
Integrating Fantasy and Reality in Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*

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“People like to separate storytelling which is not fact from history which is fact. They do this so that they know what to believe and what not to believe” (93), observes the narrator Jeanette in Jeanette Winterson’s boundary-crossing novel *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. By making the distinction between history and storytelling, Jeanette clearly defines fact and fiction, and by extension, the belief systems she has been brought up with—religious fundamentalism and her mother’s absolutist worldview—as rigid binaries. Jeanette’s declaration also exposes how authority is granted and maintained in this construction of the world in which there exist only opposing choices. Privileging one binary over the other becomes easy shorthand for determining right from wrong, thereby naturalizing moral judgments and perpetuating social, political, religious, and sexual norms. As Isabella C. Anievas Gamallo points out, “establishing one particular narrative as ‘official History’ becomes a strategy to impress and reinforce dominant ideological discourses” (128). What Winterson shows in *Oranges* are the ways in which these dominant discourses can be overturned. “Walls protect and walls limit,” the narrator Jeanette notes, but “It is in the nature of walls that they should fall” (112). As this description suggests, the effort it takes to institutionalize and naturalize certain behaviors and beliefs—to maintain the walls—also points to places where the structures are weak because ideologies are in flux. In *Oranges*, stories are the places where ideologies are most unstable and visible.

By narratively juxtaposing reality (Jeanette’s history) with fairy tales and “fantastic” spaces, Winterson complicates the “truths” of each setting, disrupts the binary imperative, and reveals the spaces where change can occur. The biblical, fantasy, and personal narratives are the sites in *Oranges* where the nature of wall-like belief systems are scrutinized and where meaning and identity are affirmed, contested, and then either reaffirmed or deconstructed. If, as Peggy Dunn Bailey argues, “Winterson deconstructs Jeanette’s received ideology and demonstrates the ways in which self and reality are narrative constructions” (61), then these stories are the spaces in which the power to define oneself and one’s reality is up for negotiation and interpretation. Whether the narrative’s power is ultimately

reaffirmed or disrupted, these remain sites of instability. By describing battles for interpretive power like the one that occurs over Jeanette's Fuzzy Felt depiction of Daniel in the lions' den, Winterson shows the fluidity of meaning and exposes what is ideologically at stake in these established narratives.

In *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*, Nancy Armstrong argues that fiction, domestic fiction in particular, both reflects and shapes culture: it is "the document and ... the agency of cultural history... [I]t helped to formulate the ordered space we now recognize as the household, made that space totally functional, and used it as the context for representing normal behavior. In so doing, fiction contested and finally suppressed alternative bases for human relationships" (23). This dual function of fiction is represented within *Oranges*. Winterson's text allows for a reciprocal construction of influence as Jeanette negotiates and rewrites stories in an attempt to ascertain her place both in the household and in the church. Both spaces seek to define "normal" social and sexual behaviors and desires, and one way this ideological indoctrination takes place is through culturally appropriate stories. By offering behavioral models for Jeanette in terms of family, social, and sexual relations, the Bible acts like the 18th- and 19th-century conduct books and domestic fiction that Armstrong describes, which shape gender roles and desires: the "novel, together with all manner of printed material, helped to redefine what men were supposed to desire in women and what women, in turn, were supposed to desire to be" (251). Furthermore, Armstrong argues that these texts obscure their political agenda; they "appeared to have no political bias" so the "rules took on the power of natural law, and as a result, they presented ... readers with ideology in its most powerful form" (60). Similarly, the Bible stories and fairy tales presented in *Oranges* are so entrenched in Jeanette's consciousness that even though these narratives powerfully regulate conduct, their power and political bias are masked. In *Oranges*, Winterson both shows the ways in which the biblical stories that Jeanette is exposed to early on reinforce the fundamentalist religious beliefs and works to expose the political, sexual, and religious bias in these texts as a way of subverting their naturalizing function. By giving as much credence to Jeanette's personal feelings as the morals taught in these other texts, Winterson uses the personal narrative to disrupt the power of these socially entrenched stories. Through the process of integrating stories and reality, which collapses the distinction between history and story, fact and fiction, personal and political, Winterson models a new, more fluid belief system that "subvert[s] the possibility of a single authoritative reading of her fiction" and allows for multiple and shifting truths (Gamallo 126).

Elsie, one of Jeanette's mentors, expresses this more fluid and harmonious relationship in her advice to Jeanette: "'There's this world,' she banged the wall graphically, 'and there's this world,' she thumped her chest. 'If you want to make sense of either, you have to take notice of both'" (32). Jeanette's inner realities, the interior knowledge that Elsie represents by thumping on her chest, are worked out in fantasy and dreams. The fantasy stories do not simply describe new worlds but also contain religious and fairy tale details—elements of traditional narratives—that are the basis of Jeanette's early belief system. By "illustrat[ing] personal and psychological conflicts and ... point[ing] out possible solutions and alternative explanations for them" (Gamallo 126), these narrative spaces help Jeanette understand her place in the world and the different social relationships that shape it.

Through storytelling, Jeanette also learns that she has the power of self-determination and self-definition in this new world. As Bailey argues, "When Jeanette chooses herself (her thoughts and feelings, not those dictated to her) over the wall, she must construct another life, another narrative in order to survive" (75). By replacing the dominant narratives with stories of her own invention—a skill that develops throughout the text—Jeanette does precisely this; she constructs her own story and survives. Moreover, it is at the moment when Jeanette can write her own stories and voice her own opinions that the walls fall. "That walls should fall," Jeanette observes, "is the consequence of blowing your own trumpet" (112). Before the walls come down, however, Jeanette must recognize their restrictive nature.

The first fantasy story of the novel shows Jeanette's early acceptance of her family's and her church's ideological walls. In this story, a passionate, sensitive princess must discover what constitutes her productive place in society. Initially, she is too sensitive to do anything; even "the death of a moth could distress her for weeks on end" (9). However, she meets a hunchback who offers the princess an already established role in society; the princess will take over the hunchback's job. Her duties are:

1. To milk the goats
2. To educate the people
3. To compose songs for the festival. (9)

By taking over the hunchback's job, the princess is kept busy enough not to be overly sensitive, and she finds a useful place in society.

The style and content of the list of Jeanette's mother's expectations for the infant Jeanette mirrors that of the princess' duties.

She [Jeanette's mother] would get a child, train it, build it, dedicate it to the Lord:
a missionary child,
a servant of God,
a blessing. (10)

The parallel suggests that by fulfilling these family, social, and religious expectations, Jeanette will become a productive member of her fundamentalist religious community, and just as the princess must learn her duties from her mentor, Jeanette must learn how to act from her mother. Like the princess who must feed and educate people, Jeanette will do missionary work as a way to feed people's bodies and souls. As part of her job in the church, Jeanette preaches and leads revivals—a type of festival; this work parallels the duty of the princess to compose songs for the festivals. Therefore, this story demonstrates that, like the princess, Jeanette learns and originally accepts her proper and productive place in her community.

This fairy-tale bliss, however, starts to erode when Jeanette at age seven begins to question the biblical stories on which her social and religious education have been based. When Pastor Finch proposes that “This little lily [Jeanette] could herself be a house of demons” (12), Jeanette learns that people and things are malleable and potentially contradictory and deceptive. Made uncomfortable by the pastor's words, Jeanette leaves the room and works out her unvoiced confusion with Fuzzy Felt. In so doing, she also learns that malleability might not be such a bad thing.

Jeanette uses the Fuzzy Felt in order to rewrite the story of Daniel in the lions' den. As her subject suggests, Jeanette's experimentation with revision begins within the confines of her religious knowledge. However, her picture represents Daniel being eaten by the lions, thereby suggesting an alternative ending. In the biblical story, Daniel is not hurt because he believes in his God. Therefore, Jeanette's revision challenges a belief that God or religious narratives will save her.

When Pastor Finch sees Jeanette's version of the story, he is “aghast” and explains that her representation is “not right” (13). “Don't you know that Daniel escaped?” he asks. “In your picture the lions are swallowing him” (13). The pastor's horror shows the threat Jeanette's revision represents.¹ Moreover, Pastor Finch's comment that Jeanette's story is “not right” makes clear that, in his view, there is only one correct version of a story.

Although Jeanette may not understand the full ramifications of her biblical revision, her actions are consciously subversive. She does not tell Pastor Finch the truth about her pictorial intentions, which she describes as a “rewrite of Daniel in the lions' den” (12). Instead, she mollifies Pastor Finch by telling him what she

thinks he wants to hear, and she restricts her narrative explanation to something religiously acceptable. “[P]utting on [her] best, blessed face” (13), Jeanette explains that she was pretending that the lions represent whales and that really her picture depicts Jonah being eaten by the whale: “I wanted to do Jonah and the whale, but they don’t do whales in Fuzzy Felt” (13). Jeanette’s explanation suggests that she can change the signifiers in order to change the story. However, for Pastor Finch, signifiers are static and any revision is threatening. The problem for Pastor Finch is that Jeanette’s original representation of the lions eating Daniel shows familiar characters in an unfamiliar story, and it shows a different way of understanding power relations.²

This Fuzzy Felt episode is one of the places where ideologies are revealed and eventually reaffirmed, but it is also a place where slippage occurs so that Jeanette can see that meaning is in flux, narrative revision is possible, and that the authority to restructure the story and its embedded power relations lies with the storyteller. In this moment, she realizes some stories are not satisfying and need to be retold in new ways.³ She also recognizes the deconstructive implications of Fuzzy Felt. The pieces (and the narrative they represent) can come apart and do not have to be put back together in the same way. As such, they represent a challenge to static history and to the church.

The medium and Jeanette’s vivid imagination expose the ways in which the fundamental text of the Bible is open to different interpretations, and it is this instability that Pastor Finch finds so problematic. Clinging tightly to his beliefs, Pastor Finch tries to ignore Jeanette’s religious challenge by insisting that the Bible is not open to interpretation. Of course, what he really means is that it is not open to Jeanette’s interpretation. The same argument that Tess Cosslett makes about Jeanette’s mother not admitting that she rewrites stories, instead “claim[ing] to be in possession of the truth” (24), can be applied to Pastor Finch. By seeing his own reading of the Bible as Truth, he ignores the idea that he too may be involved in the interpretative process.

Even if Pastor Finch will not admit the cause, the panic he feels when Jeanette challenges the familiar biblical narrative shows the ways in which his worldview is tenuous. In an attempt to stabilize the foundation, he forcefully defines right and wrong. He must also reaffirm the narrative structures. Therefore, Pastor Finch cannot let Jeanette’s revision stand. In an effort to “right” the story, the pastor returns the characters to their original roles. Daniel’s safety as well as the safety of Pastor Finch are both ensured when he “carefully rearrange[s] the lions in one corner, and Daniel in the other” (13). He is then comfortable enough to start on a new Fuzzy Felt story, the Astonishment at Dawn scene, and enlists Jeanette’s help.

Jeanette, however, refuses his offer. From a practical point of view, she knows that the Astonishment at Dawn scene is not possible because “Susan Green was sick on the tableau of the three Wise Men at Christmas, and you only get three kings to a box” (13). More significantly, Jeanette is not invested in reaffirming the structures. When her version of the Daniel story is dismantled, Jeanette loses interest and leaves Pastor Finch to maintain the familiar narratives on his own.

The Fuzzy Felt incident and Jeanette’s interaction with Pastor Finch reveal Jeanette’s first religious, historical, and narrative questions, even if she does not explicitly articulate her skepticism. She begins to realize here and then more so when her mother ignores her deafness for three months that the world is not as clear or easy to understand as she had thought: “Since I was born 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” (26-27). Both Jeanette’s Fuzzy Felt revision and her rather heretical thought that “the church was sometimes confused” have the potential to destabilize Jeanette’s worldview and the worldview of the people around her. However, because a fundamentalist religious perspective is the foundation of Jeanette’s knowledge of the world, her theological rebellion, like her Fuzzy Felt revision, is only tentative at this point.

A sermon on perfection given by a preacher at the Society’s special conference provokes Jeanette to question this religious foundation:

Perfection, the man said, was a thing to aspire to.... It could only be truly realised in the next world, but we had a sense of it, a maddening, impossible sense, which was both a blessing and a curse.

“Perfection,” he announced, “is flawless.” (60)

Because Jeanette does not yet have the language to voice her conflicted feelings about the sermon, Winterson recasts Jeanette’s theological disagreement as a fairy tale. The story about perfection has all the trappings of a fairy tale: a prince in search of a wife, a perfect woman (potential princess), a talking goose, the theme of good versus evil, and an expectation of marriage and a happily ever after ending.

In this Cinderella story, a prince goes in search of a wife. He “want[s] a woman, without blemish inside or out, flawless in every respect ... a woman who is perfect” (61). When after three years the prince and his advisors cannot find this woman, the prince writes a book titled *The Holy Mystery of Perfection* (62) in order to make explicit what he is looking for and what he means by perfection. Yet even with a model, his quest is unsuccessful. Three more years pass before the perfect woman is finally found. The prince’s advisors are relieved that their quest is over and expect that they can “live happily ever after” (64). The perfect woman, however, disrupts their expectations and the fairy-tale marriage narrative when she politely refuses

the prince's proposal. This refusal precipitates "a gasp of horror from the gathered court" (64), which parallels Pastor Finch's aghast reaction to Jeanette's Fuzzy Felt recreation. Just as Jeanette's religious disagreement that challenges the traditional church narrative and its authority is "not right," the perfect woman's reaction is "not right" in terms of the traditional romance plot. Even when the prince insists the woman "must" marry him because he has "written all about [her]" (64), she refuses to let her destiny be defined by the prince's book.

She also calls into question the truth of his perfection theory, thereby challenging his narrative authority. She points out that she does not fit his description of perfection, which he defines as flawlessness. Instead, "She was perfect because she was a perfect balance of qualities and strengths" (64). Because the prince has already claimed that the woman is perfect, if he accepts her definition, it will be necessary for him to redefine perfection, rewrite his book, and make a public declaration. The prince's position of authority, as his advisors insist, makes these acts impractical: "Because you are a prince ... you cannot be seen to be wrong" (65). In order to save face, the prince must prove that the woman is not actually perfect and publicly discredit her.

Like the pastor giving his sermon on perfection, the prince tells the town "there is no such thing as flawlessness on this earth" (66), thereby suggesting that perfection in this world is not possible. However, unlike Jeanette, the woman can voice her disagreement, and she speaks out. In doing so, she continues to contradict the prince's opinions. When the prince insists on his original definition of perfection, the woman tells the prince: "What you want does not exist" (66). By talking back and refusing the prince's earlier offer of marriage, the perfect woman rejects the role of submissive fairy-tale princess.

Her rejection of the prince's offer and her willingness to speak the truth get the perfect woman into trouble. As the prince's chief advisor eagerly proclaims when the woman continues to be vocal, she condemns herself. "Proof from her own lips," he cries (66). Because the woman's words contradict those of the prince, she is punished; the prince orders her head to be chopped off. He believes this action will silence the dissenting voice—"a very great evil" (67)—that upsets the known order. By eliminating the disruptive element, the prince escapes ruin just as Pastor Finch escapes disaster by reordering the Fuzzy Felt figures.⁴ However, unlike the Fuzzy Felt story, in the Perfection tale there is retribution for the figure of authority for his wrongdoing. This judgment is reinforced by the cultural imagery that ends the story. A man who sells only oranges gives the prince a book that "tells you how to build a perfect person" (67). The book is *Frankenstein*, which represents the dangerous hubris inherent in trying to build a perfect person, either

in a fairy tale or through religious instruction. By identifying parallels between the pastor's rigidity and the prince's destructiveness, Winterson shows the dangers of this insistence on perfection as flawlessness.

These parallels show that Jeanette is using the Perfection tale to work out real problems. In addition, the tale reveals the figures who shape Jeanette's worldview; they are archetypal power figures representing stereotypical relationships and desires. The tale represents subordinate roles for women who are punished when they do not conform to them, and within this schema, the only possible moral positions represented are those of good and evil. Similarly, the church offers set roles for women, and as Pastor Finch's reaction to the Fuzzy Felt suggests, the belief system is a binary one of right and wrong. Through this story, the narrator Jeanette can express disagreement in the fantasy world that she does not voice in reality. Yet by showing the danger of expressing disagreement with the prince/church, the story also serves as a warning about challenging authority. Jeanette heeds the warning in this instance and keeps her head. However, the story itself reveals Jeanette's doubts that a fundamentalist religious paradigm can accurately explain her world.

Just as Jeanette expresses her theological disagreement through a fairy tale, she also expresses her ideological disagreement about romantic love and marriage through a deconstruction of fairy tales. The fairy tales Jeanette considers naturalize gendered behavior. In particular, they offer a definition of women's social roles, especially concerning women's appropriate desires. As Jack Zipes contends: "Fairy tales and children's literature were written with the purpose of socializing children to meet definite normative expectations at home and in the public sphere" (9). Winterson uses the conventional fairy-tale plot of women transforming beasts into men through a kiss in order to reveal that this construction of heterosexual female desire does not work for Jeanette, and therefore, she cannot meet "normative expectations at home [nor] in the public sphere."

Beginning with Jeanette's confusion about the relationship between fairy-tale beasts and real beasts, fantasy expectations (dream) and reality begin to mix. The chapter "Numbers" begins with the description: "It was spring, the ground still had traces of snow, and I was about to be married. My dress was pure white and I had a golden crown. As I walked up the aisle the crown got heavier and heavier and the dress more and more difficult to walk in" (71). Because this fairy-tale marriage is such a common ideal, it is not clear that this description is a dream until the second paragraph when the priest keeps getting fatter and fatter "like bubble gum" (71). This confusion between fantasy and reality shows that, for women, fairy tales inform real marriage expectations. Thus, fairy tale and reality

mix on the page and in our cultural expectations, demonstrating how pervasive and insidious these stories are. However, trying out these roles in the real world shows Jeanette their shortcomings.

Jeanette experiences confusion and disappointment when her reality does not match the cultural expectations voiced by her community. “Everyone always said you found the right man,” she thinks (72), but this assurance does not account for Jeanette’s dream or how other women talk about their husbands. When a woman on her street disparages her husband’s behavior by asserting that she “married a pig” (71), Jeanette takes these words literally. Jeanette uses this image in order to make the connections between her dream and reality: “No doubt that woman had discovered in life what I had discovered in my dreams. She had unwittingly married a pig” (71). With the literal interpretations of words that Jeanette has been taught through her biblical studies, it is not surprising that she misinterprets the description of men as pigs.

Jeanette initially looks to fairy tales in order to understand romantic and marital expectations. In particular, she reads “Beauty and the Beast” and then she tries to reconcile this story with reality, but cannot.

I wondered if the woman married to a pig had read this story.... And what about my Uncle Bill, he was horrible, and hairy, and looking at the picture transformed princes aren’t meant to be hairy at all.

Slowly I closed the book. It was clear that I had stumbled on a terrible conspiracy.... What do you do if you marry a beast?

Kissing them didn’t always help. (72)

Jeanette’s question and subsequent musing show her fear that things do not work in reality as they do in fairy tales. If kissing beasts does not turn them into princes, what does? Because fairy tales do not give Jeanette suitable answers, she tries to get answers from her elders. When she tells her mother about the dream, her mother tells her that the problem is nothing more than “sardines for supper” (71). However, when Jeanette has sausage the next night and still has the dream, she knows that her mother’s answer is not right. The conspiracy of fairy tales is linked with the mother’s inability to offer Jeanette answers to her relationship questions, and these incidents reveal to Jeanette that her mother’s worldview may be just as faulty as the ones proposed by fairy tales and her church.

The conspiracy of fairy tales is also juxtaposed with the betrayal Jeanette feels upon learning that her mother has rewritten the end of *Jane Eyre* so that Jane Eyre marries St. John Rivers. This discovery is one of the moments where the givens of Jeanette’s world are upset. Her mother’s revised ending may reflect her romantic and religious desires, but it does not work for Jeanette as a model for

understanding romance. Instead, it is another instance where Jeanette's mother's narrative revision is exposed and the foundation of Jeanette's knowledge—her mother and the church—starts to crumble, and Jeanette loses faith in these representatives of authority.

When her mother fails her, Jeanette tries to reconcile her dream about marriage with reality by looking at other men she knows. In particular, she uses the minister and Uncle Bill as test subjects. The minister, she thinks, must be special because “he [wears] a skirt” (73). However, Uncle Bill's hairiness and his bestial movements—he “slinks off” (73)—confirm Jeanette's worst fears. When Jeanette asks her aunt, “Why are so many men really beasts?” her aunt misunderstands the question. She laughs and tells Jeanette, “You're too young for that” (73). Jeanette has used the language of fairy tales in order to express herself, but her aunt understands the question as descriptive of male behavior, which shows the overlap between the fairy tales and culture. The interaction also shows, like the Fuzzy Felt pieces that can signify different objects, that words can have different meanings.

After direct questioning is unsuccessful, Jeanette decides that listening to other women might reveal some truths about men and beasts. Jeanette's spying has mixed results in terms of answering her questions. Hearing about Doreen's husband Frank being “up to no good” (75) helps confirm her beast theory, but overhearing a discussion about lesbianism confuses her further. Like hairy princes, lesbians are not part of the traditional fairy-tale narrative, and therefore these stories do not help Jeanette understand her desires. Instead, Jeanette turns back to her familiar religious background for comfort. She thinks her missionary destiny will solve the problem of figuring out the relationship between fairy tales and reality by allowing her to avoid the issue: “It was a good thing I was destined to become a missionary. For some time after this I put aside the problem of men and concentrated on reading the Bible” (77). Although Jeanette realizes a discomfort with the romantic stories, and on some level knows they do not fit her life, she continues to try to reconcile them with what she knows to be true: the Bible. However, Jeanette herself shows by the end of the novel that neither Bible stories nor traditional fairy tales accurately describe her desires.

The chapter “Deuteronomy,” which discusses the relationship between stories and history problematizes “truth” and complicates the narratives described in the first half of the book—those that have directly shaped Jeanette's early life. A philosophical Jeanette argues in this section: “we make them [stories] what we will. It's a way of explaining the universe while leaving the universe unexplained.... Some people say 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” (93). In this passage, Jeanette states her objection to the convention of people separating stories from history in an attempt to organize their worlds around the binary and exclusive concepts of true and false and fact and fiction.

This binary belief system is the one to which Jeanette’s mother subscribes. For her, things are either right or wrong, true or false, and she squeezes her understanding of the world to fit this view of history that precludes doubt about its truthfulness. It is this absolutist binary paradigm that Winterson wants to disrupt. As she explains in an interview with Bill Moyers, “what we must not do is accept false choices—fake realities imposed on us by other people.” These are the only choices, however, offered to the narrator Jeanette, so she must learn to negotiate them.

Although people like Jeanette’s mother tell themselves stories in order to create “order and balance,” Jeanette argues that this construction is a limited solution that only offers “pretend” order and “a security that cannot exist” (95). They both have value, but each only offers a single and partial way of seeing the world. Therefore, while stories and histories are necessary to a modern belief system, they also need to be questioned at their foundation. Unlike the pretend order that separating stories from history represents, Jeanette suggests that it is important to be able to see the fluid relationship between the two.

In contrast to Jeanette’s less rigid belief system, her mother’s dichotomous view of history and story is represented by her ability to neatly squeeze potted beef into a sandwich. As Jeanette notes: “she cut the bread firmly, so that only the tiniest squirt of potted beef oozed out” (21). The sandwich and related worldview may be neat, but the need to “cut the bread firmly” demonstrates the effort it takes to hold onto this position. Fear of instability is one reason Jeanette’s mother reacts so strongly and passionately to any ideological challenges. As Bailey astutely notes: “Mother thinks there is only one true narrative, the Bible; however, she fails to see she is ordering her life (and the life of her child) based upon a reductive *interpretation* of the text.... She certainly cannot, and will not, recognize alternative interpretations” (64). As is evidenced from her unwillingness to send Jeanette to school and her designation of the school as a Breeding Ground, Jeanette’s mother is concerned that her daughter will be taught ideas that do not fit her absolutist worldview. Although “Breeding Ground” certainly has sexual connotations, it is the idea that Jeanette will be exposed to the disease of new opinions and beliefs that Jeanette’s mother finds most threatening.

Jeanette, however, is more open to seeing the world from different points of view. Her sandwich and her conception of history are not nearly as neat as her

mother's. Jeanette's sandwich is "laced with mustard," which makes it messier, but also more exciting (95). Similarly Jeanette's history allows for slippage: "I can put these accounts together and I will not have a seamless wonder," she explains (95). Ultimately, Jeanette advises the reader: "If you want to keep your own teeth, make your own sandwiches" (95). This advice and her next crisis show Jeanette's immediate need to find narratives other than traditional fairy tales or religious texts, both of which are someone else's stories and both of which define behavioral norms and desires that do not fit Jeanette's experiences.

The crisis in the novel occurs when Jeanette inadvertently challenges the seemingly innocuous ideologies perpetuated in these texts by falling in love with a woman. Jeanette eventually comes to understand that sexuality and acceptable sexual desires are religious and cultural constructions and can then renegotiate these standards. When she first falls in love with Melanie, however, Jeanette does not have a way to adequately express her feelings. She attempts to use the religious model that she was brought up with, but it does not work for her.⁵ When the pastor asks Jeanette, "Do you deny you love this woman with a love reserved for man and wife?" Jeanette shakily replies, "No, yes, I mean of course I love her" (105). Jeanette's confusion, which is represented by her inability to answer easily a yes-or-no question, shows her inability to express her desire in the context that she knows. From the pastor's point of view, Jeanette has only two options: she can either love Melanie or she can love the Lord, but she cannot love them both. Jeanette, however, does not see her options as mutually exclusive. When the pastor insists that if Jeanette loves Melanie, "Then you do not love the Lord," Jeanette refutes this assertion: "I love both of them," she tells the pastor (105). Jeanette does not understand how loving Melanie is a sin or can be wrong. Using arguments from the Bible, she thinks to herself: "Melanie is a gift from the Lord, and it would be ungrateful not to appreciate her" (104).⁶ This formulation allows Jeanette to reconcile lesbian love and religion, and the model makes sense to her, but like the Fuzzy Felt Daniel in the lions' den, it does not make sense to Pastor Finch.

When pushed by the pastor to renounce Melanie because the relationship is sinful, Jeanette replies by citing Titus 1:15, "To the pure all things are pure" (105). She verbally challenges the pastor just as the woman talks back to the prince in the Perfection tale. Like the perfect woman who will not let her destiny be defined by the prince's book, Jeanette refuses to let her life and desires be circumscribed by Pastor Finch's interpretation of the Bible. She condemns herself by claiming to love Melanie *and* the church. Rather than having her head cut off, Jeanette is punished by being cut off from the church and her family.

Despite being told that her actions are wrong, Jeanette does not see how her formulation of desire is incompatible with her upbringing because it is not adequately discussed at home or in church. Because her mother's experience of true love turns out to be a stomach ulcer (88), all she can offer Jeanette in terms of advice is a glossed over story about Pierre (86)—her supposed true love—and a quick warning to her daughter not to let anyone touch her “down there” (88). In another instance, Jeanette's mother revises her romantic history in order to avoid more explicit questions from Jeanette. In her photo album under “Old Flames,” Jeanette's mother has a picture of Eddy's sister. When Jeanette asks about the picture, her mother makes an excuse and quickly turns the page. The next time Jeanette looks, the picture has been removed. The silence about these romantic issues is in part responsible for Jeanette's later confusion about relationships. When Jeanette tries to broach the subject of Melanie with her mother, her mother listens but does not participate in the discussion. As Jeanette describes: “I decided to tell her how I felt. 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” (102). As the ellipses and hesitations reveal, the subject is not an easy one for Jeanette to discuss, and what Jeanette misreads as understanding is really her mother's shock and disapproval. Her mother's reaction is made more explicit when she tells Jeanette to “Go to bed” and “pick[s] up her Bible” (102), which represents a talisman, a protective symbol for her belief systems. She also refuses to discuss the matter further with Jeanette. This silence continues the pattern of Jeanette's mother not offering Jeanette any guidance about love, romance, and relationships.

Even when Jeanette does hear lesbianism discussed outside of the house, she cannot make sense of the concept because the words describing sex and lesbianism are too vague. The conversation Jeanette overhears is between Nellie and Doreen. They are talking about two women who have gotten a double bed. When Nellie argues that a double bed does not imply sexual activity—“Me and Bert had one bed but we did nothing in it”—Doreen posits that “two women were different” (76). Nellie may understand what Doreen means, but Jeanette does not: “Different from what I wondered” (76). Jeanette is left to wonder because she is eavesdropping and therefore cannot ask for more of an explanation.

At church the matter of love and sex is not made any clearer. Jeanette is simply told she “cannot love Melanie” (105), but she is not told why. Even the implied answer that their relationship represents “Unnatural Passions” is not enough, because Jeanette is unclear about what this phrase means. Jeanette does experience

some sense that perhaps her relationship with Melanie is not quite right and wonders if it falls into this category—“Do you think this is Unnatural Passion? I asked her [Melanie] once” (89)—but because the young women lack a solid definition, they must rely on other means to figure out what is right and wrong. “Doesn’t feel like it,” Melanie responds. “According to Pastor Finch, that’s awful” (89). Jeanette finds Melanie’s logic compelling and concludes, “She must be right” (89). Because Jeanette relies on her religious beliefs to make sense of her feelings and situation, when these biblical interpretations conflict, she cannot understand why one interpretation is more right than another. By paying attention to her own feelings and her individual experiences Jeanette eventually is able to challenge the public, established narratives that even she expected would shape her life.

In the meantime, in order to cope with this crisis of language and belief, Jeanette reverts to fantasy and dream. Fantasy allows these conflicts to be resolved, and then Jeanette can apply the solution to her situation. This strategy is, according to Marilyn R. Farwell, part of developing a lesbian narrative: “The discursively constructed lesbian subject enters diverse narrative structures—realistic or experimental, romantic or heroic—and interrogates the gender positioning of the narrative elements. It undermines gender opposition and hierarchy and also male bonding, structural elements which combine to form the ideology of Western narrative” (23). Questioning the gendered power structures that are ingrained in fundamentalist readings of biblical and other narratives ultimately allows Jeanette to embrace a new identity and provides a language through which to express herself and her desires.

An imaginary orange demon helps Jeanette understand her situation: “We’re here [the demons] to keep you in one piece, if you ignore us, you’re quite likely to end up in two pieces, or lots of pieces” (109). But Jeanette is skeptical, because the orange demon’s assertion conflicts with the core of her belief system. “[I]n the Bible you keep getting driven out,” she asserts, but the demon counters: “Don’t believe all you read” (109). The orange demon’s words confirm Jeanette’s suspicion that not everything in the Bible or in other books is true. However, as the demon suggests, questioning the religious structure can cause a person to fall apart unless she has something to hold onto. When the demon vanishes so that Jeanette can address the church officials, it leaves Jeanette with a rough brown pebble to hold that helps Jeanette remember her true feelings. The pebble has multiple functions. It represents the intersection of interior and exterior knowledge until Jeanette can combine the two and make sense of them herself. It is also reminiscent of the epistemological challenges to her knowledge, something not as solid or strong as the rock of religion. However, as a later dream reveals, in a world with different power structures, the pebble represents strength.

Although Jeanette appears to repent of her Unnatural Passions, she goes to visit Melanie, who is now staying with relatives. This action precipitates another dream of crisis. She dreams of the “City of Lost Chances” and the “Room of the Final Disappointment” (111). These fantasy places may sound dismal, but they allow Jeanette to explore different possible realities for her own life, and the dream gives Jeanette insight into her desires. When Jeanette enters this dream realm, an assistant suggests: “Why don’t you start as a browser” (111). The assistant’s suggestion helps Jeanette set up a method for solving her real-life problems. The first step is to “browse” her options, which she does in the dream and fantasy realms. There are, however, some limitations: “You can change your role, but never your circumstance” (111). One of these roles can be found in the forbidden city where there exists a different power structure. This is the space where a pebble can, as in the David and Goliath story, “fell a warrior” (112) and where Jeanette’s emotional truths can slay foundational ones. Although this image of power in the forbidden city offers Jeanette something new, she still lacks the language to represent these new roles. Jeanette must use biblical language—“Who will cast the first stone?”—and clichéd rhetoric—“She had a heart of stone”—to work through her dilemma (112). Jeanette also reverts back to nursery rhyme paradigms. In particular, she looks at the choices the story of Humpty Dumpty offers: “you or the wall” (113). Humpty Dumpty represents a belief system that cannot be put back together once it is broken. This crumbling belief system is also represented by an image of a crumbling arena. The arena is symbolic of a heroic past, but as the pebble’s power suggests, the crumbling building offers more options than the solid, traditional structure.

Jeanette’s dream allows her to recognize the confinement her childhood options—symbolized by walls that protect and limit (112)—represent. Yet, it also offers other possible realities for her life; walls *can* fall. When she awakens, Jeanette questions her confinement by rejecting the persistent idea that oranges are the only fruit. “What about grapes or bananas?” she silently asks (113). As this example demonstrates, Jeanette’s foray into fantasy transforms her reality: she more insistently questions the givens that shape her life. By interrogating the real options presented to her as well as the fantasy ones, Jeanette rejects the idea of just one right path.

Jeanette’s quest for a viable identity eventually leads her to the Edenic secret garden: “All true quests end in this garden.... To eat of the fruit means to leave the garden because the fruit speaks of other things, other longings. So at dusk you say goodbye to the place you love, not knowing if you can ever return, knowing you can never return by the same way as this” (123). The knowledge the fruit

represents is an understanding of the complex nature of desire. In return for this knowledge, one must say good-bye to familiar comforts that are represented by one's home and the image of Eden, but this is not an exile. To eat the fruit means leaving the garden, but it is in order to begin a new quest. As these two stages of the journey—the quest that ends in the garden and the longing that prompts the new one—reveal, the secret garden represents contradictory desires. These quests also represent a fluid conception of time in which the end is also the beginning, thereby signifying a space in which choices are less dichotomous. The only way to get back into the garden is through “chance” (123) and being true to one's desires. Jeanette's uncomplicated affair with Katy brings her back to this remarkable place and ends her quest to understand the true nature of her feelings. But with the end of this quest comes the longing—prompting a new quest—for a community that will accept her desires. As a result, Jeanette must leave her home knowing she cannot return by the same way she came; however, she leaves with the knowledge that perhaps she can some day return by another path. Returning will signify that she has succeeded in her quest to make peace with her family, her old community, and herself.

The last two stories of the novel—the story of Sir Perceval and the story of Winnet—help Jeanette work through a difficult time and complete her quest. Jeanette has begun to recognize the complexity of her situation: “I loved God and I loved the church, but I began to see that as more and more complicated” (128). The Sir Perceval and Winnet stories complicate and go beyond the earlier narrative models that only worked out single problems such as the problem of religious disagreement or marriage. While these other stories have helped Jeanette understand the expectations for her life and the terms of her conflicted position, the last two stories in the novel help Jeanette reach the place where reality and fantasy freely mix—the place where she can make sense of both worlds.

Structurally, these stories are also more complicated. The story of Sir Perceval and the story of Winnet intertwine with each other, demonstrating a greater number of possibilities than either story offers on its own. In addition, the story of Sir Perceval jumps chapters, which signals further boundary crossing. Both stories mix with the narrative of Jeanette's real life, signifying a more fluid connection between inner and outer worlds. The fantasy stories reflect and encourage Jeanette's growth by becoming longer, less morally clear-cut, and including fewer archetypal figures. Sir Perceval and Winnet Stonejar are specific characters instead of generic princes, princesses, women, or men. The archetypal figures from the earlier stories imply that these narratives fit everyone's life and that readers can be squeezed into one of the roles presented, even if it is through wish fulfillment. In contrast,

making the characters specific allows the reader the possibility of differentiating him- or herself from the characters and narratives presented.

These stories also suggest new possibilities for Jeanette's identity by disrupting traditional gender roles. According to Laura Doan, Winterson's "metafictional writing practices" offer "a vision of hybridized gender construction outside an either/or proposition [that is] at once political and postmodern" (154). This non-binary set of roles is represented within these stories by the cross-gendering of characters, which expands possible identities for Jeanette. For example, in the story of Sir Perceval, Jeanette experiments with a male quest narrative. Although this is a familiar story, the gender of the character who represents Jeanette suggests possible new roles for her that are not based on cultural expectations for women. Yet while Jeanette experiences more freedom in a masculine role, usurping typically male power precisely represents the problem of her relationship with the church.

Jeanette discovers that her power in the church is predicated on her ability to recognize her proper place and the limitations of her authority. Her love for women and her refusal to submit to the church's authority represent dangerous and disruptive elements to the church and to her community, because her actions implicitly question the dominant power structures. Jeanette's sexual relationships become, in Armstrong's terms, a site of struggle over "changing power relations between classes and cultures as well as between genders and generations" (10). Hoping to contain Jeanette's threat to the social order and the church, Pastor Finch acts to discredit her. He insists that Jeanette's homosexuality is the result of having too much religious power and claims that Jeanette's "inability to realize the limits of [her] sex" makes her use of power inappropriate (134). Her punishment is to lose the voice and religious authority that she has gained through her preaching.

Surprisingly and disconcertingly, Jeanette's mother agrees with Pastor Finch's assessment of the problem and his solution: "My mother stood up and said she believed this was right: that women had specific circumstances for their ministry, that the Sunday School was one of them, the Sisterhood another, but the message belonged to the men.... My mother droned on about the importance of missionary work for a woman, that I was clearly such a woman, but had spurned my call in order to wield power on the home front, where it was inappropriate" (133). Jeanette's mother's contention that "the message belonged to the men" throws Jeanette's belief system into turmoil, because she has always encouraged Jeanette's "home front" preaching role. It is not just Jeanette's homosexuality that is problematic for her mother and Pastor Finch—although it certainly is—but that her behavior questions the foundations of knowledge that the members of her church and her community use to differentiate right from wrong.

Because Jeanette's actions threaten to upset her mother's entire belief system, her mother holds on even more tightly to her moral and religious paradigm. She does this by accepting the pastor's diagnosis that Jeanette's problem stems from taking on a man's role in the church. For Jeanette's mother, it is easier to accept that she too will lose power in the church than to see the disintegration of all of her beliefs. Unwilling and unable to make the ideological leap that Jeanette has, she reconfigures her beliefs so they still conform to her literalist and fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible. Her mother's radical shift in perspective unbalances Jeanette's ideological foundation: "Until this moment my life had still made some kind of sense. Now it was making no sense at all" (133). The figure of Sir Perceval not only represents this power struggle but also helps Jeanette make sense of her mother's new point of view.

Sir Perceval's motivation to search for the Holy Grail is to rediscover balance: "He had seen the vision of perfect heroism, and for a fleeting moment, the vision of perfect peace.... He was a warrior who longed to grow herbs" (166). In the Holy Grail, Sir Perceval seeks the missing part of himself that would combine his seemingly opposing desires—heroism and peace—and help him realize his dreams. Similarly, Jeanette seeks to balance her desires so that the church and her love for women can be reconciled.

Additionally, Sir Perceval's quest represents nostalgia for the simplicity of the past. After he leaves Arthur's court, he dreams of lost comforts, "of Arthur's court, where he was the darling, the favourite" (135). Like Sir Perceval, Jeanette has left the comforts of her past. She already has ideologically left the church where she was "the darling," and after the description of this part of the quest narrative, Jeanette announces her decision to permanently leave the church. When she tells the pastor and her mother, Jeanette uses her brown pebble for protection and magical power: "I held on tight to the little brown pebble and hoped they'd go away" (135). Unfortunately, simple fairy-tale power does not work in reality, so the pastor and Jeanette's mother do not disappear. As this failure of magic suggests, wielding power in the real world is more complicated than in the early, simpler fairy tales.

In order to help Jeanette negotiate her more complicated world, the story of Sir Perceval's quest revises the Perfection tale. The restoration of complexity to the Perfection tale is particularly important in the terms that Armstrong uses to describe the effect in 18th- and 19th-century novels of reducing identity to a set of binaries: "the novel exercised tremendous power by producing oppositions that translated the complex and competing ways of representing human identity into a single binary opposition represented by male versus female" (253). The Perfection

tale invokes this gender binary, but by questioning the representation of gender, sexuality, and desire in the Perfection tale and then more emphatically in the later stories, Winterson upsets the flattening and erasure that Armstrong describes.

As a revision, the Sir Perceval story works on several levels. First, it complicates the binary figures of good and evil and the happily-ever-after expectations. Second, Sir Perceval offers Jeanette a better example of self-reliance. The goal of Sir Perceval's quest is to attain balance within himself, which contrasts with the prince who tries to find balance through someone else. Third, Sir Perceval's mobility and agency represent a more powerful and active role than that of the fairy-tale princess who can attain power only by marrying a prince. Finally, in this new configuration, Jeanette who is positioned as Sir Perceval, symbolically gets to explore the prince's role in the first story, which expands the roles for women in the old stories.

Eventually, the Sir Perceval story sets up Jeanette's response to coming home. Through their journeys, she and Sir Perceval have come to understand the mother/king, knowledge that is necessary to come to terms with the past. The story of Winnet, however, is necessary in order for Jeanette successfully to complete her journey home. It is not enough for Jeanette to desire comfort, for that longing just puts her back in an impossible position. It is also not enough, as the Winnet story proposes, to leave forever. Instead, these conflicting longings for comfort and new options—peace and heroism, church and lesbian desire—balance each other in Jeanette's reality.

When Jeanette leaves home, the Winnet narrative begins. Like the story of Sir Perceval, the story of Winnet is another quest narrative, but this time the hero has been recast as a woman. In this story, Jeanette reviews her history and, like the Sir Perceval narrative, reworks some of the earlier fantasy models. The story blurs textual boundaries—specifically, the imposed boundary between story and history—in order to suggest the possibilities of enchantment in reality. The blurring of fantasy and reality is first indicated by Jeanette's and Winnet's rhyming names, which emphasize their kinship. Jeanette's past is also evoked in the names of the ravens, which match the names of Elsie's mice. In addition, there are specific events that parallel those in Jeanette's life. Winnet is adopted by the sorcerer who teaches her his art just as Jeanette's mother adopts her and raises her to be a missionary. There is also a replaying of the events between Katy and Jeanette, except in the story of Winnet, Katy is a boy. Winnet's attention to him is the reason the sorcerer asks Winnet to leave. Relenting a little, the sorcerer gives Winnet a second option: "If you stay, you will stay in the village and care for the goats" (147). Similarly, Jeanette is offered the choice between a less powerful role in the church and leaving.

Unlike Jeanette, Winnet gets advice as to what she should do and is told by the raven Abednego: “You won’t lose your power, you know, you’ll use it differently” (147). The raven further explains to Winnet: if you stay, “You will find yourself destroyed by grief” (147) and gives her a rough, brown stone that symbolizes its heart, which has suffered this fate.⁷ Thus, the rough brown pebble that the orange demon gives Jeanette ends up in the Winnet story (143), again demonstrating an interplay between the stories. The object is the same, but the symbol’s meaning has changed from a remembrance of Jeanette’s true feelings to a representation of the problem of staying in her community. The chalk the wizard throws Winnet for protection is also a rough brown pebble (143). Each pebble represents what Jeanette needs at the time, and each helps her build her own structure. Later in the story, the blind man who teaches Winnet to sail gives her “a singing stone” (159). In contrast to the silent rough brown pebbles Jeanette and Winnet have been collecting, the singing stone represents the beginning of a voice. Emphasizing the ways in which narratives—textual, sexual, religious, etc.—are cultural constructs, Winterson uses Jeanette’s counternarratives to expose the gender and sexual politics behind these stories.

As part of Jeanette’s new voice, the Winnet story comments on the fairy-tale paradigm proposed in the beast section by imposing realistic questions on a fairy tale narrative: “how much food do you take? What sort of monsters will you meet? Should you take your spare blue tunic for peace, or your spare red tunic for not peace?” (141). These questions show that the realm of fantasy needs to be questioned in order for it to become a productive space for envisioning solutions to real problems. In *Oranges*, reality also impacts the stories. By showing how the fantasy stories influence Jeanette’s story and how the story of Jeanette influences the fantasy stories, Winterson represents the symbiotic relationship between how stories help construct reality and how reality can construct or reconstruct stories.⁸ This move is important because it reveals the powerful implications of storytelling, and allows, on different levels, the narrator Jeanette, the author Winterson, and readers to be actively involved in shaping the world. In this way, the stories become in Armstrong’s terms “agen[ts] of cultural history” (23), having social importance within the novel and cultural influence outside the novel.

Just as the Sir Perceval story revises an early story in *Oranges*, part of Winnet’s story is a retelling of the story of the sensitive princess in which the princess willingly becomes the hunchback’s apprentice. It also recalls Jeanette’s early and uncomplicated reaction to becoming an apprentice missionary. However, when the wizard tells Winnet that he wants her to become his apprentice, Winnet has a more complex reaction than the princess. She is angry but agrees to become

the wizard's apprentice if he can guess her name. This more considered response reflects Jeanette's new knowledge about the expectations of an apprentice and is another indication that her reality and experiences influence the fairy-tale stories.

The fluidity between story and reality is further shown as the story of Winnet begins to fill in the blanks of Jeanette's story. For example, Winnet's story connects Jeanette's decision to leave home with her new job at the funeral parlor, and as such, the fantasy story becomes part of Jeanette's real story. Winnet's story also offers a commentary on Jeanette's new experiences and insight into Jeanette's new friendships. When Jeanette leaves her childhood community, others see her old life as strange. This response is shown through the villagers' reaction to Winnet: "Winnet went with her, back to her village, where the people made her welcome and gave her work for a living. They had heard of Winnet's father, believed him mad and dangerous, and so Winnet never spoke of her own powers, and never used them. The woman tried to teach Winnet her language, and Winnet learned the words but not the language" (153). Although both try, neither Winnet nor Jeanette fit entirely into her new environment.

There is also textual interconnectedness between the Winnet story and reality. One of the Winnet sections ends with the contention: "One thing is certain; she can't go back" (160). This statement is juxtaposed with questions to Jeanette about her past: "When did you last see your mother?" and "Don't you ever think of going back?" (160). When she does go home, Jeanette's reality mixes with fantasy space, suggesting an integration of her inner and outer worlds.

"Last train luv," [the conductor explains]. I search for the clock. It's only half-past eight. The voice sees my confusion. "Snow luv, lines are clogged." What is he talking about? I travel just a few hundred miles and I am cut off. I feel suspicious. I am in the sphere of enchantment and anything is possible. (162)

Not only does Jeanette contend that she is in a fantasy world, but fantastic language supports this claim. As she waits for the train to leave the station, a "chanting" "bundle" "pops through" the door and boards the train (162). Although bundle turns out to be a woman, the description evokes an enchanted being. The mixing of reality and enchantment is also evident when Jeanette arrives home. "[S]uddenly I'm outside my front door again," thinks Jeanette (163).

Although enchantment is present in Jeanette's journey home, she rejects the fairy-tale edict that forbids the journey home. Unlike Winnet who "can't go back," or the distant narrative voice that contends, "People do go back, but they don't survive, because two realities are claiming them at the same time" (160), Jeanette does go home, thereby proving that one does not have to "choose between ... two realities" (160).⁹ Instead, they can exist simultaneously. This idea is epitomized by

Jeanette's theory of multiple lives, which accounts for her catching a glimpse of the life she could have led had she stayed. Jeanette explains: "I have a theory that every time you make an important choice, the part of you left behind continues the other life you could have had.... There's a chance that I'm not here at all, that all the parts of me, running along all the choices I did and didn't make, for a moment brush against each other. That I am still an evangelist in the North, as well as the person who ran away" (169). This theory reworks the binary options and represents a multiplicity of choice. The ability to catch glimpses of other lives makes the possibility of multiple lives more tangible and offers a more positive way of viewing choices. In this formulation, choice does not preclude—not "I could have done this"—but instead includes—"I have done this and also this." This construction makes everything always possible, which is why coming home is also possible. It allows Winterson to write beyond the fairy-tale endings and, by extension, to go beyond the constricting fairy-tale paradigms.

Peggy Dunn Bailey and Laurel Bollinger offer good, although differing, interpretations of Jeanette's homecoming. Bailey observes that Jeanette's return demonstrates her newfound confidence in her ability "to go back and not be 'claimed' by Mother's reality" (75) and is evidence of Jeanette's development. Bollinger sees Jeanette's homecoming as evidence of Jeanette (like the biblical Ruth) "choos[ing] female loyalty" (371). Bollinger also argues that Jeanette's ability to voice her discontent with the church and with her mother allows this homecoming to happen: "girls [like Jeanette] narrate their concerns precisely so that those concerns will not destroy the familial relationship" (363). Bollinger's formulation represents one way of not having to face the opposing options of staying or leaving, family life or lesbian relationships. Through this interpretative model, Jeanette is able to negotiate another set of binaries indicated by Bailey's and Bollinger's readings of the text: female development versus female loyalty.¹⁰

The mixing of fairy tales and reality and reworking of endings can also be seen symbolically with the string, which ties everything together. In the story of Winnet, the sorcerer ties an invisible thread to Winnet that signifies a connection to the past. This thread links Winnet's story with that of Sir Perceval in which Sir Perceval dreams he is a spider (174). A raven, an image from the Winnet story, frees Sir Perceval by cutting the thread. Symbolically, the tie to the past is cut, and Sir Perceval is free, but he no longer has the comfort and protection of the sturdy oak that his spider self hung from. The image of the thread also connects these stories to Jeanette's story. For Jeanette, the string remains. Her mother "had tied a thread around [her] button, to tug when she pleased" (176). Therefore, just as Jeanette rewrites the end of Winnet's story by going home, she also revises Sir Perceval's

story by remaining attached to the past. Although Sir Perceval's and Winnet's stories offer two possible options, Jeanette chooses another, which combines elements of both. Thus, the problem of the thread is worked out through the intersection of fantasy and reality, suggesting options that go beyond the familiar narratives. Both spaces create and shift meaning. One of the revolutionary aspects of Winterson's novel is how reality affects fantasy, and because fantasy in turn influences culture, this reciprocally influential relationship suggests that "anything is possible" not only in the sphere of enchantment but also in reality.¹¹

The reciprocal influence occurs at another level as well. Just as Jeanette's story is integrated into the Sir Perceval and Winnet stories, Winterson integrates some of her personal history into *Oranges*. The process of combining autobiographical elements with fiction—what Gamallo calls "Winterson's autobiographical mythmaking" (127)—allows readers to "enter into the world of narrative and accept the characters as real people with lives beyond the confines of the text" (Gamble 169). The result is an even greater commitment to keeping meaning in flux.¹² By juxtaposing Jeanette's continual revision of her autobiography with a narrative that deconstructs religious fundamentalist readings of the Bible and heteronormative cultural scripts evoked in fairy tales, Winterson creates a story that will continue "beyond the confines of the text."

Notes

¹ Later, Jeanette more explicitly questions the truth of religious stories: "How is it that no one will believe that the whale swallowed Jonah, when every day Jonah is swallowing the whale? I can see them now, stuffing down the fishiest of fish tales, and why? Because it is history. Knowing what to believe had its advantages. It built an empire and kept people where they belonged" (93).

² Similarly, Jeanette's sampler helps her recognize that problems occur when there is a clash between vision and expectation. As Jeanette explains: "What constitutes a problem is not the thing, or the environment where we find the thing, but the conjunction of the two; something unexpected in a usual place (our favourite aunt in our favourite poker parlour) or something usual in an unexpected place (our favourite poker in our favourite aunt). I knew that my sampler was absolutely right in Elsie Norris's front room, but absolutely wrong in Mrs. Virtue's sewing class" (45).

³ Jeanette's biblical revisions are not limited to Fuzzy Felt. When she plays with Elsie's Noah's ark collage, which has a "detachable chimpanzee," she notes: "I had all kinds of variations, but usually I drowned it" (24). Jeanette's last scenario—a watery death for the chimpanzee—challenges the idea that the ark is a vessel of salvation.

⁴ One could also argue that Pastor Finch escapes disaster by Jeanette's departure once he begins the Fuzzy Felt reordering. In both cases, the women disappear.

⁵ Later, Winterson's reference to the biblical Ruth does, as Laurel Bollinger suggests, offer Jeanette a means of anchoring her lesbianism in biblical texts (369-370).

⁶ Unlike Bailey who argues that starting with Jeanette's relationship with Melanie, "Jeanette appropriates the Biblical narrative to meet her own needs and fulfill her own desires" —a description that implies a conscious use of the biblical paradigm—I see Jeanette's biblical arguments as the only model that she has at this point for explaining her worldview.

⁷ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to worship King Nebuchadnezzar's golden idol, thereby questioning the dominant power structure. King Nebuchadnezzar ordered them to be burned in a fiery furnace for their disobedience. However, they are rewarded for their faith in the true God, who prevents them from burning in the fire, and the three are restored to their positions as King Nebuchadnezzar's trusted advisors. In *Oranges*, Abednego tells Winnet she does not have to follow the binary options the wizard sets out: either staying to tend for the goats or simply leaving. Instead, Abednego in his role of advisor offers Winnet another option: to leave with her power and to use it differently. The stone heart, therefore, can represent a burnt and hardened heart resulting from a lost faith in the true God.

⁸ This relationship between stories and rewriting addresses Christy Burns' concern that fantasy can become simply escapism. Burns argues: "If fantasy is for Winterson a necessary part of the process of stepping out over the water—a form of agency posited on belief—it also requires an encounter with the real, a point of interaction between the real and the imaginary such that signification, fiction, and art are not cut off from the contexts they address" (291).

⁹ Anne DeLong resolves this dilemma by looking at the problem linguistically. She argues, "After all, Winnet's story ends with: 'One thing is certain; she can't go back' (160). It doesn't say she can't go home. Going back would mean retracing one's thread or rewriting one's own chosen path. Going home may be the culmination of the circular journey, as it is for Jeanette" (273-274).

¹⁰ Bailey is less optimistic about Jeanette's mother's potential for change and growth. Although Jeanette's mother acknowledges at the end that "oranges are not the only fruit" (172), Bailey argues that "Mother makes the comment trying to cover up a faux pas, to vindicate herself and her usual stereotypical thinking ... not in reference to anything concerning her daughter. There seems to be no room for Jeanette in Mother's life; having stepped into the margins of the text Mother sees as reality, Jeanette may or may not exist. To Mother, she is irrelevant" (77).

¹¹ This reading supports Terry Castle's argument about lesbian fiction: "Precisely because it is motivated by a yearning for that which is, in a cultural sense, implausible—the subversion of male homosocial desire—lesbian fiction characteristically exhibits, even as it masquerades as 'realistic' in surface detail, a strongly fantastical, allegorical, or utopian tendency" (88).

¹² As Gamallo argues of *Oranges*, readers "are forced to remain painfully aware of the instability and lack of finality of any narrative we construct" (127). Jana L. French makes a similar observation about *Sexing the Cherry* that can also be applied to *Oranges*: "if Winterson's object is to resist essentializing categories of representation and so avoid a politics of opposition, if she means to redeploy categories of identity and thus ensure their resistance to fixity, the novel must end where it begins, with the image of journeys and the language of flux. This resistance to closure, to re-sealing ontological seams laid bare in the text, is precisely what is at stake in *Sexing the Cherry*, for it keeps the dialogue between history and fantasy open" (249).

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