurvy and the itch of which you cannot be cured*.' (Revised Standard Version)" (53). Winterson thus foregrounds Jeanette's adolescent quest for selfhood with these two incidents that demonstrate the unacceptable sexual expression of both homosexuality and heterosexuality in her religious community.

As a mother, Louie is a strong-minded character who completely dominates both Jeanette and the narrative; Jeanette is brought up with the bizarre fundamentalist notions formed by her mother, who has the first and last word in any discussion. Jeanette thematizes her mother's sense of duty in a fairy tale that characterizes Louie as a princess "of great energy and resourcefulness" who is also extremely sensitive (9). Jeanette's fairy tale describes how the princess ventures away from her castle and finds an old woman who bequeaths her wisdom and vocation as advisor and friend to " a small village of homely people" to the princess (9). The old woman dies, leaving the princess in sole charge of this village. What is most evident in Jeanette's story is the sense of purpose that the princess feels towards her new duties, and this sense of purpose describes Louie extremely accurately. Yet the one-dimensionality with which Louie pursues her religious agenda suffers under Jeanette's acid wit. "She was wrong, as far as we were concerned," Jeanette comments, "but right as far as she was concerned, and really, that's what mattered" (5). And really, this *is* what matters in *Oranges*. It is easy to laugh at Jeanette's descriptions of her mother, for Louie's fundamentalist beliefs are an easy target, but despite Jeanette's caustic commentary, we never have the impression that we are laughing with the narrator against the mother for long. As Zoe Fairbairns observes, no matter how ridiculous a portrait Jeanette paints of her mother, we are "never allowed to doubt this mother's strength" (33).

One of the goals in Jeanette's quest is her attempt to reconcile the fundamentalist vision of her Church with her own evolving ideas about gender behaviour and sexuality, and part of her quest involves the deconstruction of her mother's teachings. Jeanette's education began not with childish fairy stories, but rather with stern stories her mother takes from the Bible. "It was in this way," Jeanette says, "that I began my education".

> I discovered that everything in the natural world was a symbol of the Great Struggle between good and evil. She meant that in the short term, evil can triumph, but never for very long. We were very glad, and we sang our favorite hymn, *Yield Not To Temptation*. (15-16)

Louie's use of binary terminology in her daughter's education is deeply entrenched. She teaches Jeanette the necessity of a black-and-white vision of the world, and it is a vision that Jeanette accepts unquestioningly, at least initially, as the above excerpt indicates. "We were very glad," Jeanette says, but the fact that this event takes place before she attends public school means that her knowledge of what constitutes good and evil is probably very limited. Instead, Jeanette's education is informed by a mixture of her mother's seed catalogues, the Bible, and a magazine called *The Plain Truth*. "And so," Jeanette says, "I learned to interpret the signs and wonders that the believer might never understand" (17). Ironically, Louie will teach Jeanette about the evils of the Catholic Church but she will not teach her French, for it reminds Louie of her own explorations into "the fruits of the flesh."

Jeanette's initial attempt to work through the stories she has learned as a child cause her nothing but confusion when she is eventually sent to school. Her unorthodox disposition, and obvious differences from the traditional hero, is most noticeable is her project choices in school. Her penchant for Biblical themes is not welcomed with enthusiasm, particularly in the pedagogical sphere, and her school projects begin to alarm not only her classmates, but also her teachers.

> Mrs. Vole picked up an ink well and looked at me carefully.
>
> 'Jeanette, we think you may be having problems at school. Do you want to tell us about them?'
>
> 'I'm all right.' I shuffled defensively.
>
> 'You do seem rather pre-occupied, shall we say, with God.'
>
> ...
>
> 'My mother taught me to read,' I told them rather desperately.

> 'Yes, your reading skills are quite unusual, but you haven't answered my question.'
>
> How could I?
>
> My mother had taught me to read from the Book of Deuteronomy because it is full of animals (mostly unclean). Horsies, bunnies and little ducks were vague fabulous things, but I knew all about pelicans, rock badgers, sloths and bats. This tendency towards the exotic has brought me many problems, just as it did for William Blake.
>
> ...
>
> 'Well,' pressed Mrs. Vole, 'I'm waiting.' (40-41)

Jeanette's irony here clearly foregrounds the gulf in comprehension between herself and her teachers. Mrs. Vole's discomfort with Jeanette's religious attitudes intensifies to the point that she eventually sends Louie a letter outlining her concerns about the immoderate religious leanings Jeanette displays. We might laugh at Jeanette's depiction of the situation, but it is evident that, as we saw in her "birth," Jeanette carefully develops these contentious aspects of her narrative with a common theme—she is different. She stands apart from the crowd, and there is the obvious hint that she sees her martyred status as a noble one: "If it had not been for the conviction that I was right, I might have been very sad. ... I told my mother how things were once. 'We are called to be apart,' she said" (42).

Mrs. Vole's reception of Jeanette's penchant for Biblical themes reveals to Jeanette the vast gulf in comprehension between those who share her religious leanings and those who do not. After her explorations in the pedagogical sphere, she begins to experiment with the Biblical stories she has hitherto unquestioningly accepted. Her "rewrites" display an inventively transgressive desire to alter the sacred texts of convention and seek new avenues of expression and alternate modes of perception. One example of her transgressive impulse is when Jeanette rearranges the Fuzzy Felt creatures in the Sunday School playroom to tell a different tale of the story of Daniel in the lion's den. Jeanette tells us that she "was just beginning to enjoy a rewrite" when her pastor enters the room and is aghast that she has mistakenly allowed the lions to eat Daniel, although it would seem that her mistake was nothing of the sort (12). Putting on her "best, blessed face," she assures him that she really meant to do the Jonah and the whale story, and dupes him into believing that she is just an innocent child.

Jeanette's "rewrites" display a definite tension between the duty she feels towards her mother and her growing awareness of the contradictions in the Church's interpretations

of the Bible. She alludes to this tension early on, but, as she indicates, her desires seem to be running counter to the parameters of her Church's moral instincts, and she wants to put off the inevitable confrontation of the two. "Since I was born," she comments, "I had assumed that the world ran on very simple lines, like a larger version of our church. Now I was finding that even the church was sometimes confused. This was a problem. But not one I chose to deal with for many years more" (26-7). Instead, she subsumes her questions in a happy and conflict-free fairy tale world. The differences between what her mother tells her and the outside world shows her provides the impetus for Jeanette's creations. "I didn't understand the ground rules," she explains, "The daily world was a world of Strange Notions, without form, and therefore void. I comforted myself as best I could by always rearranging their version of the facts" (47).

Initially, Jeanette's "re-arranged versions" express themselves as wish-fulfillment tales, as in the story of the emperor Tetrahedron (47-8). As a wish-fulfillment device, this story is comforting, but it promotes an illusory reality that is not sustainable in her daily world, as she discovers that day in the library reading fairy tales. While Bruno Bettelheim defines the prime function of the conventional fairy tale as being "the relief of all pressures" (36) for the child, his remarks do not resonate in Jeanette's experiences. As wish-fulfillment devices, Jeanette's fairy tales promote a sense of security only as long as she refuses to confront the patriarchal authority of her mother's attitudes. As a young female she is expected to participate and uphold the sexist mentality of her Church, even if it involves personal sacrifice. Bettelheim's remarks point out how differently fairy tales are perceived by theorists. He intimates that fairy tales provide encouragement to the child about the eventual resolution of family conflicts. But Bettelheim's readings come from a perspective that does little to address the issues faced by children who are different. Bettelheim also expounds a theory that pays scant attention to the difficulties confronting young girls. Young women, in Jeanette's Church, are expected to defer to the masculine authority of the Church Elders and remain in a subordinate intellectual position. The contradictions of this perceived "wisdom" is not only confusing for Jeanette, it also teaches her that what she wants is neither important to nor valued by her community. Jennifer Waelti-Walters alludes to this in *Fairy Tales and the Female Imagination*, arguing that, far from reassuring young girls about the eventual resolution of their conflicts, fairy tales actually "teach girls to accept at least a partial loss of identity" (7), and this is indeed the realization that Jeanette comes to in her fairy tales. Her "rewrites" are meant to challenge the authority of "official versions." The world that evolves from these creations "arms Jeanette," as Klein aptly puts it (333). "When troubled by the contradiction between the

'daily world' and her own and her mother's eschatological vision, she subsumes the quotidian world into her own myth, a conflation of biblical and ordinary fact" (Klein 333) As a support mechanism, this tactic gives Jeanette some comfort but it is unable to transcend the barrier between her childish world and the adult world into which she is moving. The comforting power of fairy tales can no longer be relied upon to challenge the conventions and traditions expected of her as an adult woman.

Eventually, the tension between the Church's teachings and her own internal queries manifests in Jeanette's "first theological disagreement," which originates in a sermon expounding the belief that "Perfection is flawlessness" (58). Her disagreement is explained in a fairy tale steeped with Christian and metaphysical allusions. The plot details a prince's search for a perfect wife and his eventual problem when he finds a woman who is perfect but who has no interest in being his wife. The fairy tale characters that Jeanette's tale utilizes are recognizable: there is a prince and there is also a beautiful and intelligent woman. But there is a definite tension in the narrative that points to the expected behaviour of traditional fairy tale characters. The woman of Jeanette's tale is not interested in marriage and she suffers because of this. The prince ostensibly has her beheaded for refusing his marriage proposal but the advice of his royal advisor insinuates that there might be more than one reason. The prince's advisor, from the beginning of the tale, evinces an obsession with the prince's public reputation. He convinces the prince that the defiant attitude of the woman must be punished if the prince is to maintain his kingdom. The protestations of the prince—that no one will believe him—are met with the response that the people will always believe him, and the prince follows the advice accordingly. He has the woman publicly beheaded.

In this fairy tale Jeanette's argument centers on the relationship between perfection and flawlessness. Perfection, as Jeanette develops it, is not flawless. The characters in her fairy tale—the prince in particular—have their flaws, but through the teachings of the woman they learn that the search for perfection is really "the search for balance, for harmony" (62). Perfection, she tells them, "lies in the sphere of [their] own hands" (64). The story-line in Jeanette's fairy tale evolves through her growing awareness that her Church's interpretation of Biblical doctrine is flawed and controversial, and what she does in her "rewrite" of the conventional fairy tale is to show how any challenge to dominant ideologies often results in social victimization. The woman, who does not want to marry the prince because marriage is not something she is "interested in" (61), teaches the prince that there is a greater logic to the world than the one he has written about. She refutes his beliefs and refuses to marry him. The prince and his advisor might be able to overlook this,

but when the woman deconstructs the prince's arguments with her own obviously superior intellect, the prince and his advisors quickly work to silence her. The prince's book—*The Holy Mystery of Perfection*—is evidently a loose allusion to the Christian doctrine as practiced by Jeanette's Church, and what Jeanette's fairy tale expounds is the problems encountered when one individual attempts to disagree with the expression of a dominant social ideology. Jeanette's disagreements with the interpretive strategies of her Church manifests her awareness that the polemical position she is taking will never be comfortably accepted by the other Church members. The reigning Church ideology as taught by the Church Elders must be accepted without question. The woman in Jeanette's fairy tale recognizes the hypocritical underpinnings of the prince's argument, but her difference of opinion threatens the balance of power in the prince's kingdom and so she must be silenced if the prince is to maintain his dominance.[7]

One notable element in this fairy tale is its humour. It is demonstrative of Jeanette's sense of humour. The key word here is rebelliousness. Jeanette's fairy tale emphasizes the power of rebellion through the subversive tactic of laughter. Not the witty and teasing laughter apparent in previous scenes of *Oranges*, but the laughter of ridicule and scorn. Laughter becomes the means of complicity between Jeanette and the reader. The prince and his advisors are exposed as the obvious dupes of the narrative, they become ridiculous in the extreme, and this is precisely Jeanette's intention. They are shown to be too overtly concerned both with their public images and with their positions of power. The prince's book, which blends parochial eugenics with a misguided philosophy, is faulted not so much for its subject matter, but rather for the conclusions it draws. The prince delineates his strategies for building the perfect race of people, a thinly veiled allusion to the Frankenstein motif, which Jeanette uses in part as a parody of Louie's intentions for Jeanette as well as a critique of her Church's rigid adherence to a philosophy that has severe flaws.

In traditional fairy tales, the female body is one of the places where the political and cultural interdictions of the society intercept. The traditional quest paradigm manifests the same methodology. Female characters have no identity other than as plot elements in the

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[7] Interestingly, this fairy tale is closely modeled on the Celtic legend of St. Winifred, the patron saint of virgins. In the Celtic legend, Winifred was beheaded for refusing to marry the Welsh prince Caradoc, and the blood from her body also became a lake. Jeanette's allusion to this tale can only raise further questions on the portrayals of marriage in fairy tales and legends. There are very few examples in mythology and fairy tales of women who are able to resist social pressure and remain unmarried (and/or childless). In *Sexing the Cherry*, Winterson uses one of these few examples—the huntress Artemis—as a character

hero's adventures—they are familiar to the reader in their roles as beautiful princesses, evil step-mothers and wicked witches. These polarities of feminine expression are invariably treated the same in every fairy tale: good girls marry handsome princes and wicked witches are punished with death. In Jeanette's fairy tale the woman is a complex figure. She may not be able to subvert the prince's dominant position of authority, but she is able to effectively demonstrate the foolishness of his beliefs. She is given a dominant subject position from which to speak, and what she tells the villagers forms a powerful critique of the prince's philosophy. The narrative outcome, in a reversal of traditional fairy tale convention, becomes a critical statement about the sociocultural conventions imposed on women and the brute force present to "persuade" them to act in a normative way.

As Jeanette approaches adolescence, though, she is inundated with more than just religious ideology, and her struggles to find a comfortable sense of selfhood increase with the barrage of traditional advice she is given by a series of well-meaning neighbours. Winterson uses Jeanette's sexual development to develop the difficulties facing the child who is not conventionally heterosexual. While Jeanette's intellectual differences have always been foregrounded in *Oranges*, her sexual difference is treated with a greater attention to detail, particularly regarding the subject of marriage. As she matures, Jeanette's dreams are always the same: she is about to be married. In these dreams, her husband-to-be is inevitably an unexpected and unpleasant surprise. "Sometimes he was blind," Jeanette comments, "sometimes a pig, sometimes my mother, sometimes the man from the post-office, and once, just a suit of clothes with nothing inside" (69). The advice she gets from the adults she knows—"Everyone always said you found the right man"—does little to assuage her fear that she might unwittingly marry a pig (70). She decides to seek advice from the books in the local library. "In the library," she says, "I felt better, words you could trust and look at till you understood them, they couldn't change halfway through a sentence like people, so it was easier to spot a lie" (70). What she discovers in a book of fairy tales, however, is deeply disquieting, for it is filled with stories that have no resonance in her everyday life. She reads *Beauty and the Beast* and is astounded to see Beauty transform her Beast into a handsome prince with a simple kiss. She reads *Little Red Riding Hood* and is equally horrified that the wolf has such a clever disguise. Her reaction to these stories is twofold. Jeanette feels sympathy for the women in the world who have unwittingly married beasts and are unable to transform them with a kiss, but also anger that these beasts should be able to perpetrate such deceitful attacks on the women who unwittingly marry them. The disappointment, she thinks, must be unbearable. "Why had

no one told me?" she wonders, "Did that mean that no one else knew? Did that mean that all over the globe, in all innocence, women were marrying beasts?" (71)

For advice on the confusing subject of marriage Jeanette turns to her mother Louie's reaction is typically unhelpful, and she gives Jeanette some rather cryptic (and unfortunate as it turns out) words of wisdom when Jeanette asks Louie why she had married Jeanette's father

> 'We had to have something for you, and besides, he's a good man, though I know he's not one to push himself But don't you worry, you're dedicated to the Lord, I put you down for missionary school as soon as we got you Remember Jane Eyre and St John Rivers ' A faraway look came into her eye " (72)

The reference to Jane Eyre, although Louie is unaware of it, is certainly no reassurance for Jeanette As Jeanette implies, *Jane Eyre* has been a metaphorical touchstone between herself and her mother It is her mother's favorite book, apart from the Bible, one that Louie has read to Jeanette over and over again Unfortunately though, Louie changed the ending when reading it to Jeanette and this Jeanette discovers one day while on "a sort of nostalgic pilgrimage that dreadful day in a back corner of the library" (73) It turns out that Jane Eyre did not marry St John Rivers, as Louie implied, but instead returns to Rochester Thus, when Louie refers to *Jane Eyre*, Jeanette knows better than to believe her mother's words She decides that the advice of her neighbours is too confusing and solaces herself with Biblical pursuits "Eventually," she says, "I'll fall in love like everybody else Then some years later, quite by mistake, I did" (75)

When Jeanette does eventually fall in love, however, it is not exactly "like everybody else " Her first lover is a young woman who works in a fish-stall in the local market, and her name is Melanie The first thing Jeanette notices about Melanie are her eyes which are a "lovely grey, like the cat Next Door" (78) This allusion to the neighbours (the ones who were sinning so noisily) is not the only reference we have that the relationship between Jeanette and Melanie is not "like everybody else " The fruit metaphor of the book's title, which Winterson employs as an obvious allusion to the differences of sexual expression, is most noticeable with regards to Jeanette's relationship with Melanie While Jeanette's mother considers oranges to be "[t]he only fruit" (29), Melanie is so named because of her resemblance at birth to a melon Jeanette becomes deeply infatuated with Melanie, and as their friendship matures they become lovers Jeanette's representation of

their first sexual encounter is portrayed with a tenderness that is absent in her other relationships

> We read the Bible as usual, and then told each other how glad we were that the Lord had brought us together She stroked my head for a long time, and then we hugged and it felt like drowning Then I was frightened but couldn't stop There was something crawling inside my belly I had an octopus inside me
>
> And it was evening and it was morning, another day
>
> 'Do you think this is Unnatural Passion?' I asked her once
>
> 'Doesn't feel like it According to Pastor Finch, that's awful ' She must be right, I thought (86)

From this example it is evident that Jeanette has some indication that her sexual relationship with Melanie is a transgressive one, although she manages to subdue her unease with Melanie's rational assurances that Unnatural Passion must be something awful But what stimulates Jeanette's unease is the issue that what they are doing is pleasurable—hence it must be wrong

Same-sex desire is treated, in this *bildungsroman*, much like any other passionate first love, and that is one of the more radical aspects of the novel Winterson employs a very simple rationale in this aspect of *Oranges*, and she develops the genesis of Jeanette and Melanie's relationship first as an innocent friendship that gradually turns into a profound force between two willing young women She treats the sexual attraction as a natural evolution in their relationship and not as some furtive or degraded passion Thus, when Jeanette and Melanie are castigated in front of their Church for their transgressions, the sympathies of the reader are largely in Jeanette's favour

In *Sisters and Strangers* Patricia Dunckert sees *Oranges* as a "parable," and argues that "it is important to the structure of [Jeanette's] parable that the pathological view of Lesbianism which involves distress, grief, shame and fear is very clearly shown to be in the minds of Other People The only problem with this assertion is that most of the time this is not the case, it is in our minds too" (178-9) "Being Lesbian," Dunckert continues, "simply becomes another form of being Chosen Thus, the struggle against the Family of God is presented in their terms rather than in those of a Lesbian feminist consciousness There is nothing at all problematic in Jeanette's head about being a Lesbian or Lesbian

sexuality. One day you just see a woman, fall in love with her and there you are" (178-9). Dunckert makes an important point about Jeanette's attitudes towards her lesbianism, yet it is apparent that Jeanette's perspective is that of a young girl, and in this sense there *is* nothing problematic about romantic love with another girl. Any sexual education she might have gleaned from her mother merely compounds her naiveté and gives her very few hard facts about human sexual instinct and the "normal" expression of it. Louie continually demonstrates to Jeanette her belief that any sexual expression is abnormal. Thus, when Jeanette falls in love with Melanie, she does so with scant awareness of the consequences of a same-sex relationship. The puritanical and cryptic advice her mother has given her is outweighed by the intensity of pleasure she derives from her relationship with Melanie. Dunckert, to my mind, misses the point. Jeanette's lesbianism is not presented in the terms of a "Lesbian feminist consciousness" because Jeanette does not have a "Lesbian feminist consciousness." She has a naive and essentially traditional outlook on sexuality that is largely informed by the religious interpretations of her mother. Sex has always been treated in her family as a pathological symptom to be expunged through prayer. Jeanette's lesbian feminist perspective develops only after she has been castigated by her Church for her relationship with Melanie, and her narrative reflects this. The point at which Jeanette falls in love with Melanie is still at an innocent stage of wonder and newly-discovered physical pleasure.

Moreover, while the physical and emotional experience of Jeanette's lesbianism is carefully inscribed in the text as a socially transgressive one, it is portrayed as a more inherently satisfying one. The depth of emotional bonding in Jeanette's early relationship with Melanie (and later with Katy) contrasts markedly with the heterosexual relationships in the novel, particularly the marriages of Jeanette's parents and of her aunt. Jeanette's attitude towards men is initially one of distaste, and her position later is one of patient, but bored, tolerance. "As far as I was concerned," she says, "men were something you had around the place, not particularly interesting, but quite harmless" (126). The peripheral position of the women in her community who are not heterosexual is foregrounded by Jeanette: the two purported lesbians who run the corner shop, Miss Jewsbury, and Doreen's daughter Jane are all objects of sly gossip and ostracism in the eyes of the local townsfolk. In a community largely dominated by strong women, these 'other' women remain shadowy characters of uncertain reputation. Unmarried women are regarded with suspicion, the two women who run the paper shop demonstrate this. Although we have no reason to doubt the fact, we have only the gossip Jeanette overhears to inform us that they are lesbians. Equally suspect is Doreen's daughter Jane, a girl who apparently spends too much time with her

girlfriend. Her mother's reaction to the suggestion that the daughter could always go away to university (and presumably continue her suspect activities), upholds a grim recognition and continuation of the power hierarchy: "Frank won't put up with that, he wants grandchildren" (75). Miss Jewsbury, another lesbian member of Jeanette's congregation, is barely tolerated by Louie and the other female members. The function of women in Jeanette's community is clear: to maintain the stability of the masculine network. Jeanette's reaction to the expectations of this female community is one of revulsion and dismay. Even more depressing is the advice of her aunt: "There's what we want," she tells Jeanette, "and there's what we get, remember that" (72).

Although Jeanette gives no indication that she has tried to hide her feelings from the Church members, her sexual relationship with Melanie soon becomes obvious, and the events that follow are foregrounded as a revolution. At the annual Harvest Festival Banquet, she and Melanie stand on the balcony looking down at their "family." "It was safe," Jeanette says (86), but her narrative employs an interesting allusion to the 1917 Russian Revolution:

> The elect have always been this way.
> Getting old, dying, starting again. Not noticing
> Father and Son. Father and Son.
> It has always been this way, nothing can intrude.
> Father Son and Holy Ghost.
> Outside, the rebels storm the Winter Palace. (87)

Here is Jeanette's battle cry. Her reference to the Holy Trinity, in the context of a revolt against "the elect," indicates the purpose of her intentions. The Winter Palace that is her Church is the site of the revolution, and in this brief declarative paragraph Jeanette's quest crystallizes.

*The last book of the law*

The events describing Jeanette's exodus from her family are preceded by a brief chapter entitled "DEUTERONOMY. The last book of the law," and in this chapter Jeanette's argument with the rigid doctrine of her Church is most fully developed. Her

argument stands as a challenge to those who pretend "an order that does not exist, to make a security that cannot exist" (93)

> When the Pilgrim Fathers set sail it was not without the opinion of many that they were crazy History has now decided otherwise Curious people who are explorers must bring back more than a memory or a story, they must bring home potatoes or tobacco or, best of all, gold
>
> But happiness is not a potato
>
> And El Dorado is more than Spanish gold which is why it could not exist The ones who came home were mad with a vision that had no meaning And so, being sensible, the collector of curios will surround himself with dead things, and think about the past when it lived and moved and had being The collector of curios lives in a derelict railway station with a video of various trains He is the original living dead (92-3)

Jeanette's argument concerns the justification of her quest She compares her quest aspirations with the goals of "the curious" who "are always in some danger" (92) "If you are curious," she says, "you might never come home" (92) Her argument rests on the two choices facing the traditional quest hero if you stay you will be "mad with a vision that ha[s] no meaning" and if you go it will not be "without the opinion of many" who disapprove The crisis of legitimation in the quests of past explorers, as Jeanette's examples indicate, changes over time What is folly to one generation, she argues, is later regarded with pride by another, and the attempt to treat the past with objective respect is futile She concludes with her own advice "If you want to keep your own teeth, make your own sandwiches " (93) What Jeanette does in this chapter filters into the following chapters with a vengeance, as she attempts to "make [her] own sandwiches" "laced with mustard of [her] own "

*Joshua Judges Ruth*

With the introduction of "The last book of the law," Jeanette has, in effect, thrown down a gauntlet before her Church, and nowhere are the battlelines more carefully apparent

than in Jeanette's relationship with Melanie. The schism between Jeanette and Church doctrine widens when she attempts to explain her growing feelings for Melanie to her mother. Jeanette's careful explanation stumbles in her inability to describe the complexity of her emotions to her mother.

> I explained how much I wanted to be with Melanie, that I could talk to her, that I needed that kind of friend. And ... And ... But I never managed to talk about and ... My mother had been very quiet, nodding her head from time to time, so that I thought she understood some of it. When I finished I gave her a little kiss, which I think surprised her a bit, we never usually touched except in anger. (100)

Jeanette obviously underestimates her mother's sense of duty to the Church, though, and the catastrophe that follows forcibly moves Jeanette to the understanding that her mother will always put her duty to the Church before her family. Louie, who sees Jeanette's revelations as the work of Satan, informs the Church Elders that her daughter is infected with demons and the following Sunday Jeanette and Melanie are brought before the congregation and publicly reviled for their sins. It is ironic that the strength of character Louie has instilled in Jeanette gives her the fortitude to resist the wrath of the pastor. She is forced into a public debate with the pastor about the sins of the flesh, and she is able to counter the words of St. Paul with her own argument: "To the pure all things are pure" (103). Melanie, in complete contrast, immediately capitulates to Pastor Finch's self-righteous anger, and she agrees to repent of her "sin" and "beg the Lord to forgive [her]" (103). The debate culminates as Jeanette runs from the church and is intercepted by Miss Jewsbury.

Miss Jewsbury's character presents the novel with another lesbian viewpoint, although Miss Jewsbury is not a major figure in the narrative. She could be indicative of what Jeanette will be if she remains closeted in her lesbianism within the confines of the Church, for it is not obvious that Miss Jewsbury is a lesbian until this encounter with Jeanette, although it is evident that she is not wholly accepted by the Church parish. What she makes Jeanette realize, however, is that her lesbian sexuality is something to keep hidden. Miss Jewsbury chastises Jeanette for her flagrant indiscretion, and we recognize in her words—"it's my problem too"—the character of a woman who has spent her life hiding her sexuality from the members of her community (104). She attempts to comfort Jeanette, stroking her neck and shoulders, and the sexual encounter that results is presented

by Jeanette as an event she "hated but would not stop" (104) Winterson presents Jeanette's encounter with Miss Jewsbury as a turning point in Jeanette's quest Until this moment Jeanette saw her relationship with Melanie as a relatively unproblematic arrangement that could be comfortably accommodated within the doctrine of Christianity Miss Jewsbury's admonishments lead Jeanette to the uncomfortable realization that her Church family will never permit her to remain as a lesbian Christian woman in their midst

Echoes of her previous fairy tale surface as Jeanette undergoes a ritual exorcism in an attempt to drive the demons from her body This exorcism is fully condoned by her mother, although fourteen hours later Jeanette refuses to renounce "the demon" of her desire and the Elders disappointedly depart When her mother locks her up in the front parlour for the next thirty-six hours in an effort to break her will, Jeanette is visited by an ambiguously sexed orange demon, who warns her against the parochial attitudes of the Church Elders Jeanette's response to the demon centers on the Biblical attitude that demons are evil, while the demon reassures her that demons are a necessary part of a person's "aura" "But in the Bible you keep getting driven out," Jeanette argues, and the demon counters this with a response of his own "'Don't believe all you read'" (106) It evidently convinces her to rearrange her tactics, for when the Elders return she pretends to capitulate, and the exorcism concludes with both sides feeling victorious Later, when Jeanette is lying ill in bed after her aborted reunion with a fearful and profoundly altered Melanie, the orange demon reappears and tells her that, having made her choice, she can never return to what she was As a talisman, he leaves her with a "rough brown pebble" (111)

The parameters of Jeanette's quest take place primarily within the enclosure of the family home, and her reference to the Books of Joshua, Judges, and Ruth indicates precisely where her quest differs from the traditional quest In the traditional quest paradigm the hero embarks upon his quest alone and always leaves his family behind in his quest for independence and maturation In *Oranges*, Winterson employs an element of twentieth-century realism in her adaptation of the quest paradigm She constructs the relationship between Jeanette and her mother with a particular kind of attention to the emotional complexities of the mother-daughter bond What Jeanette discovers through her questing is that even when she matures and discovers the often bizarre contradictions in Church doctrine, she is unable to sever the bond that ties her to her family and to her mother in particular She can deconstruct the patriarchal teachings of the Church, but her mother remains a powerful figure in Jeanette's personal mythology

The lack of an explicitly lesbian role model in either Biblical tradition or in quest literature could be seen as the major stumbling block in Jeanette's quest. Neither within the structure of biblical tradition, nor within the web of fairy tales and legends that she uses, is there any reference to the alternate modes of sexuality that lesbianism offers. Jeanette's difficulties are largely informed by her inability to balance the demands of her gender with the demands of her community. That is, what is expected of a young girl like Jeanette is vastly at odds with what Jeanette herself wants. Jeanette is a lesbian in a largely heterosexual community. The social organization of relationships between the sexes is clearly delineated. Heterosexuality, both as identity and as institution, is the norm. She can "rewrite" the Bible in her fantasies, but she will never be accepted as a "normal" female by her community. Their cultural dictates bar her from participating freely, as a lesbian, in mainstream activities in her Church. No one is prepared to overlook her "deviant" sexuality, and Jeanette is too combative to pretend otherwise. "At first, for me," she comments, "it had been an accident. That accident had forced me think more carefully about my own instincts and other's attitudes. After the exorcism I had tried to replace my world with another just like it, but I couldn't. I loved God and I loved the church, but I began to see that as more and more complicated" (126). This is what has been confronting her, both in her fantasy sequences, and in her daily world: the cultural traditions and expectations surrounding her behaviour as a female. Yet she wants to remain part of her community, part of her home, and knows this to be an impossible desire. In the traditional quest formula, the hero, after his journey is completed, returns home to his community, where he is generally welcomed with open arms. Jeanette, as the quest hero of her own narrative, is not able to emulate the hero's conventional actions, as is evidenced by the last of her fairy tale and mythic adaptations.

As the events of Jeanette's narrative become more and more controversial, the tone of her narrative abandons its naive wonder and gentle good humour and takes on an increasingly cynical point of view. This is perhaps where Jeanette's quest most clearly separates itself from the traditional quest. Here is a "hero" who has ventured out to fight the "dragons" of heterosexuality and cultural conformity that threaten her, only to realize that her mother is more loyal to these "dragons" than she is to her own daughter. Jeanette's inability to "rewrite" the relationship between her mother and herself becomes evident in the last two stories Jeanette tells us. The tale of Winnet Stonejar and the legend of the Grail knight Perceval articulate the final point of dissention between Jeanette and her Church family. The spirited rebelliousness that characterizes the early humour of the novel disintegrates as Jeanette is increasingly unable to reconcile the burgeoning palimpsest of

contestatory voices and visions. The impish spark that is so characteristic of her early personality founders in her failure to fully articulate her lesbianism with the moral parameters of Church doctrine. The parameters of the traditional hero's quest are ineffective in this girl's quest for independence and identity, because the traditional quest hero always conforms to what is expected of him in his quest. Jeanette's quest offers a protean vision—partly because of her education and partly because of her mother, but mostly because of her religion. The sheer force of the Church in Jeanette's life permeates the entire novel, and in the end we are left with the uncomfortable feeling that the Force of Divine Love is really just an exercise in power.

Winterson offers the last two mythic structures of Jeanette's imaginative world, the stories of Winnet Stonejar and of Perceval, as signposts of the direction that Jeanette's quest is about to take. Unlike the Grail hero Perceval, who in the Arthurian legends leaves his mother quite literally lying dead on the road behind him, Jeanette is unable to reconcile the "White Queen" mother of her childhood with the treacherously unforgiving mother who appears in the more critical light of Jeanette's battles with Church doctrine. When Jeanette's lesbianism becomes a major parish issue, Louie sees her years of careful cultivation gone to waste, and sides with the church against her daughter. She tells the congregation that Jeanette, despite her missionary potential, "had spurned [her] call in order to wield power on the home front, where it was inappropriate" (131). "She ended by saying that having taken on a man's world in other ways I had flouted God's law and tried to do it sexually," Jeanette remarks, "This was no spontaneous speech" (131-32). Angered by her mother's conspiracy with the patriarchal authorities of the Church dictates, Jeanette reacts with the harshest criticism she can think of: "If there's such a thing as spiritual adultery, my mother was a whore" (131-32).

Jeanette's adaptation of the Grail legend represents her polemic relationship with Church doctrine. She becomes the questing knight Perceval, the renowned knight of Arthurian fame who was given a second chance to seek the Grail.[8] There are obvious affinities between Jeanette and Perceval, not the least of which is the fact that both are essentially fatherless. Like Perceval, Jeanette has an overprotective mother who attempts to shield her from the realities of the world, and, like Perceval, Jeanette initially followed her mother's advice in a naively literal manner, without reflecting on it or allowing any voice to her own thoughts and opinions. The most telling point of similarity is the fact that what

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[8] Winterson draws heavily on the Wolfram von Eschenbach version in her adaptation, for in this version the Grail is a stone, which has similarities to Winterson's use of the "rough brown pebble" given to Jeanette by the orange demon as a token of strength and power.

sends both Perceval and Jeanette off on their quests is the very thing against which their mothers sought to shield them—their uncanny fascination with the outside world.

By situating herself metaphorically in the person of Perceval, Jeanette attempts to locate an identity and a purpose which would reconcile the beliefs of her religious community with those of the "daily world," and with her own maturing vision. That she chooses the innocent and naive Perceval as her literary ego is significant. In the Arthurian legends, Perceval's Grail quest can only be completed once he has learned to disregard the advice given him by an old man. This advice—that a real knight never asks personal questions—aborts Perceval's quest when he allows his concern for his social appearance as a knight to interfere with his desire to help the Fisher King. Only when he asks how the Fisher King has been wounded can the fertility of the land be restored, and with it, the successful culmination of Perceval's quest. Her use of the Grail motif provokes obvious parallels with the situation that exists between her and the Church as her vision of the Christian faith moves away from what she believed as a child. Through her questing Jeanette learns that, like Perceval, she must deconstruct the wisdom of her elders if she is to achieve her desired goal. Her concerns and fears about the validity of her purpose are articulated most clearly in this passage, as Perceval attempts to justify his quest.

> His journey seemed fruitless, and himself misguided. His host had asked him why he had left, not really wanting to hear, presuming reasons of his own, that the king was mad, or the Round Table ruined. Perceval had stayed silent. He had gone for his own sake, nothing more. He had thought that day of returning. He felt himself being pulled like a bobbin of cotton, so that he was dizzy and wanted to give in to the pull and wake up round familiar things. (168)

Perceval remains in a self-imposed stasis, unable to leave, yet unable to go back. This is the position Jeanette finds herself in. She has left her mother's home but, as she discovers, it is impossible for her to forget about the past—its memory will always haunt her. Her quest for a new Grail vision wavers between possibility and inevitability, as it founders on the paradoxical recognition that her Church's interpretation of the Bible will always treat her lesbianism as a mark of sin. Her allusions to Perceval articulate her awareness that she is trapped by the traditions of Christian doctrine. Winterson's use of the quest motif deconstructs the contradiction that exists in the traditional quest narrative that is informed by the relation of the hero to cultural normalcy. His appearance as a socially

acceptable hero is an unvarying condition of his status as a hero in his community. Jeanette, in the guise of Perceval, breaks with social conformity when she comes out as an unrepentant lesbian, and as such she is unable to translate her experiences into a traditionally heroic narrative. How she attempts to construct herself as the hero of her narrative follows the Perceval legend in the "rewritten" fairy tale of Winnet Stonejar and the wizard.

The tale of Winnet Stonejar and the sorcerer replays the story of Jeanette's early childhood experiences. It employs allusions to Jeanette's adoption, to her unusual religious education, and to the struggle for autonomy that has characterized her interactions with the Church. As with Jeanette's other stories, the affiliations with the persons and events of her life form the basis of this fairy tale. Winnet, like Jeanette, is told by the sorcerer who cares for her that she was "specially entrusted to his care by a powerful spirit" (141), and she accepts this unconditionally, although we know from the narrative that the sorcerer has deceived Winnet somewhat. She becomes the sorcerer's apprentice and he teaches her everything he knows. His duties recall Jeanette's short fairy tale about her mother, for the sorcerer, like Louie, is the local authority in his village. He is a strong character who represents the power of traditional religious sanction, and he is not receptive to Winnet's independent streak. When Winnet interrupts her father's annual religious ritual, the sorcerer views her actions as a challenge to his authority. He attempts to punish her through her friend, a young boy from the village, but Winnet's refusal to be cowed increases his anger. "Daughter, you have disgraced me," he says, "and I have no more use for you. You must leave" (143). Fortunately for Winnet, her friend the raven gives her some words of advice. "You won't lose your power you know, you'll use it differently, that's all. . . Sorcerers can't take their gifts back, ever, it says so in the book," he says (143). He advises her to leave the village, for it would only remind her of her former life as the daughter of a powerful sorcerer. He vomits up a "rough brown pebble" as a token of remembrance. "It's my heart," he tells her, "You see I chose to stay, oh, a long time ago, and my heart grew thick with sorrow, and finally set. It will remind you" (144). This pebble is a talisman, identical to the pebble given to Jeanette by the orange demon, and it exists as a reminder that she has chosen a specific direction in which to quest. But some tokens of Winnet's past are inescapable, most specifically her relationship with her father, who secretly slips into her room and ties an invisible string to her button. Winnet, like Jeanette, is unable to escape the inevitable ties of her family.

Winnet "sets off down the most obvious path" in her departure from the village, and soon falters in great despair and homesickness (148). Fortunately she is revived by a

mysterious woman who "knew nothing of the magic arts, but she understood the different kinds of sorrow and their effects" (148). This woman restores Winnet's physical health, but Winnet is unable to learn her language.

> The woman tried to teach Winnet her language, and Winnet learned the words but not the language. Certain constructions baffled her, and in an argument they could always be used against her, because she could not use them in return. (148-9)

Jeanette develops Winnet's story as a parallel to her own. Her departure from the home of her mother was inevitable, but in Winnet's story we see the pathos of Jeanette's experience as she is unable to adapt to a secularized vision of the world. The "language" she learned as a child contrasts sharply with the "language" of her new community, and she is unable to learn it effectively. Her sexuality seems to have found some expression, as the presence of the compassionate woman who rescues her indicates, but Winnet's quest has no clear sense of direction until she determines to seek the mythical city "where truth mattered" (154). She has, like Jeanette, "[o]nly a conviction that what she wanted could exist, if she dared to find it" (154). Winnet's quest follows the familiar pattern of many quests: her vision is to be found at the end of a long journey. She builds a boat and sails away, not completely sure of her skills, but certain that what she is doing is right. Jeanette's quest, through the persona of Winnet Stonejar, is an effort to radically reassess her social identity in the wake of her expulsion from her religious community. Who she is and what purpose her life has in the world are the ultimate goals of her quest.[9] Winnet's story ends on a note of cautious optimism.

> When Winnet wakes up, there's light rain, and she must move quickly. She's crying and the blind man, touching her, tells her not to worry about being afraid. She rows out to the sea, and stores her boat for a day, until she gets used to the salt taste and how big it all is. The need for the city fastens her heart to her mind. She will get in her boat and sail to the other side. The sail is pulling and the sun is out. Now there is nothing about her but water. One thing is certain, she can't go back. (155)

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[9] The name of Jeanette's fairy tale hero is a loose-assembled anagram of Jeanette Winterson, whose biography bears a striking resemblance to the actual events of *Oranges*.

Jeanette's own story ends on a note of cautious optimism, as she describes her return home for the Christmas holiday. Nothing seems to have changed, and the familiarity of the place causes her to reflect about the earlier drama of her religious exile and the loneliness she feels as a result:

> I was beginning to wonder if I'd ever been anywhere. My mother was treating me like she always had, had she noticed my absence? Did she even remember why I had left?
>
> I miss God. I miss the company of someone utterly loyal. I still don't think of God as my betrayer. The servants of God, yes, but servants by their very nature betray. I miss God who was my friend. I don't even know if God exists, but I do know that if God is your emotional role model, very few human relationships will match up to it. I have an idea that one day it might be possible, I thought once it had become possible, and that glimpse has set me wandering, trying to find the balance between earth and sky. (164-65)

Jeanette's narrative articulates the direction of her quest. Like Perceval, who has a fleeting vision of "perfect peace" (161), Jeanette has her own idealized quest vision: "I want someone who is fierce and will love me until death and know that love is as strong as death, and be one my side for ever and ever" (165). But meanwhile she still has her mother to contend with, and in her return home for Christmas we can see Jeanette's desire for the former security of her religious community, even though this community no longer holds the force of expression it once did.

*Oranges* gives us an example of what Annis Pratt sees as one of the fundamental patterns in "modern women's love fiction." As Pratt contends:

> The socially unacceptable status of Eros as a natural force in the human personality automatically places woman in a puzzling double bind. On the one hand she experiences Eros as an aspect of her natural maturation, on the other hand such an experience for a woman is considered 'unnatural.' The gender norms for feminine behaviour that should provide signposts to adulthood are obscured, destroyed, or reversed. Modern women's love fiction reflects this situation in a disjunction of narrative structure

> characterized by quests gone awry, labyrinthine wanderings, and a general tone of confusion and perplexity (5)

*Oranges* is, in this sense, a "quest gone awry." Eroticism, in Jeanette's community, is socially unacceptable, whether heterosexual or homosexual. The Biblical injunction to ignore the lusts of the flesh is taken very literally by the members of Jeanette's community and by her mother in particular. The "gender norms for feminine behaviour" have their origins in the strict interpretative schema of her Church, and thus Jeanette has little knowledge of what provides a "normal" sexual development. Her experiences are reflected in the fairy tales she "rewrites," each of which employ her knowledge of the powerful ideology that forms the structure of the Church doctrine. Her growth as a lesbian Christian transgresses the rigid gender boundaries of her Church, and the rites of her passage from young child to questing adult are scarred by the treatment which her sexual maturation received.

In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell contends that the rites of passage of the hero's journey are a necessary prelude to the awakening of wisdom and knowledge. These rites follow a specific pattern: separation, initiation, return. The hero must separate from his community, be initiated into the rites that will mark him as hero, prove himself, and return home to be reintegrated into his community. If we apply this analysis to *Oranges*, these rites of passage prove to be an integral part of Jeanette's sexual independence, for the ostracism she experiences force her to examine her religious beliefs, as well as her sexual orientation, which she had previously taken at face value. But we are also faced with the limiting pattern of this form of the quest, as it allows little space for differences in gender or heroic temperament. Winterson's adaptation of the quest motif takes advantage of these contradictions with regards to Jeanette's character portrayal. Jeanette is not a hero, in the conventional sense, but convention is precisely what Winterson takes issue with in *Oranges*. The problematic relationship between the institution and the individual forms Jeanette's quest. Winterson reverses the pattern of the traditional quest to reflect the experience of a quester who moves against the dominant tradition and "lights out on her own" (Heller 1).

Dana Heller sees a clear analogy between the "quest-romance" and the development of the psyche. "The quest-romance represents the libido's search to embrace external reality, and at the same time salvage the inner self from the anxieties that accompany that reality" (4). Jeanette's psyche develops from the form her quest takes—she has been, and will always be as long as she remains independent and rebellious, outside the cultural

approbation of her family and of her community. The woman Jeanette becomes in her quest rejects both the passive self-sacrificing woman of traditional mythology and the subservient attitudes of the women in her working-class town. This is not without its repercussions. The separation, initiation, and return patterns of the traditional hero's quest can only be emulated by strict adherence to the social restrictions of the feminine and religious definitions instilled in her via her mother and her community. Her search for an acceptable sexual identity is thwarted by her religious community, who refuse to accept the possibility that lesbianism might be as "natural" a sexual identity as heterosexuality. Its Christian ethics are shown to be a complete sham. Because of Jeanette's emphatic refusal to either associate with or accept the existing social arrangements of her community, she is alienated from any community whatsoever. The irony of her situation is not lost on Jeanette. "Everyone," she muses as she returns home for Christmas, "thinks their own situation most tragic. I am no exception" (157).

Thematically, *Oranges* develops a dialogue between an institution and an individual in the familiar fairy tale terminology of 'might makes right.' Jeanette's ordeal, while being far from over at the conclusion of her narrative, leaves no doubts as to who is wrong and who is right. She concludes her narrative in a state of exile that remains in thrall to two realities—the narrow world of her childhood, and the new world she has escaped to. "I was beginning to wonder if I'd ever been anywhere. There's a chance that I'm not here at all, that all the parts of me, running along all the choices that I did and didn't make, for a moment brush against each other. Perhaps for a while these two selves have become confused. I have not gone forward or back in time, but across in time, to something I might have been, playing itself out" (164).

How does Winterson's use of the quest motif in *Oranges* speak to the reader? In the obvious diversions and deconstructions of the traditional quest, Winterson makes a clear statement for a quest that employs a distinctly lesbian perspective. Jeanette's quest reflects the constricting advice of tradition, and of her Church, advice which holds the individuals of her community (not only women) to particular forms of behaviour. The implications of Winterson's use of the quest motif illustrate the need to create empowering images of women as heroic figures. *Oranges* is a novel that takes on the ideological issues of the traditionally masculine quest, and adapts these issues to reflect the experience of a young girl growing up in a parochial environment. Dana Heller argues that the fundamental predicament in quest-myths is informed by an obvious gender imbalance. Women in mythology have traditionally been "trophies" in the hero's adventures. "In the myths and rituals of Western patriarchal culture," she comments, "woman is expected to know only

what the dominant ideology occasions her to know, and she develops in relationship to this complex illusion which fixes her within the limits of someone else's desire" (1) The issue, Heller asserts, is not so much "who we are talking about when we talk about women questing," but rather "who haven't we been talking about?" (12) Heller goes on to say that

> My belief is that women's quest ... addresses ... the need for political agency in the quest to expand the limiting available categories of identity It is a movement that presumes the existence of variously located agents all touched by a fundamental structural predicament how to assert identity and at the same time preserve and conduct our powerful capacity to think beyond the fixity of gender and other socially determined conditions The feminization of quest-romance ... is a collaborative quest for a radical reassessment of social identity that will make possible individual survival (121)

Heller's comments provide an important point of view from which to examine Jeanette's quest The need to "expand the limiting available categories of identity" is more than apparent in Jeanette's narrative, and is indeed the crux of her predicament It is not a predicament that is completely resolved in the novel The tensions in Jeanette's "rewrites" illustrate her awareness of the instability of her situation within her community Her quest stands in defiant opposition to the parameters of the traditional quest As such, her quest reflects the "fundamental structural predicament" of the traditional quest a structure which is predicated on the cultural normalcy of the hero The fact of her predicament is not lost on Jeanette "The only thing for certain is how complicated it all is," she comments "It's all there but hard to find the beginning and impossible to fathom the end The best you can do is admire the cat's cradle, and maybe knot it up a bit more" (91)

# Chapter Three

## Questing after strange fruit in *Sexing the Cherry*

> Can we be "self-conscious" in the present, or is not the self of which we are conscious different from the self we "are"? The self of which we are conscious, then, might appear as always being deferred, displaced onto a future or a past, either unrealized or an abstraction.
> —Thomas Docherty (56)

Here is a woman describing herself:

> How hideous am I?
>
> My nose is flat, my eyebrows are heavy. I have only a few teeth and those are a poor show, being black and broken. I had smallpox when I was a girl and the caves in my face are home enough for fleas. But I have fine blue eyes that see in the dark. (24)

Here is a man describing himself:

> I discovered that my own life was written invisibly, was squashed between the facts, was flying without me like the Twelve Dancing Princesses who shot from their window every night and returned home every morning with torn dresses and worn-out slippers and remembered nothing.
>
> I resolved to set watch on myself like a jealous father, trying to catch myself disappearing through a door just noticed in the wall. (10)

These are the two main characters of Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry*. They are both residents of seventeenth-century London, the time of Papists and Puritans, of bloody revolutions and political ferment. They are also mother and son. The mother, who

calls herself the Dog-Woman—"I had a name but I have forgotten it" (11)—shares narratorial duties with her son Jordan, a foundling child she fishes from the muddy, stinking banks of the Thames. She is a parodic hulk of a woman who wades her way casually through the messy political turmoil of the Puritan Wars, dispensing justice of the "eye-for-an-eye" variety to those who offend her sense of fair-play. Of immense proportions, she is a woman to contend with. She weighs more than an elephant, reduces Cromwellian soldiers to cowering submissiveness, associates mainly with boarhounds, dredgers, and whores, and "would rather live with sins of excess than sins of denial" (67).

In *Sexing the Cherry*, Winterson uses the physical body as a space to be mapped and explored. To be 'sexed' in most cultures is to be inundated by various political and social structures that encourage a certain behaviour with regards to one's sex and gender. The human physical body is the site where these dictates are interpreted and represented. In this novel Winterson takes two bodies, one female and one male, and uses them to explore how the representation and experience of gender is constructed and absorbed. The realism of these social situations is rearranged somewhat to give *Sexing the Cherry* its satirical and political edge. Its politics deal specifically with issues of gender and sexual choice, and Winterson admits to a deliberate "rearrangement of the facts" in her fictions that is informed by her determination to develop characters "who refuse normative sexual stereotyping" (Barr 31). Winterson contends that "the versions of sexuality that we are served up from the earliest moments are prescriptive and in many ways debilitating. People don't get a chance to find out about themselves. They are told who they are, that they fit in to certain patterns. ... But that's largely because of the picture book world that we're offered, the story that we are told about ourselves, rather than being encouraged to tell our own stories. And I think in the area of gender and sexuality that it's extremely damaging" (Barr 31). What emerges from a close reading of the novel is Winterson's contention that female subjectivity and experience is developed in a particular relation to sexuality that leaves the female subject often hopelessly defined in relation to masculine subjectivity instead of an independent subjectivity. Winterson carefully guides the narrative to reflect her contention that gender is not merely sexual difference, but is actually an imposed system that develops the subjectivity of the individual within a sexual hierarchy. In *Sexing the Cherry*, the issue of gender is not only one of difference, but one of power.

In the previous chapter I examined how in *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* Winterson uses the lesbian body as a site of contention, contention that splits apart a family when their religious philosophy fails to integrate the lesbianism of their adoptive daughter

In this chapter I want to discuss Winterson's explorations of love and gender through the fabulistic perspectives of the two narrators of *Sexing the Cherry*. In the spirit of Winterson's other novels, her adaptation of the quest motif continues the gender debates she began in *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*. The quests of both the Dog-Woman and Jordan are presented as individual explorations that unconventionally traverse time and space in search of an individualized ideal. Each narrative perspective of this novel bears a distinctive frame of reference. The Dog-Woman's narrative storms through the rabble and clutter of early seventeenth-century London, mired as it is in the petty squabbles and religious melee of the Puritan Revolution, and seems more intent on heroic swashbuckling than on metaphysical soul-searching. The Dog-Woman's ideal is a world free from the hypocritical pestilence of the "po-faced, flat-buttocked zealots" around her, and at times her methods are brutally effective. Her attitude toward violence is cavalier. "I like a fight myself" she says engagingly, "With everyone in accord, what merriment is there?" (63). She murders her father when he attempts to impose his will on her, and what follows is the story of a woman who makes her own story up as she goes along. Her violence is both political and personal. She is the scourge of her community, waging a deeply personal battle with moral degradation. The effects of this battle are enhanced by her empathy for the women who exist only to serve the patriarchal structures that define them as inferior.

The narrative strategy through which Winterson articulates Jordan's quest makes use of gender-bending strategies time and again in an effort to question the inherently sexist values by which Jordan has developed his subjectivity. Instead, Winterson redeploys the traditional masculine subject of the quest (Jordan) as the prisoner of the story who can escape only after a thorough dissemination of the cultural values and opinions he holds regarding heroism and women. Jordan's quest takes him from one exotic country to the next, but its "true aim" has little to do with physical geography. While he ostensibly travels across the uncharted expanses of the world, collecting rarities to display in John Tradescant's museum, his quest actually functions on a metaphysical plane.

> I was never conscious of beginning this journey. Only in the course of it have I realized its true aim. When I left England I thought I was running away. Running away from uncertainty and confusion but most of all running away from myself. I thought I might become someone else in time, grafted onto something better and stronger. And then I saw that the running away was a running towards. An effort to catch up with my fleet-footed self, living another life in a different way. (80)

As Jordan implies, his quest involves a re-discovery of another part of himself. It is, like the quest of Jeanette in *Oranges*, a youthful search for love and self-discovery in a world filled with the often confusing signs of socially acceptable gender behaviour and identity. Jordan's quest is deeply concerned with establishing an independent life of his own, and when he meets a woman who embodies a freedom he aspires to, his quest takes off. Much could be made about the significance of Jordan choosing a woman as a role model. Is Fortunata the feminine side of Jordan's nature, or does she exist independently of Jordan's imagination? He alludes to this himself. "Was I searching for a dancer whose name I did not know," he muses, "or was I searching for the dancing part of myself?" (40). Both are, in a sense, what Jordan searches for. His is the consciousness of the underwater explorer, the diver who searches the strange and unknown silences of the mind. "I'm not looking for God," he says, "only for myself, and that is far more complicated" (102). Appropriately enough, Jordan is an explorer. With John Tradescant, an actual botanist of the seventeenth-century, Jordan travels the world, returning with such exotica as the first pineapple seen by Londoners. But it is not these journeys that Jordan is concerned with. "Every journey conceals another journey within its lines," he says cryptically, "the path not taken and the forgotten angle. These are the journeys I wish to record. Not the ones I made, but the one I might have made, or perhaps did make in some other place or time" (9-10).

The journeys that Jordan makes use the mind as a springboard for the imagination. Winterson dangles the fairy tale of the *Twelve Dancing Princesses* as a sort of thematic muse at the helm of his quest. In their initial incarnation as Grimms' fairy tale characters, these twelve princesses symbolize Jordan's metaphysical homelessness, at least until they leave behind the Grimms' version and emerge as their own storytellers. One by one they tell their stories, stories of love and betrayal, stories of the pain and pathos they endured, then escaped from. But the one story that Jordan searches most diligently for is the story of the youngest sister, Fortunata, the princess who repeatedly entices and escapes him. "It is well known," Jordan comments, "that those in the grip of heavy enchantments can be wakened only by a lover's touch" (39). The touch of Fortunata—this is what Jordan's metaphysical quest is about. It is through these two strange and complex characters—the Dog-Woman and her adoptive son Jordan—that Jeanette Winterson continues the dialogues she began in *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* concerning the nature of reality, the reliability of history and memory and, in particular, the cultural dictates surrounding love, sex, and gender.

But there is another perspective in *Sexing the Cherry*, and it is, in a sense, a collective one. With the narrative of the Twelve Dancing Princesses, we are drawn into a

story that is at once familiar and unfamiliar, for Winterson takes her twelve women from Grimms' fairy tale *The Twelve Dancing Princesses*. In Grimms' version, twelve princesses fly from their window every night to dance secretly in a magical city with twelve enchanted princes. Their father, a king, offers a reward to whoever can discover where his daughters go each night while the rest of the kingdom sleeps. One night they are secretly followed by an ex-soldier, who reveals their secret to the king. As a reward, he is allowed to choose one of the twelve princesses as his bride. He chooses one, and they then live happily ever after. In some versions, the ex-soldier has eleven brothers who then marry the remaining eleven sisters. In *Sexing the Cherry* we are drawn into another version of this tale. Winterson's princesses are actors in their own stories. They speak for themselves, and they speak lyrically and profoundly. The eldest Princess tells Jordan that she and her sisters lived happily ever after, "but not with our husbands" (48). One by one, each princess tells Jordan a tale about what happened to each of them after the happily-ever-after ending of Grimms' version.[10] Through the narratives of the Twelve Dancing Princesses, Jordan learns how the Princesses have written beyond the ending of the traditional story, and this inspires him to experiment with his own life. Instead of listening to cultural precepts that tell him how men are supposed to behave, Jordan attempts to write his own story, a story, which like those of the twelve princesses, is fueled with possibility.

The main frame of reference for *Sexing the Cherry* is seventeenth century London, between approximately 1630 and 1661. Even though the setting of the novel is clearly Puritan England, it is evident that Winterson is engaging with many twentieth-century feminist theories about the ideological implications behind gender construction.[11] Through her two principal narrators, the Dog-Woman and Jordan, Jeanette Winterson explores how gender and sexuality are part of the process of social construction. But why choose this particular point in time? There are two reasons why I think Winterson chooses this period in which to set the events of *Sexing the Cherry*.

The seventeenth century was a time of great philosophical and moral upheaval in England. The philosophical effort of the seventeenth century was engaged in a struggle to

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[10] I have not been able to find a version of the *Twelve Dancing Princesses* (also known as *The Shoes that Danced Themselves to Pieces*) that accords exactly with the version Winterson refers to, and so can only conclude that she either has access to a version unavailable in this country, or that she has taken some artistic licence with the Grimms' version. The most common version has as its hero an older ex-soldier who chooses the eldest princess as his bride.

[11] See Diana Fuss' *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1989), and the chapter "Lesbian and Gay Theory: The Question of Identity Politics" in particular, or *Technologies of Gender: Essays on theory, film, and fiction* by Teresa de Lauretis (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987).

achieve some kind of synthesis between old established orders and the skepticism developing in the wake of these older orders. The moral tension was similarly a product of various attempts to reconcile two very different views of humanity in relation to God. Thomas Docherty, in *On Modern Authority,* contends that the tumult of the period had its roots in a semantic "crisis in authority" precipitated by Henry VIII's divorce proceedings, the result of which was a religious schism between England and Rome. The dissemination of religious authority was administered by not one but two religious authorities: the traditional Roman church of the Pope, and the new Church of England.[12] Attending this religious "crisis" was a similar movement contesting state and familial authorities. According to Docherty, the "growth of Utopian writings in this period is testimony to the fact that the organization of social relations was in a state of turmoil, experiment and transition" (49).

But these were not the only conceptual shifts people had to contend with. Pre-Reformation theology and astronomy had postulated a world where the Earth was the centre of the universe. People "knew their place" in this world, and it was the unchanging nature of this "place" "that lent them stability and, more importantly, identity." The advent of a new attitude towards the physical place of the Earth in the cosmos (precipitated by the Copernican revolution) meant that the world, and by extension, humankind, was no longer "the still point of the centre of a universe." "The condition of humanity at the moment of this astronomical revelation," Docherty contends, "becomes one of continual exile, with the human now paradigmatically understood as a traveller. That is to say, the mobility of the human body or self becomes operational in a very specific way once the discovery of its decentred loss of identity is made." The increasing popularity of utopian literature reflects this loss of stability. The "nostalgic desire for [a] return home is a desire for a return to a mythic originary nature, a state of given certitude and stable identity which the new astronomy, the divorce of England from Rome, and the problem of authority (as self or other-directed) had all disturbed" (53).

Docherty's comments provide an interpretive framework regarding the events in *Sexing the Cherry*. One of the primary issues in the novel centres on the belief that the developing human identity must negotiate a multitude of frequently conflicting political and religious ideologies. This is reflected in the Dog-Woman's repeated discourses on the nature of love and reproduction. The Dog-Woman is representative of an older, more conventional order of belief. While she believes in the magic of an unseen world, she also

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[12] This is an interesting parallel to the religious debate between Jeanette and her mother in *Oranges*

holds traditional notions as to the earth's geographical boundaries, and as to the physical possibilities of the human body. In contrast, Jordan is representative of the Enlightenment's skepticism. Through his journeys Jordan develops an understanding of time and space as conventions of a gravity-poisoned imagination, but, as we will see, Jordan is still gravity-bound in his attitudes towards women.

Another of the significant themes in the novel is the "desire for a return to a mythic originary nature" that Docherty discusses, that utopian desire which is expressed most specifically in Jordan's quest for Fortunata. Jordan formulates his quest through his explorations in the mythical city of his imagination, and it only when he encounters Fortunata that his quest crystallizes. Fortunata represents many things to Jordan: she could be seen as Jordan's anima, or feminine alter-ego, yet she could also be seen, as her name suggests, as Jordan's fortune, his fate or destiny. Of course, Jordan's name also carries strong connotations. To the Christian faith, the river Jordan is what separates the wilderness of this world from the promised land. It is the Styx of Christian mythology. Jordan's narrative maintains very strong parallels with this theme of the redemptive journey. "I resolved to set a watch on myself," he says, "to catch myself disappearing through a door just noticed in the wall" (10). And so he does. Eventually Jordan comes face to face with the "self" he has been chasing, and he terms this "the first thing I saw" (9). Before, he says, he was "like those who dream and pass through life as a series of shadows" (95). This is emphasized at the end of the novel, when his final words attempt to unwrap the illusory garb clothing his utopian instincts.

> As I drew my ship out of London I knew I would never go there again. For a time I felt only sadness, and then, for no reason, I was filled with hope. The future lies ahead like a glittering city, but like the cities of the desert disappears when approached. In certain lights it is easy to see the towers and the domes, even the people going to and fro. We speak of it with longing and with love. *The future*. But the city is a fake. The future and the present and the past exist only in our minds, and from a distance the borders of each shrink and fade like the borders of hostile countries seen from a floating city in the sky. (144)

This moment exists as an epiphany for Jordan. His continual attempts to negotiate a stable course between his impulses and his desires have been grounded in the expectation that he will eventually achieve a sense of closure in his journey. Instead, what he realizes is that

his "goal" is always contained in a future event that exists only as far as he can create it. "The future" is only a metaphor in his mind.

One could argue that Winterson reveals her own utopian instincts in the novel. In *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, Winterson stresses the protagonist's romantic longings, for 'someone to call her home on those wild nights' (*Oranges* 165). Jeanette's poignant realization that this person might not exist forms part of the bitter-sweet texture of her conclusion. The same desire for a perfect lover is apparent in *Sexing the Cherry*. The Dog-Woman admits that she sometimes longs for "the consolation of a lover's face," but knows that there is no "match" for her in the world. The Dog-Woman's quest is less overtly developed, but her sentimentalized views of romance are clearly foregrounded. Jordan searches tirelessly for an elusive woman he sees across a crowded table, never knowing if it is her he is searching for, or a part of himself. Both the Dog-Woman and Jordan convey the impression that each seeks to recuperate what I call a perfect memory. In Jordan's case, this is developed by reference to the motif of the map. He charts the geography of the globe, not realizing that it is the geography of his own identity he is really exploring. He gives chase in a ship, travelling the world with Tradescant, and exploring the uncharted islands of the Pacific Ocean, trying to recapture a faded memory from his childhood. "Islands are metaphors for the heart," he says, "no matter what poet says otherwise" (80).

A second reason why this period might have appealed to Jeanette Winterson lies in the allure of the ribald sexuality of that time. I refer to the remarks of Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* for emphasis.

> At the beginning of the seventeenth century a certain frankness was still common, it would seem. Sexual practices had little need of secrecy, words were said without undue reticence, and things were done without too much concealment, one had a tolerant familiarity with the illicit. Codes regulating the coarse, the obscene, and the indecent were quite lax compared to those of the nineteenth century. It was a time of direct gestures, shameless discourse, and open transgressions, when anatomies were shown and intermingled at will, and knowing children hung about amid the laughter of adults: it was a period when bodies "made a display of themselves." (3)

Foucault's remarks provide another important framework from which to examine the events of *Sexing the Cherry*. The boundaries between the corporeal world and the spiritual

world were in constant flux in the seventeenth century. A myriad of discourses—medical, scientific, astrological, religious—circulated about bodies and sexuality.[13] In *Sexing the Cherry*, one of the bodies that positively *erupts* from the narrative is that of the Dog-Woman, and she is undoubtedly and unreservedly making a display of herself. As a character in a period when superstition was commonplace, and people were being hanged for practicing witchcraft, the Dog-Woman slips into the narrative with scarcely a ripple of disbelief, even though her proportions (and actions) are gargantuan in the extreme. Another body making an intriguing display of itself in *Sexing the Cherry* is the Dog-Woman's neighbour, a woman "who airs herself abroad as a witch." She is "so blackened and hairless," the Dog-Woman relates, "that she has twice been mistaken for a side of salt beef wrapped in muslin. Not I nor anyone else has ever seen her feet beneath her skirts, so there's no knowing what it is she walks on" (13).

*The Dog-Woman*

The body of the Dog-Woman is used as one of the most vivid sites of contention in *Sexing the Cherry*. Her name carries all the colloquial connotations associated with the female dog. Indeed, she has a bitchy temper towards those who have the misfortune of crossing her. There are numerous incidents which serve to emphasize her ugliness and irascibility, but also her boundless good nature. She is apparently so repulsive that a would-be lover faints with terror as she lifts him to her face to kiss her (35-6), and her rancor is such that she fearlessly attacks, and dispatches, eight soldiers sent to requisition her house for "Jesus and Oliver Cromwell" (65-6), yet when her neighbour the witch is in need of a home, the Dog-Woman allows her the use of one of her dog kennels "till the end of her days" (105).

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[13] Thomas Laqueur, in *Making Sex*, states that "there was no true, deep essential sex that differentiated cultural man from woman" (124). Another interesting perspective on gender is *Cross Dressing, Sex, and Gender*, by Vern Bullough and Bonnie Bullough (Philadelphia. U of Penn P,1993).

Uncontrolled desire has long been a potent cultural metaphor for female sexuality, and, with the Dog-Woman, Jeanette Winterson exploits this with zesty exuberance.[14] There is something of the lovable rogue in the Dog-Woman, she is uncontrolled and uncontrollable. She is a clown, a wise fool, and an outsider. All these attributes, of course, accord her the license to freely hyperbolize the everyday life around her from the perspective of someone who does not, or will not, understand. If we examine the Dog-Woman's body as a symbolic construct, it is evident that Winterson has taken the fairy tale's fascination with the extreme as a guide in developing the Dog-Woman. The Dog-Woman's physical image is one of grotesque swarthiness and crudity: she has worn the same dress for five years, she is covered with "countless lice and other timid creatures" (21), and people regularly shudder in her presence. Her nipples stand out like walnuts, her face is pock-marked, and she imagines that after she dies, "it will take a worm of some endeavour to make an impression" on the great hulk of her flesh (105). She is, it would seem, comprised of every negative physical attribute known to folklore—but she is bigger, uglier, and stronger. She is a nightmare of superlative proportions to her enemies. Yet the Dog-Woman contests these fairy tale attributes at the same time that she embodies them because of her narrative position as subject, and not object, of her story. Her hyperbolic attributes, while they exist as ironic subversions that feed on the sexism so inherent to traditional fairy tale paradigms, are weapons she exults in using to establish her independence and identity.

The violent aspects of the Dog-Woman's personality are hyperbolized with as much intensity as her physical presence. Her aptitude for aggression, though, is treated as a positive expression of her personality, and those who suffer under her violence are felt to deserve it. What becomes evident through the Dog-Woman's narrative is her unrepentant attitude towards her actions: "I do not think of myself as a criminal . . . there is no person dead at my hand who would be better off alive" (129). Her image as a murderous woman is consistently foregrounded as that of an avenging angel. She helps the women of the Spitalfields brothel dispose of the rotting Puritan bodies accumulating in the cellar, and when she murders Preacher Scroggs and Neighbour Firebrace (in an extremely unsettling fashion) she can disappear afterwards without notice. "Like the angels," she says, "I can be invisible when there is work to be done" (89). Much of the Dog-Woman's violence is directed at men who mentally or physically mistreat women. Her first victim was her

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[14] In an interview with Jackie Kay in *Spare Rib*, Winterson comments that she had a specific focus in mind with the character of the Dog-Woman: "I wanted to create a woman who was not in any way a female stereotype, who wasn't clean, particularly loveable or desireable or attractive or any of these things, and yet proved to be enormously sympathetic and vulnerable. So that you couldn't hate her" (27).

father, when he attempted, against the protestations of her mother, to sell her to an exhibition because of her great "proportions." "One night," she says, "my father tried to steal me and sell me to a man with one leg. They had a barrel ready to put me in, but no sooner had they slammed on the lid than I burst the bonds of the barrel and came flying at my father's throat. This was my first murder" (107). She has a close affection for her mother, but her only point of reference with her father is the fact that she breeds boarhounds as he did before her, and it is evident that she holds little feeling for him.

> When I was a child my father swung me up on to his knees to tell a story and I broke both his legs. He never touched me again, except with the point of the whip he used for the dogs. But my mother, who lived only a while and was so light that she dared not go out in a wind, could swing me on her back and carry me for miles. There was talk of witchcraft but what is stronger than love? (25)

The Dog-Woman's experiences with her father provide the basis upon which she builds her subjectivity as a female. Following her critical insights into the distorted sexual hierarchy that exists between men and women in her society is her own peculiarized form of social retribution and conditioning, and it is a violence unmatched by any other.

Winterson uses the negative aspects of the Dog-Woman's image in particular to make critical statements about the socio-cultural construction of women, and a major site of her scrutiny concerns the conceptualization of love and romance. Love, with all its attendant questions about gender, is central to the Dog-Woman's narrative. Her rollicking inquisitiveness parodies the rhetorics of romance, religion, and social convention that frequently condition sexual desire, body image, and feminine behaviour. While the Dog-Woman is a self-conscious figure, she is still seduced by the fiction of romance. Her narrative indicates how sexist paradigms are sustained in her consciousness and behaviour. She abhors bathing, but, "knowing it to be a symptom of love," she submits herself to the rigours of the wash-pump to impress an intended sweetheart. She is conscious of her own unattractiveness, but does not prevent her experimentations with the opposite sex, although her only experience with sex ends with her would-be lover comparing the Dog-Woman's clitoris to (of all things) an orange. "I squatted backwards on a pillow and parted my bush of hair to see what it was that had confounded him so. It all seemed in proportion to me. These gentlemen are very timid," she relates matter of factly (107). There is a tension which emerges in the Dog-Woman's dialogues between what she knows about love and

what she wants from love. She is caught between a traditional religious perspective and an equally traditional perception of physical attractiveness. "What is love?" she asks, "I am too huge for love. No one, male or female, has ever dared to approach me. They are afraid to scale mountains. I wonder about love because the parson says that only God can truly love us and the rest is lust and selfishness" (34). These situations reveal a woman who has internalized the sexism that circulates in her society, and its presence permeates her childhood reminiscences. "When I was a girl I heard my mother and father copulating. I heard my father's steady grunts and my mother's silence. Later my mother told me that men take pleasure and women give it. She told me in a matter-of-fact way, in the same tone of voice she used to tell me how to feed the dogs or make bread" (107).

Although she has been thwarted in her sexual experimentations with the opposite sex, she continues to evince a distinct fascination with the complexes of heterosexual relationships. Every cliché about heterosexual love and sex is explored with vigour. She is, in the tradition of Swift or Rabelais, an outrageous and grotesque creature, a figure who takes any colloquialism literally, whether it involves the belief "that men like to be consumed in the mouth" or Biblical admonishments to avoid the sins of the flesh. Her curious nature is such that she is more than willing to "broaden" her mind with new experiences, and when a man accosts her one day and asks her to put his member in her mouth, she agrees with alacrity:

> I like to broaden my mind when I can and I did as he suggested, swallowing it up entirely and biting it off with a snap. As I did so my eager fellow increased his swooning to the point of fainting away, and I, feeling both astonished by his rapture and disgusted by the leathery thing filling up my mouth, spat out what I had not eaten and gave it to one of my dogs. (41)

She tends to be rather casual about menacing the various men she meets (and their organs), and her innocent stories strip the sexual act of its romantic aspects, leaving only the uneven sexism of the situation. In each of her examples, the sexual hierarchy is evident. She tells us that copulation gives the woman "a more pleasurable part," and makes a deliberately sarcastic reference to the fact that in her society women exist only to give pleasure to men. "[T]heir bodies are their own," she remarks, "and I who know nothing of them must take instruction humbly, and if a man asks me to do the same thing again I'm sure I shall, although for myself I felt nothing" (41). From her own unfulfilling experiences with love and sex the Dog-Woman is astute enough to know that the organ her son needs to be

warned about is not his sexual organ but his heart "When Jordan is older I will tell him what I know about the human body and urge him to be careful of his member And yet it is not that part of him I fear for, it is his heart" (41)

Jordan is not the Dog-Woman's biological child, he is an adopted child, but this in no way detracts from their relationship She is a mother in spirit if not in body "We were happy together," she comments, "and if he noticed that I am bigger than most he never mentioned it He was proud of me because no other child had a mother who could hold a dozen oranges in her mouth at once" (26) In her most emphatic misunderstandings, the false associations reinforced and sanctioned by traditional authorities become apparent, and this is most evident with regards to her treatment of women's roles as developed by social and religious authorities Conventional images of motherhood are warped by the Dog-Woman's unconventional, but not inaccurate, imagery For example, her maternal devotions to her child parody the image of the bountiful mother

> When Jordan was a baby, he sat on top of me much as a fly rests on a hill of dung And I nourished him as a hill of dung nourishes a fly, and when he had eaten his fill he left me (11)

> When Jordan was new I sat him on the palm of my hand the way I would a puppy, and I held him to my face and let him pick the fleas out of my scars (25)

Her love for Jordan is foregrounded throughout the novel, and the pattern of her relationship with her son is articulated through the traditional position of the mother of a quest hero—she waits while he travels the world Her attitude is one of resigned acceptance that the gender division should work this way, and when Jordan makes plans for another voyage with Tradescant she says nothing to him, but her heart, she says "became a captive in a locked room" (71) But when Jordan leaves home the Dog-Woman discovers her own dormant desire for adventure and excitement "I see I have a flair for enterprise It was ever with me, but smothered, I think, under my maternalness and the pressing need to do away with scoundrels There is something to be said for this childless quiet life" (135)

As Mikhail Bakhtin has noted, the device of creating a character who deliberately misunderstands the conventions of his or her culture is an effective method of exposing "all that is vulgar and falsely stereotyped in human relationships" (162), and the Dog-Woman's penchant for literalism not only exposes the false stereotypes of gendered behaviour, but

also the internal inconsistencies of the religious dialogues circulating in her society. Her comprehension of Puritan ideology negates the logic of their rationale. Every religious expression is consistently misunderstood, and is assaulted with such an imaginatively persuasive unreasonableness that the conventional function of reason (that *we* might understand) is subverted, and the manner in which her fellow Royalists interpret the Bible is similarly undermined through the manner in which she addresses the contradictions inherent in their Biblical interpretations. "The Puritans," she comments, "who wanted a rule of saints on earth, and no king but Jesus, forgot that we are born into flesh and in flesh must remain. Their women bind their breasts and cook plain food without salt, and the men are so afraid of their member uprising that they keep it strapped between their legs with bandages" (67). While attending a secret Royalist meeting one night, the Dog-Woman is asked to consider two conflicting passages of the Old Testament. "Thou shalt not kill," and "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." "I have long been interested in these contradictions," she tells us, "and looked forward to a full rendering of their meaning" (84). "[Y]ou must go in secret and quiet," the preacher tells the group, "and gouge out your enemies' eyes when you see them, and deprive them of their teeth if they have them. This fulfills the Law of God" (84). "I was very much taken with this rendering," the Dog-Woman says, "and could only wonder how it had not come to me voluntarily before now. It is a thing to have learning and so be able to interpret the Scriptures" (84). Provided with many opportunities to "exercise [her] calling," the Dog-Woman soon has her trophy-sack filled. 119 eyeballs, and over 2,000 teeth. "[I]t seemed to me," she says, "that my zeal had only made up for the sloth of others" (85). She is, in her literal interpretations, very much like the fundamentalist mother in *Oranges*.

The Dog-Woman's encounters with the religious and sexist attitudes of her society inform her reception of the unfamiliar. When an explorer brings the first banana ever seen in England back from one of his voyages, the Dog-Woman sees it at an exhibition and is horrified that it might be "the private parts of an Oriental," particularly when she hears that it is a fruit meant to be eaten. "We had not gone to church all these years and been washed in the blood of Jesus only to eat ourselves up the way the Heathen do," she steams righteously (13). This same explorer, a herbalist by trade, is apparently an abortionist who relieves women of their unwanted pregnancies, but the Dog-Woman remains suspicious. "When a woman ... came back [from a visit to Johnson's surgery] all flat and smiling she said it was Mistletoe or Cat-nip or some such, but I say he sucked it out for the Devil" (11-12). Her disbelief that such an event might be possible is influenced by her belief that most men hold little regard for the lives of women.

While her narrative reveals a woman who distrusts male motivation, it also demonstrates her essential conservatism. She scoffs at the notion that the world might be anything but "a manageable place made of blood and stone and entirely flat" when Tradescant explains to Jordan how "every mapped-out journey contains another journey hidden in its lines" (23), yet her own journey contains its own hidden tangents and diversions, as is evidenced by her figurative leap four centuries into the future. Her traditionalist outlook holds her to a rigidly gendered universe where women exist to only accommodate male sexual pleasure, and every example of her narrative reifies this. When her son develops a new variety of cherry, by grafting one species onto another, her response is similar to her reaction to the banana—she is horrified. "Thou mayest as well try to make a union between thyself and me by sewing us at the hip" she shouts at Jordan (79). Ironically though, the Dog-Woman has unwittingly deconstructed her own argument, for she could well be referring to herself and Jordan. They are biologically unrelated, but there is an invisible thread joining them as mother and son. Her next comment is even more self-referential, considering her own monstrous sexuality. "Of what sex is that monster you are making?" (79).

The conversation between the Dog-Woman and her son about Jordan's grafting attempts with the cherry gives some indication as to their different positions regarding nature and gender. Jordan attempts to explain his work to his mother, but they are evidently poles apart.

> I tried to explain to her that the tree would still be female although it had not been born from seed, but she said that such things had no gender and were a confusion to themselves.
>
> 'Let the world mate of its own accord,' she said, 'or not at all.'
>
> But the cherry grew, and we have sexed it and it is female. (79)

The Dog-Woman's comments—"Let the world mate of its own accord"—point out a fundamental difference in attitude between herself and her son regarding the construction of sexuality and gender identity. The Dog-Woman implies that the grafting project of her botanist son meddles with a form of creationism that goes against the authority of God, but she couches her argument in her belief that the binary division of the sexual hierarchy is impossible to subvert. Winterson presents the Dog-Woman's view as an essentially traditionalist one. "we are born into flesh and in flesh must remain," says the Dog-Woman (67). The Dog-Woman's attitude is similar to Jeanette's mother's attitude in *Oranges*, with

her superstitious biblical fundamentalism, although she is infinitely more permissive than Louie, as the phrase "of its own accord" implies. While her experiences have left her with the certain knowledge that there is no one of her own "accord" to mate with, the Dog-Woman is unintentionally deconstructing her own argument, for her pronominal reference uses the neuter form. What emerges, then, is a reversal of meaning. The cherry grows, and it is as naturally female as the Dog-Woman herself. Her comments find greatest resonance not in reference to situation of the cherry, but in the gender confusion her son Jordan experiences through his own attempts at grafting the heroic character onto his own nature.

*Jordan*

Winterson uses Jordan's character both to toy with the concept of a naturally gendered body as a construction and to portray a quest hero trapped by the parameters of the traditional quest paradigm. She poses the construction of gender as both a sociocultural construct and as a semiotic structure that assigns value to the men in Jordan's society, but not the women. Jordan's quest is articulated through a complex web of experiences that are the product and the process by which he attains his subjectivity, but while Jordan's narrative calls attention to the strategies of subjective reappropriation Winterson developed through the Dog-Woman, the ground upon which Jordan constructs his own attitudes about subjectivity and identity disintegrates as his quest evolves. As a quest character he is far from typical, but his initial attitudes towards heroism are articulated through a series of markedly traditional notions concerning sexuality and gender representation. Jordan's notion of heroism adheres to a crippling sexist paradigm, and this is brought forcibly to his attention by the rewritten fairy tales and myths Winterson grafts onto his story.

As a child, Jordan dramatizes the events of his adoption with the ingenuity Jeanette demonstrates in *Oranges*, and along similar religious thematics. Like Moses, Jordan is fished from the slimy banks of a river by a woman.[15] He describes this event with an eye for the details of the Dog-Woman's incredible anatomy in comparison to his own diminuitive figure.

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15 Winterson's allusions to the primary "heroes" of the Christian tradition are interesting in that she uses them as palimpsests against which she superimposes characters who are not destined for fame, fortune, or religious canonization, at least, not outside her fictional world.

> I was wrapped in a rotting sack such as kittens are drowned in, but my head was wedged uppermost against the bank I heard ... a roar in the water and a face as round as the moon with hair falling on either side bobbed over me She scooped me up, she tied me between her breasts whose nipples stood out like walnuts (10-11)

This description characterizes the relationship between Jordan and his mother, who looms over him "like a mathematical equation, always there and impossible to disprove" (79) His name, which is a direct reference to the river Jordan, is given to him by the Dog-Woman, who later rues her decision "I should have named him after a stagnant pond and then I could have kept him, but I named him after a river and in the flood-tide he slipped away" (11)

Although the presence of the Dog-Woman penetrates the events of Jordan's life, she does not markedly influence her son's attitudes about the female sex In contrast to his mother, Jordan is an insecure character who looks to heroes like Tradescant for inspiration What he discovers through his questing is his essential lack of identity His quest, which is built upon an elaborately developed metaphor of escape and pursuit, ostensibly seeks to affirm his heroic "nature," but the real events of his life are discovered "squashed between the facts" (10), and are more difficult to follow The sexist ideology that permeates Jordan's narrative finds specific expression in his formulation of the typical hero "England is a land of heroes," he says, "every boy knows that" (79)

> I want to be brave and admired and have a beautiful wife and a fine house I want to be a hero and wave good-bye to my wife and children at the docks, and be sorry to see them go but more excited about what is to come I want to be like other men, one of the boys, a back-slapper and a man who knows a joke or two I want to be like my rip-roaring mother who cares nothing for how she looks, only for what she does She has never been in love, no, and never wanted to be either She is self-sufficient and without doubt (101)

Winterson develops Jordan as a character caught between the contradictions of gender stereotypes He has an objectifying attitude towards women—they exist as plot elements in his personal fantasy[16]—and even his mother is given scant consideration, as we see from

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[16] Jordan's essentially sexist attitudes are further revealed in his idealizations of Penelope and Sappho, both of whom he holds as examples of true love one, because she waited patiently for many years while her

this excerpt. His understanding of women defines them in relation to men, and not as autonomous individuals who are under constant subjugation by patriarchal authorities.[17] While the Dog-Woman is a character who deliberately misunderstands the cultural conventions of her society, Jordan, in contrast, is a character who also misunderstands certain conventions, but his misunderstandings are less ingenious than the Dog-Woman's. They are just as deliberate, but they lack her satirical edge. There is a frustrated aspect in Jordan's narrative, a frustration that is not appeased, as it is in the Dog-Woman's case, through humour or satirical violence. Jordan finds the supreme confidence of his mother unnerving and unsettling. Jordan is more concerned with trying to be a hero than he is in being himself, and through his quest Winterson brings these issues forcibly to our attention.

While his mother stays at home, breeding boarhounds for the fights and races in London's Hyde Park, Jordan sets sail upon the oceans of his imagination. This takes him far from the daily world of the Dog-Woman, and even though she acknowledges her part in encouraging these imaginative explorations, she is bitter that they lead him away from her. "When Jordan was three," she says, "I took him to see a great rarity and that was my undoing" (11). While the Dog-Woman sees this "great rarity" as the "private parts of an Oriental," Jordan sees it as a window onto another world:

> When I was little my mother took me to see a great wonder. It was about 1633, I think, and never before had there been a banana in England. I saw it held high above a man's head. It was yellow and speckled brown, and as I looked at it I saw the tree and the beach and the white waves below birds with wide wings. Then I forgot it completely. But in my games with ships and plants I was trying to return to that memory, to release whatever it had begun in me. (100)

When Jordan meets John Tradescant, and is invited to travel with him as an explorer, the opportunity to realize his aspirations becomes a distinct possibility. "For Tradescant being a hero comes naturally" Jordan comments, "[h]is father was a hero before him" (101). The

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husband was away on his own adventures, and the other, "who rather than lose her lover to a man flung herself from the windy cliffs" (39).

17 According to Winterson, "men cannot understand how women work." "All of my [male characters] are looking at things and facts to try and understand this mystery of the woman they are connected with. And they never get to the point, they are always skating around it. It's immensely frustrating for them ... the stupid ones decide they know and try and tell women what they think, the brighter ones realise it is just not possible" (Kay 27).

correlation between parent and child is an established fact in Jordan's mind—because Tradescant does what his father did before him—and Jordan assumes that the qualities of the hero are inherent characteristics that can be passed on from father to son. Tradescant, who travels the world looking for rarities for his museum, is carrying on the work his father began in the late sixteenth century.[18] But does Jordan realize that the Dog-Woman also does what her father did before her? This is never clarified, although at one point the Dog-Woman makes a reference to her desire to see Jordan succeed her in the family business. "He would not stay," she says, "His head was stuffed with stories of other continents where men have their faces in their chests and some hop on one foot defying the weight of nature" (34). Indeed, Jordan hopes to absorb Tradescant's heroic nature and thus "defy the weight of nature." "I thought I might be a hero after all," he says, "and bring back something that mattered, and in the process find something I had lost" (100).

> The sense of loss was hard to talk about. What could I have lost when I never had anything to begin with?
>
> I had myself to begin with, and that is what I lost. Lost it in my mother because she is bigger and stronger than me and that's not how it's supposed to be with sons. But lost it more importantly between my ideal of myself and my pounding heart. (101)

Traveling with Tradescant gives him the opportunity to reconstruct what he has "lost." What he wants to bring back, though, is first identified as a heroic nature. His sense of loss is foregrounded through two areas of contention: the disjunction between his mother and himself, that, as Jordan says, is "not how it is supposed to be," and his notions of heroism imply a belief in a tangible heroic nature available for the taking. His inherently sexist mentality cannot accommodate a radical division of gender roles and identities—at least, not initially. Jordan's eventual recognition of his mistaken ambition is articulated in his reference to the sense of loss that occurred between his "ideal" of himself (as a hero) and between his "pounding heart" (his flesh and blood identity).

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[18] There were two John Tradescants—a father and a son. During the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries they made a number of explorations around the world, collecting exotic plants and animals to display in their museum, a museum they named the Ark. After the deaths of both Tradescants, the contents of the Ark ended up in the hands of Elias Ashmole, who bequeathed it to Oxford University on his death. The Ark provided the basis for what is now known as the Ashmolean Museum. The Tradescant Winterson refers to is the son (1608 - 1662). See Prudence Leith-Ross, *The John Tradescants*.

Winterson explores the evolution of Jordan's sense of gender identity through his journeys with Tradescant. Tradescant teaches Jordan about the practical aspects of sea-journeys, but what Jordan remembers most clearly is Tradescant's more metaphysical advice: "every mapped-out journey contains another journey hidden in its lines..." (23). While Tradescant's journeys occupy recognizable parameters of chronological time and place, Jordan's quest follows a radically different line that reflects Tradescant's philosophy: "[I]n my mind it is always the same place I return to," he says, "and that one place not the most beautiful nor the most surprising. To escape from the weight of the world, I leave my body where it is" (17). In this way Jordan discovers the "invisible" facts of his life, the facts flying without him "like the Twelve Dancing Princesses who shot from their window every night and returned home every morning with torn dresses and worn-out slippers and remembered nothing" (10).

Where Jordan first encounters the invisible facts of his life is in a city where "the words resist erasure" (17). "The oldest and most stubborn," he says, "form a thick crust of chattering rage"(17). Language, in this city, has a life of its own. In its most tangible form it is a series of quarrels and contentious rows multiplied over time that produce effects that are eventually perceived as social reality. While cleaners hover over the city with brooms and mops, and sweep the sky clean of the effects of language, this does not remove the significatory power of the words, for they are able to move beyond their origins into a larger social context of signifying practice. The words effect *and* affect the city's inhabitants. Winterson gives literal shape to these reality effects, and in one instance a cleaner's hand is "badly mauled" by a "vicious row" (17). Winterson constructs the linguistic effects of this city as potentially lethal ones, and she leaves no doubt as to who is to blame. The men originally responsible for this linguistic oppression deny any culpability, however, and make their defence "on the grounds that the words no longer belonged to them" (17), yet it is evident that these linguistic practices have insidiously regulated the city's social structure, dividing the inhabitants into those who produce language and those whose subjectivity (the cleaners for example) is produced by language.

Jordan's first encounter with Fortunata occurs in this city of words. Her face, he says, "was a sea voyage I had not the courage to attempt" (21). Although we later come to know her as one of the Twelve Dancing Princesses, for Jordan her initial seductiveness depends on her namelessness. In traditional quest fashion Jordan is lured by the mysteriousness of her absence: no one knows who she is or where she came from. When she disappears into the dawn the next morning, Jordan chases after her, and his attempts to

find Fortunata lead him through a series of gender-bending encounters with mythological figures and fairy tale princesses

Initially Jordan's quest seems to traverse a conventionally gendered course, but his encounter with "a pen of prostitutes" leads to radical consequences "The women were gracious," he reports, "but urged me to return in female disguise That way I might be granted admittance As a man, however chaste, I would be driven away or made a eunuch" (30) Compliantly, he returns in feminine disguise Although his feminine garb allows him to enter the world of these women, Jordan is recognizable to us as an outsider because he has no understanding of the way these women are interacting "[I]t seemed as though they were communicating without words," he comments, and what at first seemed an essentializing move on Winterson's part—using woman as a category Jordan cannot merely step into—is actually a more complex strategy Why Jordan cannot simply exchange one gender for another is informed by Winterson's proposal that when gender is viewed merely as sexual difference, the issues of power that shape and represent gender relations are obscured Jordan is not able to "be" a woman just by dressing as one, and his cross-dressing experiences are frustrating encounters that force him to consider more carefully the dynamics of how sexual difference is represented and constructed The operations of gender, Jordan discovers, are not only issues of difference, but specifically the questions of power that are always shaped within certain ideological frameworks that disguise the presence of inequality and male domination The prostitutes are the possessions of a rich man—they live in his house and serve his pleasures Jordan is unable to understand their language because he is, like the rich man, of the gender of the oppressor, and so unable to comprehend the language of the oppressed Thus he determines to explore further into the world of gender

> I have met a number of people who, anxious to be free of the burdens of their gender, have dressed themselves men as women and women as men
>
> After my experience in the pen of prostitutes I decided to continue as a woman for a time and took a job on a fish stall
>
> I noticed that women have a private language A language not dependent on the constructions of men but structured by signs and expressions, and that uses ordinary words as code-words meaning something other
>
> In my petticoats I was a traveller in a foreign country I did not speak the language I was regarded with suspicion (31)

In his guise as a woman Jordan discovers a female "conspiracy" that shocks him. "I like women," he says, "I regard them highly. I never guessed how much they hate us or how deeply they pity us" (32). Winterson constructs an inferior and easily duped masculine intellect through Jordan's narrative which is clearly developed in the rule book (written by women for women) Jordan is given by a well-meaning female fish-mongerer. It is a catalogue of the ineptitudes and cupidities of men, and the last rule is perhaps most pertinent to Jordan's own situation. "Your greatest strength is that every man believes he knows the sum and possibility of every woman" (33). Jordan has evidently undergone a considerable change in opinion during his brief period in the clothing of a woman, for his sudden capitulation to this rule book reflects a surprisingly different attitude towards women. "I was very much upset when I read this first page, but observing my own heart and the behaviour of those around me I conceded it to be true" (32-33).

In his feminine garb Jordan is treated as a woman, particularly when he dresses as a drab in order to attend the trial of Charles I (68), and this introduces an element of crisis into his narrative, for although he cannot understand the language of women, he is treated as a woman. Gender is exposed as a performance that produces the illusion of an inner sex or essence. His gestures and his gait proclaim him as a woman (at least, to the soldiers he meets), but is really just a surface representation that challenges heterosexual gender divisions. Marjorie Garber, in her book *Vested Interests*, notes "the appeal of cross-dressing" as a simultaneous deconstruction/ reconstruction of gender categories (9), and her comments have a particular significance when we examine Jordan's own attempts at cross-dressing. Jordan, in his female clothing, challenges conventional modes of gender representation. He is neither essentially female nor recognizably male, but rather a third category of individuation altogether. Garber posits this third category as "that which questions binary thinking and introduces crisis—a crisis which is symptomatized by *both* the overestimation *and* the underestimation of cross-dressing. ... The 'third' is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a space of possibility" (11). How Winterson uses this "space of possibility" is developed most forcefully through Jordan's encounter with the Twelfth Dancing Princess.

The Grimms' version of *The Twelve Dancing Princesses*, a version in which these twelve princesses were mere stock characters, stands as a silent sentinel in the background of Jordan's narrative. They live in a city where "the inhabitants have reconciled two discordant desires: to remain in one place and to leave it behind forever" (43). The significance of these "discordant desires" impacts upon Winterson's version of *The Twelve Dancing Princesses*, because she treats the original, familiar ending as the point from which

her own rewrite begins. The tales the princesses tell Jordan layer themselves one by one on top of the Grimms' version so that the trappings of the familiar fairy tale are exposed as precisely that—familiar trappings. In this example, the eldest princess tells Jordan how she and her sisters came to live together.

> You know that eventually a clever prince caught us flying through the window. We had given him a sleeping draught but he only pretended to drink it. He had eleven brothers and we were all given in marriage, one to each brother, and as it says lived happily ever after. We did, but not with our husbands.
>
> . . .
>
> For some years I did not hear from my sisters, and then, by a strange eventuality, I discovered that we had all, in one way or another, parted from the glorious princes and were living scattered, according to our tastes.
>
> We bought this house and we share it. (48)

The tales of these Dancing Princesses—a heterogeneous affair of lesbian passion, Christian symbolism, and fairy tales references—demonstrates that the "tastes" of these eleven women are not flavoured by a predominantly heterosexual point of view. Some are lesbians and some loved the princes they had married, but all their stories reify what Jordan learned in the rule book: that men "are never never to be trusted" (32). The pictures that emerge from their stories show Jordan "the penalty of love" (47), but also cause him some consternation, for there are only eleven princesses in this house—the twelfth, as he soon discovers, is missing.

The twelfth Dancing Princess, as Jordan learns from her sisters, ran from her impending marriage to the prince who had discovered their secret life. On that day, instead of following her sisters, this princess "flew from the altar like a bird from a snare and walked a tightrope between the steeple of the church and the mast of a ship weighing anchor in the bay," never to be seen by her sisters again (60). "She was, of all of us" the eldest Princess tells Jordan, "the best dancer, the one who made her body into shapes we could not follow. She did it for pleasure, but there was something more for her, she did it because any other life would have been a lie. She didn't burn in secret with a passion she could not express, she shone" (60). Through further query, Jordan discovers that this sister is the dancer he met in the city of words. Her name is Fortunata. He is warned by the

princesses that she will not be what he expects—"The body she has will not be the body she had" (60)—and they are only too accurate

Fortunata is Winterson's 'third category' in *Sexing the Cherry* She is a distinctive character even against the intense magical-realism of the novel Her presence articulates an alternate mode of gender representation, for she has completely discarded the constrictions of conventional gender behaviour She enters the novel in a particularly distinctive section that calls immediate attention to itself because it is the sole portion of the novel that is completely italicized This section, which begins and ends on a single page, is also the only instance where the novel is written in the *third* person She is, it seems, a dancing instructor

> *At a dancing school in a remote place, Fortunata teaches her pupils to become points of light*
>
> . . .
>
> *Most, she releases like butterflies over a flowering world Bodies that could have bent double and grown numb she maintains as metal in a fiery furnace, tempering, stretching, forcing sinews into impossible shapes and calling her art nature*
>
> *She believes that we are fallen creatures who once knew how to fly She says that light burns in our bodies and threatens to dissolve us at any moment*
>
> . . .
>
> *To her dancers she says, 'Through the body, the body is conquered' (72)*

The simple act of telling Fortunata's story from this point of view charges the narrative, for not only is it the sole instance in the novel where the narrative deviates from a first-person perspective, but this description places Fortunata in a time warp (as we recognize it) She is, in contrast to her sisters, neither stiff nor old She has taught her body to become her instrument The body is Fortunata's tool, through it she deconstructs the traditionally heterosexual parameters of gender representation She teaches her pupils to defy the constraints of their bodies with their bodies This she terms not art, but nature The largely conservative views of the Dog-Woman (that ungendered beings are a confusion to themselves) are in direct contrast to those of Fortunata, whose radical methodology implies that only *gendered* bodies are a confusion to themselves Fortunata's innovative adaptation of the physical body is Winterson's most emphatic "challenge to easy notions of binarity"

(Garber 10), as Fortunata refutes the cultural ideologies that determine a feminine or masculine mode of self-representation in favour of her own predominantly ungendered identity.

Although the reader is aware that Fortunata exists at some point in time, Jordan has yet to find her. He continues on his quest for her, and his journeys take him across a landscape that continually challenges the sexism of his notions of heroism and women. Winterson sets him down in a city where love, like a disease, has wiped out the population three times, and through this experience Jordan begins to question his desire to find Fortunata. "Not only was I chasing a dancer who, on the evidence of her sisters, was too old to move, I had in the past entangled myself in numerous affairs with women who would not, could not or did not love me. And did I love them? I thought so at the time, though now I have come to doubt it, seeing only that I loved myself through them" (73-4). This brief statement describes Jordan quite succinctly, for his conception of Fortunata has no resemblance to the real woman, but is only an attractive image of his own making. To be a muse may be enough for some, but the truth, as Jordan discovers, is that he has never really understood how he is both product and process of his social situation. "I may be cynical when I say that very rarely is the beloved more than a shaping spirit for the lover's dreams. And perhaps such a thing is enough. To be a muse may be enough. The pain is when the dreams change, as they do, as they must. Suddenly the enchanted city fades and you are left alone again in the windy desert. As for your beloved, she didn't understand you. The truth is, you never understood yourself" (74).

When Jordan returns to his mother's house, his behaviour, particularly with regards to his grafting experiments, signifies some apparent changes to the traditional perceptions of gender and sexuality he holds. This "new fashion of grafting" is, like many unfamiliar practices, a technique "many in the Church condemn" as unnatural reproduction, "holding that the Lord who made the world made its flora as he wished and in no other way" (78). Jordan tries to explain to his disapproving mother that the newly-grafted cherry tree will have a sexual identity that is as "natural" as their own, but evidently the Dog-Woman upholds the formal biological definitions of socially reproduced beings. "[S]he said such things had no gender and were a confusion to themselves," Jordan relates, but "we have sexed it and it is female" (79). The apparent ease with which Jordan is able to graft the cherry exposes gender as an inevitable reproduction to which there is no true original. That the cherry is sexed as a female, and not as a male, denotes a reversal of the sexual hierarchy that exists in the world of Jordan and his mother. The sexing of the cherry

also re-presents another aspect of the "third" category of gender representation Winterson introduced with Jordan's cross-dressing and with Fortunata.

The sexing of the cherry signals a break with traditional modes of perception, and in Jordan's musings on time and the nature of reality we are introduced to the possibilities of "the inward life" (90). With the appearance of the Twelve Dancing Princesses, the possibility of writing a life-story beyond culturally sanctioned options is introduced into the novel. With Fortunata, the subversion of conventional representations of the body is introduced. With the appearance of this extended dialogue on time and memory, the narrative coherence of *Sexing the Cherry* fragments dramatically. Jordan's narrative travels through time and space in an effort to depict the "superconductive" possibilities of the human body, but, in my opinion, the coherence of Winterson's gender debate crumbles into a complex mass of philosophical explorations into a world of physics, Western art, and metaphysical ramblings. It could be that she is attempting to link the various "technologies" that create and represent gender and sexuality—art, philosophy, semiotics—in an effort to elaborate the discourses that dictate and define human subjectivity, but only when Jordan emerges from his foray into this purely Wintersonian time warp does the narrative reconstruct its focus on Jordan's quest. This is the point at which Fortunata and Jordan meet, and she teaches him about the possibilities of his body.

> I stayed with Fortunata for one month, learning more about her ways and something about my own. She told me that for years she had lived in hope of being rescued, of belonging to someone else, of dancing together. And then she had learned to dance alone, for its own sake and for hers.
> 'And love?' I said.
> She spread her hands and gave me a short lecture on the habits of the starfish. (99)

The starfish, although Winterson does not elaborate this, has no fixed sexual identity—it can adapt its sex to complement the starfish it mates with. Fortunata, like the starfish, has abandoned any allegiance to a distinct sexual specificity. She exists for her own sake, although, as the preceding example illustrates, initially it was not without a certain amount of difficulty. Shake off your restricting ideals and learn to live without conventional preconceptions, she tells Jordan. But Jordan is saddened by his encounter with Fortunata, for her presence has shattered the coherence of his desire to be a hero like Tradescant. When he leaves her to return to Tradescant's ship, he hopes that she will ask him to stay,

but she does not want to be in Jordan's fantasy, and Jordan is forced to see the wisdom in her reasoning.

> The Buddhists say there are 149 ways to God. I'm not looking for God, only for myself, and that is far more complicated. God has a great deal written about Him, nothing has been written about me. ... I could be anywhere, and since I can't describe myself I can't ask for help. We are alone in this quest, and Fortunata is right not to disguise it, though she may be wrong about love. (102)

He leaves her on her island, and heads off to join Tradescant, but in his words we see the poignant realization Jordan has come to. He knows that Fortunata will forever escape him, but her fortitude and creativity have given him the inspiration to be a hero on his own terms, and in his own way.

> 'I'll come back another day,' I say.
>
> She smiles at me and says nothing, and even as I say it I know it won't be true. She will elude me, she and this island will slip sideways in time and I'll never find them again, except perhaps in a dream.
>
> ...
>
> She wades into the water with me, deep enough to wet the bottom of her hair, and takes my face in both her hands and kisses me on the mouth. Then she turns away and I watch her walk back across the sand and up over the rocks. I begin to row, using her body as a marker.
>
> I always will. (103)

Her body is a reminder to Jordan—it represents another angle of self-representation—that he cannot function creatively inside the traditional parameters of the hero's quest. He leaves her, and with his newly-discovered knowledge he returns home to the Dog-Woman. He returns as, of all things, a hero, bringing the first pineapple to the shores of England.[19] He is greeted by his mother, who has been awaiting him on the muddy banks of the Thames. During the night, while Jordan is sleeping, the Dog-Woman notices a small silver pendant

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[19] Winterson entwines historical fact with her fiction at this point, as her reference to the Danckerts painting, on p 113, illustrates. This painting, showing John Rose (the Royal Gardener) presenting the first pineapple brought to the country to Charles II, is dated 1668.

around his neck. "It was a tiny pair of shoes," she says, "dancing shoes, their feet curved inwards as though standing on tip-toe" (109). When he awakes, Jordan tells his mother about his encounter with Fortunata. "It was given to me by a woman who does not exist," he says, "It was a day like this she described, when she told me the story of Artemis and why she was in her service" (130-31). The Dog-Woman begs to hear the story, it being "only just light," and so Jordan tells her "Fortunata's Story" (131), which is evidently Fortunata's advice to Jordan.

Winterson's innovations on rewritten myths and fairy tales are further developed with "Fortunata's Story." Jordan calls this story "Fortunata's Story," but, as we discover, it is really about the Greek goddess Artemis. Artemis' story is one of the "tricks of the light" through which Winterson deconstructs the conventional patterns of myths and fairy tales. Winterson's reference to the Florentine painter Paolo Uccello (92), who is often credited as one of the first to develop the use of dimension in painting (Murray 455), is a continuation of the concept of perspective that she begins with *The Twelve Dancing Princesses*. "My own life is like this [painting], or, I should say, my own lives," Jordan says, "For the most part I can see only the most obvious detail, the present, my present. But sometimes, by a trick of the light, I can see more than that" (92).

"Fortunata's Story" is more accurately the story of Artemis and her encounter with Orion, and it is a story that might have helped Jeanette in *Oranges*. According to this story, Artemis disdained the traditional feminine pursuits of marriage and motherhood. She preferred to hunt. She begged a bow and some arrows from her father, and set off into the wilderness. Like many of Winterson's quest heroes, Artemis is a solitary figure who prefers to live alone.

> Soon her fame spread and other women joined her, but Artemis didn't care for company. She wanted to be alone. In her solitude she discovered something very odd. She had envied men their long-legged freedom to roam the world and return full of glory to wives who only waited. She knew about the heroes and the home-makers, the great division that made life possible. Without rejecting it she had simply hoped to take on the freedoms of the other side, but what if she travelled the world and the seven seas like a hero? Would she find something different or the old things in different disguises? (131)

The traditional options of feminine behaviour hold no appeal for Artemis, and so, like Fortunata, Artemis reorganizes the pattern of tradition to suit herself. Artemis, a strong and powerful woman, envies the freedom of these mythological heroes, and decides that this freedom should not be a masculine privilege. But freedom to travel is not the essential point, as she attempts to explain to Orion. "The journey itself [is] not enough" she tells him (132). Unfortunately, the significance of her words is lost on him. Instead, Orion decides to take Artemis, whether she wants him or not. He rapes her, and her revenge is short and to the point. "She killed him with a scorpion" (132), and in this action Artemis completely changes her life. But it is not the part we might expect. It is her past, *not* her future.

"Fortunata's Story" gives us another perspective on the story of Artemis and Orion.[20] It also gives Jordan another perspective on Fortunata's desire to be alone. Winterson articulates the quest of each figure—Jordan, the Dog-Woman, Fortunata, Artemis—as necessarily solitary acts of individuation. In addition, "Fortunata's Story" provides the impetus the Dog-Woman and Jordan need to escape from their own story, and so they move beyond the parameters of the conventional narrative plot of the novel. Their characters are irrevocably altered in Winterson's narrative time and space. With one gesture, the Dog-Woman claims responsibility for the Great Fire of London. With one gesture, Jordan comes face to face with the "self" he has been pursuing throughout the novel. And, with one gesture, Winterson intertwines the lives of these two characters with two characters from twentieth-century England, characters who have also been sleepwalking through the events of their lives.

The controversy Jordan experiences in his quest for identity is informed by Winterson's continual references to the construction of gender and identity. This is most apparent when the characters of Fortunata and her sisters are introduced. The interpretive framework Jordan uses to delineate his quest ambitions functions as a hierarchical narrative that establishes the hero as someone who uses the women in his life as mere accoutrements. He has little knowledge of the power structures that subjugate women's subjectivity, and what he learns through his experiences exposes the ambitions of his quest as specifically patriarchal ones that can only succeed through the objectification of women. Thus, Winterson uses gender as the tool through which she deconstructs, then subsequently reconstructs, a hero's quest that is not predicated on a traditional sexual hierarchy.

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[20] Edith Hamilton, in *Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes*, states that the Artemis of Greek legend was "Lady of Wild Things, Huntsman-in-chief to the gods, an odd office for a woman" (31). On the subject of Artemis and Orion, she speculates that Artemis might have killed Orion in several ways: in "jealous anger," perhaps, or perhaps by accident, but "in the end the goddess killed him" (297).

Judith Butler, in *Gender Trouble*, draws an interesting parallel between the construction of gender and the sexing of the body that seems to be echoed by Winterson's exploration of these issues. "Bodies cannot be said to have a signifiable existence prior to the mark of their gender, the question then emerges: To what extent does the body come into being in and through the mark(s) of gender? How do we reconceive the body no longer as a passive medium or instrument" (8). In *Sexing the Cherry*, Winterson uses the characters of the Dog-Woman, Jordan, and Fortunata in particular as deconstructive instruments that expose the limiting binaries of traditional masculine and feminine subjectivity. The Dog-Woman is representative of a woman who, because her body does not fit into a socially acceptable female form, has rejected traditional notions of femininity for her own particular definition of subjectivity. Jordan begins as an extremely "passive medium" and is taught to develop his own "rewritten" version of a quest—one that is not predicated on an idealized muse or on an essentially heroic nature. Fortunata, as Winterson refigures her, is of a different gender altogether. She is a space of possibility that teaches Jordan to defy the parameters of his conventional assuptions regarding heroes and women. Seen together, these three characters represent Winterson's trinity of gender: one female, one male, and one who, like the newly-sexed cherry, has neither parent nor seed.

# Conclusion
## The fruits of her labours

I cannot overemphasize the
importance of an outside toilet when
there is no room of one's own It was
on the lavatory that I first read Freud
and D H Lawrence and perhaps,
after all, it was the right place
—Jeanette Winterson[21]

In *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, Winterson exposes how the specificity of Jeanette's lesbian experience is treated as a 'bad copy' by her community and family She uses the traditional parameters of the quest motif, as Jeanette develops them, to call into question the claims of heterosexual priority, thus critiquing the political and cultural forces that transform deviations from the heterosexual norm into deviant sexualities In *Sexing the Cherry*, Winterson questions the masculine priority of the traditional male quest hero She introduces the dimension of gender into the quest, and strategically places her primary quest hero in the guise of a man Through the characters of Fortunata and Artemis, Winterson questions the gender exclusions apparent in traditional quest stories Through the perspective of the Dog-Woman's narrative, we see what it means to be scorned as an ugly, fat, and impossibly large woman Winterson's characters demonstrate how stifling societal conventions can be on the individual who deviates from the norm She develops a new methodology for the literary quest, one that is not predicated solely on the sexual attributes of the individual, although it is greatly biased in favour of the feminine

In Winterson's feminization of the quest, the characters of *Sexing the Cherry* are given platforms from which to expound alternate modes of gender behaviour and subjectivity At times it appears as though she is arguing for a complete reassessment of

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21 "A Passion for Words" p 10

traditional notions of gender and sexuality, while at the same time upholding an equally traditional belief in an essential feminine and masculine mentality. The quest, in Winterson's novels, reveals how cultural stereotypes of men and women can trap individuals in a specific manner—through hero worship or through objectification of a lover. These obstacles are not located in any particular time or place, but, as she stresses, are localized in the cultural discourses, and also in the minds of her characters. Her feminized quest strategies posit active heroes who learn to reassess their situation as they want it to be, and not "the way it's supposed to be."

*Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* stands as a parent plant from which *Sexing the Cherry* grew. It can be seen as the seed of Winterson's quest explorations. Winterson takes the quest motif, and, like Jordan, she grafts what she considers to be the best aspects of it onto a conception all her own, and the result is a hybrid of humour, feminist wit, and Wintersonian dogma. What is perhaps most notable in the consideration of these two novels is that her reassessment of the quest motif raises questions about the traditional quest hero and the parameters of the traditional quest. In both *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* and *Sexing the Cherry*, Winterson's characters—Jeanette, Jordan, Fortunata, the Dog-Woman—are on what could be seen as conventional quests for identity, in that they move through their narratives seeking knowledge and wisdom. Jordan retains the most obvious ties to the quest hero in this sense. But, if we compare the alterations Winterson has made to the parameters of the traditional quest, the relationship between the traditional quest hero and cultural sanction becomes quite apparent. Traditional quest heroes, in Campbell's analysis, are men. They are strong, powerful, avenging figures who work tirelessly (most of the time) to achieve their goal—whether it be a vision of the Grail, killing the dragon, or rescuing a princess. The traditional quest hero is either of royal lineage, or marries into it. He is also heterosexual. In contrast, Winterson's quest heroes are a motley assortment of figures—lesbians, religious fundamentalists, giants, men dressed as women, fairy tale women, women who resemble dried animal hides, mythological women—who are not destined for greatness in the conventional sense. Winterson punctuates her novels with the strength and vibrance of these characters, but she also emphasizes the insignificant places in their society accords them because of their marginality. She raises the issue that the traditional quest hero carries the approval or support of his community (think of the Grail knights or St. George). Winterson's quest heroes stand on the margins of their communities, and are frequently what we might consider to be outcasts of their societies. The standards by which the traditional hero is judged are shown to be, in Winterson's fiction, inextricably linked with cultural sanction.

That this sanction is only granted through adherence to culturally approved standards is a strong element in both *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* and *Sexing the Cherry*. In *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, the form of the quest, as we recognize it, founders somewhat as Jeanette is denied a place in her community because of her rebellious behaviour. In *Sexing the Cherry*, Jordan struggles with the myth of the hero. What both novels affirm, however, is the fact that the questing character must learn to ignore the pull of social demands and light out on their own, defining the parameters of the journey for themselves. It is this, perhaps, that makes Jeanette Winterson such a good story-teller. She subverts the heterosexist conventions of the quest and encourages her characters to develop their own potential and to ignore the dictates of their culture, which she exposes as crippling and parochial ideologies, but she never loses her humour. She has, in these two novels, made a space in which the marginal characters of her fictional societies can express their idiosyncratic notions, and, as such, her novels stand as luminous literary signposts for feminist writers who want to write beyond traditional endings.

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