

A GEOPOLITICAL READING OF JEANETTE WINTERSON

“NOT THE WHOLE STORY:” A GEOPOLITICAL READING OF HISTORY IN  
JEANETTE WINTERSON’S *ORANGES ARE NOT THE ONLY FRUIT*, *THE PASSION*,  
*SEXING THE CHERRY*, AND *THE POWERBOOK*

By

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on the work of contemporary English writer Jeanette Winterson. Specifically, this project produces a geopolitical reading of Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985), *The Passion* (1987), *Sexing the Cherry* (1989), and *The PowerBook* (2000). In my analysis, I draw on Michel Foucault and Judith Butler in order to comment on the roles of history and gender in the novels. More importantly, I draw on the postcolonial theory of Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Anne McClintock in order to perform what Susan Friedman terms a geopolitical reading. In the thesis, I argue that Winterson rewrites history in order to establish a legitimate lesbian identity, but her focus on individual desire and subjectivity necessitates the construction of a realm of delegitimated otherness in her work, which is inhabited by traditional imperial others.

In Chapter One, I first define the type of fiction Winterson creates, postmodern historiographic metafiction, and then explain how she uses the genre's specific techniques – such as magic realism, self-reflexivity, the conflation of history and story – to disrupt conventional notions of history and gender. Then I explain, through a geopolitical reading, the way her work reiterates the imperial project of geographic mapping and racial othering. I begin my analysis of Winterson's first novel, *Oranges*, in Chapter Two, where I focus on rewriting personal history. My discussion then moves to *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry* in Chapter Three; there I consider the individual's role in history on a national level, and specifically examine the gendered geographic spaces Winterson creates and figures as either masculine and repressive, or as feminine and "liberated." In Chapter Four, I finish my argument with *The PowerBook*, wherein I consider the way

Winterson wants to characterize cyberspace as a “global” space that frees individuals from the conventional constructions of history and gender. Like her previous work, however, *The PowerBook* recreates the same imperial hierarchies. Through my geopolitical reading, I conclude that while Winterson makes several innovative and important narrative moves towards developing historical space for alternative homosexual and feminine identities, she legitimizes these new subjects by maintaining the illegitimacy of the imperial others.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction: Winterson's History Lesson Gets Geopolitical

"True art, when it happens to us, challenges the 'I' that we are."  
(Winterson, *Art Objects* 15)

"The world we know is not this ultimately simple configuration where events are reduced to accentuate their essential traits, their final meaning, or their initial and final value. On the contrary, it is a profusion of tangled events."  
(Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" 155)

English writer Jeanette Winterson takes up Michel Foucault's vision of the world as a "profusion of tangled events" as she explores the way histories, both personal and national, inform individual identity. Commenting on the impact of her work, and her often supercilious approach to discussing it, Winterson says that "words like arrogant and elitist are used too often alongside art and they are used to keep you away from what matters. What matters is a direct connection."<sup>1</sup> Throughout her entire body of work, Winterson avers that the power of art, of writing, of story-telling, reconnects people with their own personal and national histories. As she goes on to say, art's message "coloured through time is not lack but abundance. Not silence, but many voices. Art, all art, is the communication cord that cannot be snapped by indifference or disaster. Against the daily death it does not die" (*Art Objects* 20). In all of her novels, Winterson challenges her readers to question the nature of the history that makes up their worldviews. She not only insists that art is multilayered and dynamic, but that time and space are too. In Winterson's vision, history "is a string full of knots. It's all there but hard to find the

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<sup>1</sup> "Art Objects." Jeanette Winterson. 8 July 2004 <<http://www.jeanettewinterson.com/index.asp>>.



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" (*Oranges* 91).

In order to write novels that reflect her (re)visioning of history, Winterson needs an equally flexible narrative structure, which she finds in postmodern historiographic metafiction. As Helena Grice and Tim Wood explain in "Reading Jeanette Winterson Writing,"

Winterson constantly foregrounds the fictionality of history. In one interview, she has said: "People have an enormous need . . . to separate history, which is fact, from storytelling, which is not fact . . . and the whole push of my work has been to say, you cannot know which is which." Winterson's telling refrain throughout *The Passion* – "I'm telling you stories. Trust me" – fits her fiction squarely within historiographic metafiction's assertion that "the world is both resolutely fictive and yet undeniably historical, and what both realms share is their constitution in and as discourse" [Hutcheon 142]. (1)

Winterson draws on well-known historical events and figures, but she makes them fantastic and untrustworthy in order to turn historical "truth" against itself. In each of the novels I will be analyzing – *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985), *The Passion* (1987), *Sexing the Cherry* (1989), and *The PowerBook* (2000) – Winterson experiments with story-telling's ability to make history malleable. Of the nine novels<sup>2</sup> in Winterson's *oeuvre*, these four texts rewrite history to legitimize alternative identities. Along with their concern with alternative historical narratives, these novels demonstrate a clear trajectory in Winterson's work: she begins rewriting personal history in *Oranges*, then she considers an individual's role in national history in *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry*, and finally, she explores the "global" realm of experience in *The PowerBook*.

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<sup>2</sup> Winterson has also written *Boating for Beginners* (1990), *Written on the Body* (1993), *Art and Lies* (1995), *Gut Symmetries* (1998), and *Lighthousekeeping*, which will have its North American run in 2005.

In my analysis of these novels, there are two main streams of current criticism on Winterson that I will need to address. One stream considers her *oeuvre*'s postmodernist elements, such as the way she uses magic realism in *The Passion* to make the "everyday" miraculous in order to disrupt historical factuality. The other stream focuses on her "queering" of subjectivity and history in order to create a legitimate lesbian narrative.

Winterson's *Oranges* is often hailed as a "coming-out" novel, and it therefore receives the most attention from this line of criticism. In the following chapters, I will address the central arguments of each area to create a context for my analysis of Winterson's work. In this thesis, not only will I be bringing together these two streams of discourse, but I will argue that in her quest to rewrite history in order to establish a legitimate lesbian identity, Winterson's focus on individual desire and subjectivity necessitates the construction of a realm of delegitimated otherness in her work, a realm inhabited by the traditional imperial "others." Drawing on the theories of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Susan Friedman, Edward Said, and Anne McClintock, I will be able to place Winterson's texts within a framework that allows me to articulate the way she reconceives the construction of history and gender in a geopolitical context.

Before I elucidate the specific theoretical framework from which I will argue, I will first lay out where Winterson's work fits in the field of contemporary fiction. Along with categorizing the type of fiction Winterson produces, I will provide the definitions of the literary terms essential to my analysis. Winterson's *oeuvre* fits within Richard Todd's discussion of "British postmodernist fiction" of the 1970s and 1980s (115). Todd conceives "of postmodernist 'devices' such as metafiction and pastiche as integral to

Britain's novelists' apparent needs, in the 1970s and 1980s, to *mediate* their nonetheless very individual understandings of past and present" (118) through fiction that is "unprecedentedly self-aware, self-conscious, and knowing" (118). In every Winterson novel there is a narrator who challenges the reader's faith in the narrative, such as Henri in *The Passion*, who repeats, "I'm telling you stories. Trust me" (160). Commenting on this self-referential narrative style, Alison Lee further explains that metafiction creates "an illusion of 'reality' by representing people, places, and events, which are historically verifiable. [. . .] The use of 'real' names, places, and events however, is asserted and almost immediately rendered problematic" (36). Again, Winterson's novels continually render their "real" figures and events problematic, making the reader question which elements are "real" and which are "fictional." Winterson's writing embodies the key qualities – self-awareness, metafiction, pastiche, complication of the "real" and the "fictional – that Todd and Lee argue characterize (British) historiographic metafiction. For my analysis, I will be referring to Winterson's work as historiographic metafiction, paying particular attention to her incorporation of fairy tales, rewriting of well-known texts (such as the Bible and Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*) and magic realism.

Winterson weaves various narrative structures and plot lines into each of her novels in order to establish the fictionality of history. At times the reworked myths and original fairy tales are tangential to the story being told, but often they provide "something we need to know in order to interpret the book."<sup>3</sup> Winterson creates fairy tales to communicate "truths" that are better expressed through fantasy than through a

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<sup>3</sup> "Sexing the Cherry." Jeanette Winterson. 8 July 2004 <<http://www.jeanettewinterson.com/index.asp>>.

linear “realistic” narrative. Vladimir Propp’s *Morphology of the Folktale* provides my analysis with a working definition of “fairy tale.” Propp describes the fairy tale as a fantasy narrative that contains such elements as “miraculous birth, interdictions, rewarding with magical agents, flight and pursuit, etc” (115). He argues that everyday life and religion may be the sources of fairy tales, even though the stories themselves are fantastic (106). Propp further explains that “the majority of [the fairy tale’s] elements are traceable to one or another archaic, cultural, religious, daily, or other reality which must be utilized for comparison” (115). Winterson’s formation of fairy tales illustrates this “traceability,” as Biblical episodes or a character’s daily struggles inform the fairy tales’ plots. For example, as Jeanette in *Oranges* searches to “find” herself when she rejects her mother’s dominance, Winterson parallels Jeanette’s narrative with the fairy tale of “Winnet and the Wizard.” In such narrative moments, Winterson uses fairy tales to communicate the novels’ “truths” in a way that she claims other, more realistic, narrative models cannot.

Along with her creation of fairy tales, Winterson writes “cover-versions”<sup>4</sup> of myths and canonical stories. Specifically concerned with such “foundational” narratives, Susan Sellers, in *Myth and Fairy Tale in Contemporary Women’s Fiction*, argues that “the communal process of telling and retelling myth until it contains the input of many in a pared-down form” paradoxically reflects “our experiences more powerfully than if it were to retain a profusion of personal details” (7-8). Sellers argues that female writers

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<sup>4</sup> Winterson calls her rewriting of canonical texts and myths “cover-versions” on her webpage: “The PowerBook.” Jeanette Winterson. 8 July 2004 <<http://www.jeanettewinterson.com/index.asp>>.

choose to rewrite myth (and other well-known stories) for two reasons: first, because of the dominance of the classics in Western education; and second, the myth-making process itself makes the “otherwise alien world a ‘habitable’ place through the stories that we tell ourselves about it. The process works two ways, since what we know of ourselves and can project onto the world is itself a product of the language and literature we have received. Story-telling shapes us as we use stories to shape the world” (31). While Winterson is not one of the writers Sellers analyzes in her study, her observation of the female writer’s motive for rewriting existing narratives uncannily echoes Winterson’s own sentiments on the subject. Winterson states that: “By writing the familiar into the strange, by wording the unlovely into words-as-jewels, what is outcast can be brought home. I have also thought of myself as an outcast, but I have made myself a territory by writing it.”<sup>5</sup> Finding her “territory” in “cover-versions” of the classics and fairy tale, Winterson develops a narrative style that allows her to enter her alternative discourses into history.

Part of Winterson’s process of making “the familiar into the strange” involves rewriting historical narratives with magic realism. If the constructions of conventional society, in terms of gender expectations and other social norms that are figured as natural, do not reflect what certain individuals feel characterizes themselves, then the writer can create a world that does reflect them. Often Winterson employs magic realism in her descriptions of passion and desire in order to reanimate emotional immediacy in language. For example, in *The Passion*, Villanelle must retrieve her heart after “giving it

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<sup>5</sup> “Sexing the Cherry.” Jeanette Winterson. 8 July 2004 <<http://www.jeanettewinterson.com/index.asp>>.

away” or risk having it sewn into a tapestry by her lover. In such scenes, Christy Burns argues that Winterson manages to walk the line between rupturing reality, or the materiality of the body, and disintegrating it all together through her use of fantasy:

Winterson’s frequent preference for magic realism, as a form of fantasy that is inscribed into a realistic narrative, works to bind her source of the imaginary into the “real.” Moreover, Winterson is careful to critique excesses of the imaginary, setting it often between the poles of social order or personal integration and its elision of control. (288)

By using magic realism in her work to draw attention to the “real,” Winterson is able to show that the elements of “reality” in the novel are as constructed as those elements of imagination. In addition to rewriting canonical texts, myths, and fairy tales, Winterson uses magic realism as a way to rewrite her own reality as a self-proclaimed “outcast” from a dominant masculine and heterosexual society. Through her fantastic descriptions of the giant Dog-Woman in *Sexing the Cherry* or of the sexually-functional tulip in *The PowerBook*, Winterson makes history and truth subjective and malleable. Once the “everyday” is made fantastic, the events and characteristics of people that we assume to be natural are exposed as constructed.

The question now arises, why is Winterson so concerned with rewriting history? Her goal appears to be two-fold: first, to establish the fictionality, the construction, and the multiple possible “truths” of history; and second, to use the new space this restructuring creates for the integration of previously unacknowledged alternative narratives and identities, such as the lesbian’s. In order to integrate the lesbian into dominant discourse, Winterson rewrites history by transforming it from fact into fiction. As a scholar who has done extensive work on the “nature” of historical writing, Hayden

White offers a useful starting point for what I will refer to as “traditional” history. White discusses the way that writers, primarily male historians, record their historical chronicles. He draws attention to the historian’s creative involvement in writing history and to the claim that their work is a record of truth and fact. White carefully outlines the conventional distinctions between a historian and fiction writer: “It is sometimes said that the aim of the historian is to explain the past by ‘finding’, ‘identifying’, or ‘uncovering’ the ‘stories’ that lie buried in the chronicles; and that the difference between ‘history’ and ‘fiction’ resides in the fact that the historian ‘finds’ his stories, whereas the fiction writer ‘invents’ his” (6). Winterson’s novels fall into this space between “finding” and “inventing” stories. She challenges the standard contention that history consists of verifiable events and figures plotted along a chronological continuum.

White goes on to articulate the problems that accompany any attempt at (re)recording history, and draws attention to the exceedingly complex relationship between knowledge of the present and knowledge of the past:

The very claim to have distinguished a past from a present world of social thought and praxis, and to have determined the formal coherence of that past world, implies a conception of the form that knowledge of the present world must also take, insofar that it is continuous with that past world. Commitment to a particular form of knowledge predetermines the kinds of generalizations one can make about the present world, the kinds of knowledge one can have of it, and hence the kinds of projects one can legitimately conceive for changing that present or for maintaining it in its present form indefinitely. (21)

White helpfully identifies the way ideas about the past fix our present-day conceptions of the kinds of identities and worldviews that are possible. For example, because homosexuality has largely been ignored or left out of recent approaches to history, it has been difficult to legitimize a discourse about homosexuality today. Winterson takes up

the project to unsettle the coherence of the past in order to posit an alternative world of social thought, wherein woman is not the “other” to man and the lesbian is not the “other” to the heterosexual. By distinguishing a past that involves active and strong women, and ambiguous gender and sexuality, Winterson establishes a foundation for alternative identities that current historical discourse rejects or ignores.

Winterson rewrites history because women, regardless of their sexual orientation, have been “written out” of history so that their absence in it has come to be accepted as the norm. In her article, “Placing Women’s History in History,” Elizabeth Fox-Genovese explains that “the history we know has been written primarily from the perspective of the authoritative male subject – the single, triumphant consciousness. Much of history has, in fact, rested upon the determination to deny ambiguity, conflict and uncertainty” (29). She observes that when historians do discuss women, discussion is limited to the female spheres of biological reproduction and the domestic (familial) space. There is no discourse on the various complex relationships that exist between women and economics, politics, technology, and so on, that have traditionally fallen under man’s “success with the triumph of universal values of justice and order” (14). Winterson specifically characterizes the “ambiguity, conflict and uncertainty” within history as feminine spaces of experience. From Jeanette in *Oranges* to Ali in *The PowerBook*, Winterson’s lead characters embody those very differences that have typically excluded women and homosexuals from “traditional” history. By placing female, or ambiguously gendered,



characters at the centre of her novels, Winterson attempts to develop specifically feminine narratives<sup>6</sup> and histories.

Of course, Winterson does not simply “tell” these feminine narratives within a conventional construction of history. In order to establish her narratives as legitimate alternatives to traditional histories, Winterson rejects traditional notions of history as linear and factual, and reconceives history as fluid, multi-layered, and malleable. With this approach she echoes the conception of genealogy Michel Foucault theorizes in “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History.” By refusing to equate history with fact, which White notes is the conventional view taken by historians, Foucault’s theory makes room for women and other alternative identities in history. Undermining absolute truths, Foucault argues that the origin of things can only be thought of in relation to or in contest with other things. As he explains: “What is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of the origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity” (142). For Foucault, since there are no pure beginnings on which we can establish an objective foundation, no single subject can claim authority over the “truth.” He argues that genealogy, conceptualized in terms of descent (the direct history of a people), breaks down the historical self “in liberating a profusion of lost events” (146). By disrupting linearity and singularity, writing can demonstrate that there is no readily identifiable unified subject, but multiple possible subjects with multiple possible histories.

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<sup>6</sup> I am using the phrase “feminine narratives” to apply to both male and female characters that do not faithfully reiterate conventional gender norms. In this regard, both the masculine Dog-Woman and feminine Jordan in *Sexing the Cherry* are key figures in Winterson’s “feminine narrative” because they disrupt traditional norms of history and gender by displaying the “ambiguity, conflict and uncertainty” that Fox-Genovese argues male-dominated history leaves out.

Along with his rejection of an absolute origin, Foucault theorizes that “truth” lies in the exteriority of accidents. He articulates that “descent attaches itself to the body” (147). The metaphor of the body that Foucault uses to explain the way descent, or “history,” is reiterated through generations resonates with Winterson’s preoccupation with territory, of both the body and actual geographic places. Foucault theorizes that:

The body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated Self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration. Genealogy, as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history’s destruction of the body. (148)

All of Winterson’s novels explore history in terms of bodily inscriptions and a fractured, rather than unified, selfhood. The novels celebrate the dissolution of the body and the self, making “disintegration” positive and liberating. For example, in *Oranges*, when Jeanette rejects her mother’s oppressive ideology she comes to realize her own multiplicity with the help of an orange demon. Jordan, in *Sexing the Cherry*, actively seeks out a woman who is able to become nothing but a point of light as she dances, freeing herself from the body altogether. *The PowerBook* strives to dissolve physical bodies completely in favour of a virtual world. Regardless of the method of disintegrating the body – imagination, dance, or cyberspace – Winterson does so in an attempt to free her characters from the constraints of conventional history and society.

Related to this discussion of Winterson’s rewriting of the Foucauldian “body,” or history, are Judith Butler’s ideas about the performance of gender. Winterson is particularly interested in redefining sex and gender as she disrupts traditional history, and

Butler provides the specific terms necessary to my analysis of these processes. Like

Foucault, Butler rejects the notion of absolutes, as she argues that:

The category of “sex” is, from the start, normative; it is what Foucault has called a “regulatory ideal.” In this sense, then, “sex” not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce – demarcate, circulate, differentiate – the bodies it controls. (1)

Winterson challenges the “norm” of sex through ambiguously gendered characters like *The Passion’s* web-toed Villanelle, or *Sexing the Cherry’s* masculine Dog-Woman. To illustrate this point further, the Dog-Woman disrupts linearity as she is a fantastic figure who is not conventionally found in historical chronicles. Not only is she a giant who can achieve invisibility (14), but as a masculine woman, she transgresses the boundaries of gender. For Butler, “performativity” is the making of gender’s construction visible, as the “performance” disrupts the regulatory practice that reiterates the norms of gender as natural. The Dog-Woman’s ambiguous gender traits exemplify this disruption in *Sexing the Cherry*, as her often brutal and indelicate actions are not reflective of her designated “femaleness.” Butler continues to explain how “the subject is constituted through force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is, after all, ‘inside’ the subject as its own founding repudiation” (3). The abject, that which the dominant cultural ideology deems “not human,” often becomes part of the central event or character in Winterson’s work. By moving the thing that can only be conceived of as “outside” *into* history, Winterson endeavours to reconstruct historical notions of space and time and expose the gender norms that are reiterated within that discursive sphere.

Now that I have established the terms I will be using to explain Winterson's theorization of history and gender, I will explicate my particular approach to interpreting her work. While Winterson rewrites history in order to establish a discourse for alternative identities, I argue that she does so from a specifically (post)imperial locus (England). Susan Stanford Friedman, in "Geopolitical Literacy," articulates the importance of reading literature in its geopolitical context; she suggests that "thinking geopolitically means asking how a spatial entity – local, regional, national, transnational – inflects all individual, collective, and cultural identities" (109-110). While Winterson's texts are not ethnographies per se, Friedman's methodology suggests that I must approach them as if they are. Regardless of the authors "travels" to other places in their texts, Friedman proposes that readers need to consider Edward Said's notion of "worldliness," which as "an analytic process involves breaking the binary of global and local, of seeing how the global is always already present in the local; the local always already present in the global" (111). While criticism on Winterson typically emphasizes the reinvention of gender and sexuality through postmodern strategies, Winterson's work demands a geopolitical reading because she situates her novels across Europe and in the New World. A geopolitical analysis of her work allows me to deal with all of the areas of thought that inform her novels: historical revisioning, feminist and queer politics, and – equally important – imperialism and postcolonialism. Friedman ends her argument for geopolitical reading by stating that her work "asks for an interrogation of how the geopolitical axis informs and inflects all cultural formations and identities, our own as well as that of others. It requires spatial, geographical thinking to complement temporal,

historical analysis” (130). By placing Winterson’s primary concerns with history and gender into a postcolonial context, I will be able to investigate the ways that her supposedly liberating novels still maintain imperialist ideologies.

Said’s work in *Culture and Imperialism* informs Friedman’s concept of geopolitical reading, and it also contributes to my theoretical framework, particularly his definition of imperialism in “Overlapping Territories, Intertwined Histories.” Following Said, I will be using the term “imperialism” to mean “the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory; ‘colonialism’, which is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on distant territory” (8). A British citizen, Winterson imbues her work with imperialist ideologies that have, until now, remained largely unexamined in current Winterson scholarship. Said’s approach also complicates Foucault’s (and Winterson’s) Eurocentric notion of history. Building on Foucault’s acknowledgement of historical uncertainty and the importance of the past in creating current identities, Said argues that:

Appeals to the past are among the commonest of strategies in interpretations of the present. What animates such appeals is not only disagreement about what happened in the past and what the past really was, but uncertainty about whether the past is really past, over and concluded, or whether it continues, albeit in different forms, perhaps. This problem animates all sorts of discussions – about influence, about blame and judgment, about present actualities and future priorities. (1)

Said articulates the problems that such appeals to the past create, especially in terms of what they reveal about present day actualities.<sup>7</sup> Winterson appeals to the past in order to

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<sup>7</sup> In his reading of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, Said observes that even though Conrad wanted his novel to expose “Europeans performing acts of imperial mastery” (25), he “could probably never have used Marlow to present anything other than

reimagine gender norms, but in doing so, she reiterates imperialist ideologies – in terms of figuring the individual white woman as subject and the “native” (or Easterner or Jew) as other – that have continued into the present day.

Following in this line of postcolonial reading, the question arises: why does Winterson, whose work attempts to be inclusive of alternative narratives, exclude the narrative of the “native” or “foreign” other? It is significant that Winterson’s work, as a feminist undertaking, relies on a realm of delegitimized otherness to legitimize her feminine subject. Gayatri Spivak argues that this kind of othering is typical of the Anglo-American feminist project. In her article, “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism,” Spivak states that “it seems particularly unfortunate when the emergent perspective of feminist criticism reproduces the axioms of imperialism. A basically isolationist admiration for the literature of the female subject in Europe and Anglo-America establishes the high feminist norm” (243). She further explains that the native other “consolidates the imperial self” (253). Because Winterson focuses on “freeing” women and alternative sexualities, who are the traditional “domestic” others, she refracts otherness on to those “outside” of the dominant Western European framework – such as Easterners in *The Passion* and *The PowerBook* or New World natives in *Sexing the Cherry*. And the majority of these descriptions of the “foreigners” are pejorative and cursory, which I argue is indicative of the extent that “their” identities are already easily

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an imperialist world-view, given what was available for either Conrad or Marlow to see of the non-European at the time. Independence was for whites and Europeans; the lesser of subject peoples were to be ruled; science, learning, history, emanated from the West” (27). While he attempts to expose the imperialism of the past, Conrad still ends up reiterating the imperialism that informed his present.

known as “other” within Winterson’s texts. Due to her concern with individual subjectivity and other seemingly imperial projects, such as exploration and mapping, her narratives require the construction of a realm of delegitimated otherness.

As I push my reading of these delegitimated realms further, I will be specifically considering the role of geographic space in her work, particularly in *The Passion*, *Sexing the Cherry*, and *The PowerBook*. As I have established with Friedman and Said, geography has a central role in imperialist conceptions of the world (in terms of what spaces are marked as “good” or “bad”). In *Imperial Leather*, Anne McClintock investigates the relationships between gender, geography, and imperialism. She discusses the role of gender in the colonial enterprise and outlines the colonial trope of gendered geography, wherein male writers have feminized geography in order to conquer it. Not only does this feminization and denigration occur in colonial spaces, but McClintock argues that it simultaneously occurs in the domestic space; she states that “as domestic space became racialized, colonial space became domesticated” (36). Further describing the characteristics of these realms of otherness, McClintock argues that “the colonized – like women and the working class in the metropolis – do not inhabit history proper but exist in a permanently anterior time within the geographic space of the modern empire as anachronistic humans, atavistic, irrational, bereft of human agency” (30). Thus, both these colonized and metropolitan others are often the markers of time “rolling back;” McClintock observes that in imperial literature, “geographical difference across *space* is figured as a historical difference across *time*” (40).

As I enter into discussion of the specific locales Winterson (re)imagines, I will consider the ways in which she figures space as either masculine, controlled and mapped, or as feminine, liberated and unmapped. By gendering and qualifying space as such, Winterson reenacts the imperial project of “mapping” the world. Throughout her work, characters not only travel through space, but they also travel through time and it is the “native” other that acts as the marker of anterior time. As well, I will posit that while Winterson goes back and foregrounds women in history, she leaves colonized people and other “non-Europeans” within the imperial hierarchy. Embodying this imperialist prejudice, Winterson exploits the Hopi’s “primitive” conception of time in *Sexing the Cherry*, and stifles Turkish development at the height of the seventeenth-century in *The PowerBook*. In this thesis, I will argue that Winterson intends to use the spaces she characterizes as feminine to be inclusive of all narratives but her reliance on imperial constructions of space necessitates that the “foreign” other remains silent and subordinate.

It is within this framework, constructed with Foucault’s and Butler’s theories of history and gender, together with the postcolonial and imperial approaches articulated by Friedman, Said, and McClintock, that I will explore the connections between gender, desire, geography, and history in Winterson’s work. In Chapter Two, “Placing the Self in History,” I will examine Winterson’s (re)construction of personal history through alternative narratives, such as fairy tale, in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. In Chapter Three, “Mapping Desire in History,” I will then move the discussion of history from the personal level, in terms of autobiography, to the group level, in terms of national histories, in *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry*. I will investigate the extent to which



Winterson both transforms and inscribes other nations in a gendered, but still imperial, context in order to create space for alternative feminine identities. Chapter Four, "History Goes On-Line," will focus on Winterson's second latest novel, *The PowerBook*, as a culmination of the challenges and problems that exist in her previous work. As Winterson adopts the language of cyberspace, she further exemplifies the notions of space, time, and gender that Foucault, Butler and McClintock articulate. Even though *The PowerBook* rejects physical geographic space, it still maintains imperialist ideologies by relying on "foreign" lands and peoples to be the others to the feminine subject. Throughout all of these chapters, I will sustain a discussion of Winterson's experiments with multiple narratives and the other elements of historiographic metafiction as she rewrites traditional history in order to establish a discourse for alternative identities. With my geopolitical approach, I will unravel Winterson's "knotted-string" of history and add a few knots of my own.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Placing the Self in History: *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*

Are real people fictions? We mostly understand ourselves through an endless series of stories told to ourselves by ourselves and others. The so-called facts of our individual worlds are highly coloured and arbitrary, facts that fit whatever fiction we have chosen to believe in. (*Art Objects* 59)

In her first novel, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985), Winterson explores the malleability of history. Winterson rewrites “traditional” history, dominated by masculinity, heterosexuality, and linearity (as I have established in my introduction), in order to create a legitimate space for a particular lesbian identity. Current criticism on *Oranges* focuses on either the novel as a lesbian “coming-out” story or on the novel’s innovative use of multiple narratives. Both of these elements are integral to my reading of *Oranges* as a novel in which Winterson considers the possibilities and the complications that exist in rewriting history on a personal level. My discussion brings together the diverse threads of existing criticism while sustaining a detailed analysis of the roles *both* Jeanette and her mother Louie play in the novel’s development of alternative narratives. By offering a pseudo-autobiography that is interwoven with fairy tale, myth, and the Bible, Winterson produces a theorization of history as malleable. As such, *Oranges* embodies the possibility to be a liberating narrative for alternative identities. Once history and truth are exposed as uncertain, Winterson can then expose the construction of gender norms and dismantle the constrictions on personal identity that come with them.

In this chapter, after summarizing previous criticism on *Oranges*, I will begin my analysis of *Oranges* with the central chapter of the book, “Deuteronomy.” In that chapter,

Winterson's narrator gives voice to the driving theme of the novel – the malleability of history and the necessity for individuals to exploit this malleability in order to create their own personal histories. From there I will discuss the ideological constructions, particularly those regarding religion and homosexuality, which Jeanette first learns from her mother and then later rearranges or rejects. Jeanette learns from both her mother and from her older friend, Elsie, that history can be rewritten to one's advantage using alternative narrative structures such as fairy tales. Although Winterson has Jeanette reject certain religious and sexual binaries, she still struggles with breaking away completely from conventional notions of gender and family. By the conclusion of this chapter, I will have established that in *Oranges*, as an intertextual autobiographical fiction, Winterson strives to expose the fluidity of history and to suggest that history can be rewritten in order to acknowledge and legitimize a personal, and in this case, a specifically lesbian, subject.

My argument builds on the contemporary critical work on *Oranges*. This work pays extensive attention to the sexual identity of the main character Jeanette and the relationship with her overbearing Evangelical mother, Louie. For example, Laura Doan, in "Jeanette Winterson's Sexing the Postmodern," argues that Winterson exploits the techniques of postmodern historiographic metafiction<sup>1</sup> in order to "challenge and subvert patriarchal and heterosexist discourses and, ultimately, to facilitate a forceful and positive radical oppositional critique"(138). Doan argues that while Winterson attempts to disrupt heterosexual binaries of natural and unnatural, she ends up recreating them in terms of a

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<sup>1</sup> Doan provides the following techniques as examples: intertextuality, parody, pastiche, self-reflexivity, fragmentation, the rewriting of history, and frame breaks (138).

“homophobic/heterophobic” binary (146). I take a detailed look at these binaries, and argue that Winterson’s disruption and reiteration of them is more complicated than Doan observes, for Winterson rejects certain norms, such as heterosexuality, but reiterates others, such as an ongoing attachment to family. Lauren Rusk, in “The Refusal of Otherness: Winterson’s *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*,” also considers the binary systems with which Jeanette struggles. Rusk specifically discusses Winterson’s creation of the autobiography interwoven with alternative genres, like the *Künstlerroman* (translated loosely as portrait of the artist) and the coming out story (108). While I agree with Rusk’s articulation of Winterson’s subversive use of fairy tales and Biblical and Arthurian allusions into the narrative structure, I also posit that Winterson not only uses these narrative techniques to reject constrictive heterosexual ideologies, but also to teach Jeanette, and the reader, an alternative way to create personal history.

Other critics, like Louise Horskjær Humphries, point out that, while lesbian elements of *Oranges* are integral to its construction and interpretation, it is also important for readers to consider the novel’s innovative use of multiple genres and literary techniques.<sup>2</sup> Horskjær Humphries encourages readers to look beyond lesbian politics while reading Winterson’s work in order to develop an aesthetic appreciation of a

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<sup>2</sup> Horskjær Humphries makes this argument in “Listening for the Author’s Voice: ‘Unsexing’ the Winterson Oeuvre:”

As Winterson appropriates both generic categories and specific texts – (medieval) romance, fairy tale, the Bible, (canonized) literary fathers and mothers alike – for her own writing, her novels truly qualify as “intertextual palimpsests.” To read *Oranges* as a lesbian “coming-out” novel in the Radclyffe Hall tradition is, it seems, to ignore the diversity of literary echoes reverberating throughout the text. (11)

“Wintersonian poetics” (16). While Horskjær Humphries succeeds in shifting the focus from identity politics to Winterson’s rewriting of history, her discussion does not fully explore Winterson’s motive for attempting to disrupt traditional history. I argue that Winterson develops her “poetics” of rewriting history specifically to create space for an alternative lesbian narrative in *Oranges*. My argument also builds on Susana Onega’s focus on Winterson’s challenges to traditional history in her article, “I’m telling you stories. Trust me’: History/Story-Telling in Jeanette Winterson’s *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*.” Onega explores Winterson’s use of a variety of narratives, like that of the Bible and of fantasy, to reconceive of history and the definition of truth.<sup>3</sup> Onega argues that Winterson rewrites history in order to establish a subjective basis for one’s personal history. But Onega does not articulate the rewriting process Jeanette undergoes within the novel aside from discussing her rejection of her mother’s absolutist version of the world. Along with the other critics I have encountered, Onega limits the role Louie plays in the novel to a source of religious education and control. I put forward that Louie offers Jeanette not only a framework to rebel against, but also a lesson plan in *how* to rebel against that framework. Also interested in Louie, Keryn Carter emphasizes the central role Louie plays in the narrative by drawing on notions of “the abject.”<sup>4</sup> Carter argues that Jeanette becomes the abject when she rejects her mother’s version of events, but as

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<sup>3</sup> Onega argues that Winterson has the “conviction that literature, and specifically fantasy literature can be more truth revealing than history” (142).

<sup>4</sup> Carter is drawing on Julia Kristeva’s theorization of “the abject.” In particular, Carter uses the term to mean “the place where meaning collapses,” and then goes on to explain that the “the body of the mother remains the primary object of abjection: the original not-self in every individual’s history” (17).

the narrator, she is able to generate meaning through her rejection, rather than disappearing (20). Yet by positing Louie as Jeanette's direct other, Carter fails to recognize the instability of Louie's character. My analysis exposes the subtle fissures within Louie's supposedly solid world view that offer Jeanette a place of learning and identification not available to her in conventional heterosexual discourse.

In terms of the lesson Winterson wants to convey about rewriting history, "Deuteronomy," dedicated to uncovering history's mistruths and construction, is the most important chapter in *Oranges*. Winterson rewrites traditional history to conceive of an individual's personal history. She clearly states that the intent of the chapter is to guide the reading of *Oranges*. Winterson says in interview that: "One of my favourite passages in the novel, a short essay on the difference between history and story-telling, entitled 'Deuteronomy', had to be left out [of the screenplay]. And yet it is central to the book and no accident that it falls precisely in the middle of the seven chapters" (qtd. Omega 136-137). "Deuteronomy" is important to Winterson because in it she comments on the fallibility, and the resulting malleability, of historiography.

Thus Winterson's conceptualization of history in this section echoes that of Michel Foucault, who argues that history is under the control of those who understand and manipulate its construction:

The successes of history belong to those who are capable of seizing these rules, to replace those who are capable of seizing these rules, to replace those who had used them, to disguise themselves as to pervert them, invert their meaning, and redirect them against those who had initially imposed them; controlling this complex mechanism, they will make it function so as to overcome the rulers through their own rules. (151)

Like Foucault, Winterson argues that history can be shaped, inverted, and redirected to suit one's will, as the narrator of *Oranges* explains: "So the past, because it is the past, is only malleable where once it was flexible. Once it could change its mind, now it can only undergo change. The lens can be tinted, tilted, smashed. . . . we have to know what we are doing, pretending an order that doesn't exist, to make a security that cannot exist" (93). The current lives of people are never linear and one-sided, as there are multiple truths to any event. Just as Foucault argues against the singularity of "origins" (144), Winterson's narrator argues that there is no "order" or "security" that creates absolute truths to which people must adhere. Winterson's conception moves history from a passive event that "just is" to an active event, an act of (re)viewing through a "lens" that is "tinted, tilted, smashed." History therefore becomes open to multiple narratives and truths from which people can choose, and choose to change. As the narrator explains at the start of "Deuteronomy:" "Of course that is not the whole story, but that is the way with stories; we make them what we will" (91).

More specifically, *Oranges* makes changes to recorded history and to canonical texts, like the Bible, in order to display the falseness of heterosexual security. The message of "Deuteronomy" regarding the necessity of rewriting history resonates throughout the novel as Jeanette begins to formulate her identity. Jeanette echoes the sentiment of "Deuteronomy," for instance, when she comments on Melanie's lack of reaction to her coming back home:

Time is a great deadener; people forget, get bored, grow old, go away. She said that not much had happened between us anyway, historically speaking. But history is a string full of knots, the best you can do is admire it, and maybe knot it

up a bit more. History is a hammock for swinging and game for playing. A cat's cradle. (166)

Winterson insists that history is not linear and certain, but a mess of people's independent perceptions and truths. On some level, all people rewrite history to establish and justify their own sense of identity. For Melanie, the lesbian love affair is damaging to her heterosexual identity and so must be denied. Melanie's dismissal of their relationship directly attacks Jeanette's version of history, and therefore also undermines her sense of self. By describing history as "a string full of knots," Winterson draws attention to the "messiness" of history, as a site of complication and confusion, to underscore the futility in conceiving history as linear infallible truth. She argues that "real" history is not straightforward, but involves several layers of truth and various possible interpretations. Jeanette must make sense out of the knots the best she can for herself and add her own on to the string. As the narrator advises the reader at the end of "Deuteronomy": "If you want to keep your own teeth, make your own sandwiches" (93). If Jeanette wants to establish her own identity, she needs to write her own independent version of history.

Before I can discuss the identity that Jeanette creates for herself, I must first analyze the basis of Jeanette's initial world view – her mother Louie. *Oranges* immediately starts with Jeanette explaining her mother's binary world view. Introducing the reader to her mother Louie, Jeanette explains that:

She had never heard of mixed feelings. There were friends and there were enemies.

Enemies were: The Devil (in his many forms)

Next Door

Sex (in its many forms)

Slugs

Friends were: God



Our dog  
 Auntie Madge  
 The Novels of Charlotte Bronte  
 Slug pellets

and me, at first, I had been brought in to join her in a tag match against the Rest of the World. (3)

Louie's world is neatly divided into short lists of enemies and friends, but her own daughter does not hold a secure position in either category. Jeanette's phrase, "and me, at first," falls out of line with the rest of the listed text, foreshadowing her eventual exile from her mother's house and from her mother's worldview. Rusk comments that: "Repeatedly, the text constructs binary opposites and then denies the choice between them, 'othering' neither" (121). Jeanette chooses neither of her mother's categories for herself, instead she chooses to create her own classification system. In order to establish an identity separate from her mother, Jeanette must metaphorically conquer and banish Louie from her life. As a lesbian, Jeanette cannot arrange her "enemy and friend" list in the same way that her heterosexual Evangelical mother does. Instead, Jeanette develops her own binary system that is divergent from her mother's. Jeanette actively struggles against Louie's construction of "others" and makes herself the centre of her own world. For instance, Jeanette becomes one of those unfortunate people who "suffer" from "Unnatural Passions," but since she is at the centre of the text as protagonist, Louie then becomes characterized as an intolerant religious fanatic. Learning from her mother that "everything in the natural world was a symbol of the Great Struggle between good and evil" (15), Jeanette realizes that she is intimately involved in this "Great Struggle." Coming out on the side of evil, Jeanette subverts her mother's heterosexual dichotomy of "self/other" in order to empower her own situation.

Jeanette's struggle against her mother is integral to the development of her own identity. Keryn Carter, in "The Consuming Fruit: *Oranges*, Demons, and Daughters," argues: "To develop a self the infant must retain its sense of difference from the mother: thus, the mother comes to represent the border between the self and the unknown" (16). The initial problem Winterson sets out in *Oranges* is that Louie is the origin of knowledge about the self and the other. As Jeanette explains, her mother neatly arranges the entire world into friends and enemies, the saved and the damned, the missionary and the heathen. For Louie, people who do not fit into her "godly" world view are "Heathens." These "Heathens" pose a threat to both herself and the proper education of Jeanette: "The Heathens were a daily household preoccupation. My mother found them everywhere, particularly Next Door. They tormented her as only the godless can, but she had her methods" (51). While Louie obsesses over combating difference and shutting out the "Heathens," Jeanette is more interested in the details that identify the "Heathens." Instead of shunning them, Jeanette wants to understand their difference. For example, Jeanette recalls that:

Usually we listened to the Light Programme, but on Sundays always the World Service, so that my mother could record the progress of our missionaries. Our Missionary Map was very fine. On the front were all the countries and on the back a number chart that told you about Tribes and their Peculiarities. My favourite was Number 16, *The Buzule of Carpathian*. They believed that if a mouse found your hair clippings and built a nest with them you got a headache. If the nest was big enough, you might go mad. As far as I knew, no missionary had yet visited them.  
(4)

The closeness of detail in her description of the "Buzules" demonstrates that Jeanette is fascinated, not repulsed, by their "peculiarities." As well, since her comment about the missionary is so brief, it points to her disinterest in converting them. Omega provides a

particularly apt explanation of Jeanette's refusal to believe in the limited ideological frameworks available to her:

Jeanette's process of maturation and self-definition, therefore, involves the rejection of her mother's and of other people's totalizing and absolutist categories of truth and falsehood, of good and evil, of history and story-telling and the development of a more complex and also more problematic concept of reality and truth. (146)

Against Louie's world of black and white, Jeanette begins her separation from her mother by relishing the details that establish difference between people.

Although Jeanette seeks to be different from her mother, Louie uses Jeanette as her primary site of identification. Through her religious education, Jeanette becomes a literal expression of Louie's desires. As Annette Kuhn discusses, in "A Credit to Her Mother," the body of the child is the primary site of identification for the mother. Kuhn argues that

one loves one's baby of course; and the evidence and the guarantee of that love lies in the labour of care evident in the child's appearance. But there is more to this than mere display. The baby's body is here quite literally a blank canvas, screen of the mother's desire – desire to make good the insufficiencies of her own childhood, desire to transcend these lacks by caring for her deprived self through a love for her baby that takes very particular cultural forms. (286)

While Louie is not overly concerned with Jeanette's physical appearance, she is deeply motivated to control Jeanette's behaviour through religious education. After adopting Jeanette and listening to her cry out for "seven days and nights" (10), Louie makes claim to the baby girl as her vision of the future:

She understood how jealous the Spirit is of Flesh.  
Such tender warm flesh.  
Her flesh now, sprung from her head.  
Her vision.  
Not the jolt beneath the hip bone, but water and the word.

She had a way out now, for years and years to come. (10)

For Louie, Jeanette embodies all her lost opportunities and the consolidation of her binary framework. Louie rejects the physicality of humanness, the sinful “Flesh,” in favour of the esoteric “Spirit.” The adoption of Jeanette frees Louie from the struggles with her own flesh, from her own “Unnatural Passions.” Like Athena springing from Zeus’ head, Jeanette becomes her mother’s vision of her future – Louie’s “Spirit” made into Jeanette’s “Flesh.” Louie claims that she could not become a missionary, as the “Lord hadn’t called her to the hot places,” (54), but Jeanette “was destined to become a missionary” (75). Jeanette, as an adopted daughter not born from Louie’s body, becomes an icon of “Spirit” and so promises to fulfill her mother’s failed religious aspirations.

Louie had other histories before Jeanette’s adoption. Within her seemingly cut and dry binary framework, there are fissures in her identity that Jeanette observes and struggles to understand, for they disrupt Louie’s projected flawlessness. Early in *Oranges*, Jeanette describes her mother as “very like William Blake; she has visions and dreams and she cannot always distinguish a flea’s head from a king. Luckily she can’t paint. . . . She liked to speak French and to play the piano, but what do these things mean?” (9). Her description follows the explanation of her mother’s religious conversion, the source of the binary framework that orders their lives. Since playing the piano and speaking French are outside of that religious framework, Jeanette is unsure what “these things mean.” Jeanette exploits that space of uncertainty in order to separate herself from her mother. Jeanette takes the stories of her mother and makes amendments to them to fit her own emerging identity, realizing her own needs are as deep and complex as those of her

mother: "The unknownness of my needs frightens me. I do not know how huge they are, or high they are, I only know that they are not being met" (165). While Louie fills her emotional and spiritual need for power in the world with Jeanette's adoption, Jeanette will not follow in her mother's footsteps as she rejects religion and embraces the possibilities of the "Flesh."

Starting with the fissure between herself and her mother, Jeanette then begins to articulate her difference from the larger Church community. Carter explains that "in adolescence . . . [Jeanette] begins to threaten the security of the entire community as she strives to define and enact her *difference from* her mother and her mother's desires" (16). Repeatedly throughout *Oranges*, Winterson highlights Jeanette's struggle to enact her difference. For example, at age seven Jeanette goes deaf due to an infection of her adenoids, but her mother and the Church assume she is in a state of rapture (23). In hospital, her mother does little to comfort her and Jeanette realizes that: "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. This was a problem. But not one I chose to deal with for many years more" (27). Louie's and the Church's misreading of Jeanette's illness causes Jeanette to look elsewhere for answers.

Finding both the Church and her mother to be inaccurate sources of information, Jeanette's curiosity about the "Heathen" world intensifies. She begins to challenge her mother's decisions, especially the ones regarding school: "'Why don't I go to school?' I asked her. I was curious about school because my mother always called it a Breeding Ground. I didn't know what she meant, but I knew it was a bad thing, like Unnatural

Passions. ‘They’ll lead you astray,’ was the only answer I got” (16). Louie names the school a “Breeding Ground,” thus highlighting its concern with matters of the “Flesh” and the corporeality of the children, who are not adopted like Jeanette. At school, Jeanette will indeed begin her education of the “Flesh” instead of continuing Louie’s education of the “Spirit.” The connection Jeanette makes between Louie’s terms of the “Breeding Ground” and “Unnatural Passions” demonstrates her awareness of Louie’s rejection of the “Flesh.” Louie shelters Jeanette from school, in the same way she sheltered her from the paper shop run by the two women who dealt in “Unnatural Passions” (7). While Louie tries to keep her daughter from the force of the outside world, and all of the opposing ideologies that come with it, Jeanette has an active curiosity about the possibilities that await her at the “Breeding Ground.” Learning that she has to go to school, Jeanette runs into the outhouse gleefully and thinks: “the Breeding Ground at last” (17). Jeanette renegotiates her mother’s terms as she begins her process of maturation and self-definition.

Jeanette rebels from her community on two major issues: religion and homosexuality. Jeanette’s journey to self-realization begins with her rejection of religion. While Jeanette is first introduced to homosexuality through the “Unnatural Passions” of the paper shop women and the gypsy’s foretelling that she’ll never marry (7), it is only after Jeanette is able to articulate her own disagreements with the Evangelical tenets that she reaches awareness of her homosexuality. Jeanette’s initial education revolves around her mother’s teachings from the Bible. She recalls that: “It was in this way that I began my education: she taught me to read from the Book of Deuteronomy, and she told me all

about the lives of the saints, how they were really wicked and given to nameless desires. Not fit for worship” (15). The *Book of Deuteronomy* is significant as the starting point of Jeanette’s education because it is the book where Moses speaks to the children of Israel and sets down for them all the laws of God. Louie, like Moses, lays out a stringent code of proper living for Jeanette. Of course, the “nameless desires” of the saints, their “Unnatural Passions,” enter into Jeanette’s education and are soon to “afflict” Jeanette. Again, in this passage, Winterson foreshadows Jeanette’s eventual rejection of Louie and the Church’s world view.

Why is Jeanette’s break with the Church important? Horskjær Humphries articulates that Jeanette’s break from the Church “is a break with a world of black and white in which homosexuality can only be natural or unnatural, good or evil, and in which perfection is a matter of ‘flawlessness’ rather than balance” (9-10). Instead of following the Church’s tenets, Jeanette frees herself from them by creating her own stories. One of the earliest signs of Jeanette’s rejection of church teachings occurs in her play with fuzzy felt in the Sunday school room during a Church dinner when she is seven. Jeanette changes the story of Daniel and the Lions by having the lions eat Daniel. When Pastor Spratt catches her, she lies and tells him that she was confusing the story with Jonah and the whale (13). Jeanette rearranges the “facts” in a way suitable to her sense of enjoyment. Since the Church “community constructs Jeanette as representing its own (potential or actual) transgressions: as the subject who refuses to take its place in the symbolic” (Carter 18), they must eventually send her into exile for exhibiting those transgressions. In this scene, the fuzzy felt Daniel is symbolic of the child Jeanette, being

ripped apart by the lions of her Church community. Winterson illustrates the way that traditional history excludes the possibility for alternative narratives to exist, and shows that Jeanette's struggle to enter into such discourse, while possible, will not be easy or uncontested.

Jeanette's rejection of church tenets reaches its apex as her relationship with Melanie comes to light. Since "Winterson totally redefines normal and renders heterosexuality as unintelligible for Jeanette" (Doan 138), it is difficult for Jeanette to recognize any sin in her homosexuality. Raised to believe that "Unnatural Passions" are feelings alien to a person, Jeanette's "natural" feelings of love towards Melanie therefore seem acceptable. Jeanette cannot see any sin in her relationship with Melanie, as she tells Pastor Spratt: "to the pure all things are pure. . . . It's you not us" (103). Confronted by Pastor Spratt to admit her "Unnatural Passion," Jeanette is confused and unwillingly to admit that she has sinned. In the Church intervention, Jeanette and Pastor Spratt argue: "I love her." / "Then you do not love the Lord." / "Yes, I love both of them." / "You cannot" (103). In these articulations, Winterson plays the Church's and Jeanette's ideological frameworks off one another. For Louie and the Church, it is not possible for Jeanette to inhabit both sides of their binary.

However, Louie unwittingly contributes to Jeanette's difference by again displaying a fissure in her strict ideology. Winterson's critics continually overlook the scene wherein Jeanette and her mother are looking through a photo album, and her



mother “mistakenly” has a picture of “Eddie’s sister” on her old flames’ page (36).<sup>5</sup>

Although Louie later removes the woman’s photo after Jeanette asks about it, the incident highlights another flaw in her supposedly solid binary framework. In this brief episode, Winterson provides the reader with a hint that perhaps Louie knows about “Unnatural Passions” first hand. After all, Louie admits to never feeling true heterosexual love. She tells Jeanette that her feeling of love for Pierre was really a stomach ulcer: “So just you take care, what you think is the heart might well be another organ” (85). Since her mother never models a “real” heterosexual relationship based on romantic love, and actually offers a glimpse of other possibilities (Eddie’s sister), Jeanette’s subversion of heterosexual church teachings fulfills the lesson Louie unintentionally demonstrates.

Beginning with the episode of the fuzzy felt, Winterson has Jeanette rewrite history throughout *Oranges*. While Jeanette learns that history is not straightforward from observing the fissures in her mother’s binary framework, Elsie Norris explicitly teaches her to accept alternative world views. As Omega points out, “the versatility of reality, and the ability to view its complex, many-layered and problematic nature is indeed the most important thing Elsie Norris taught Jeanette” (144). Jeanette’s initial understanding of history comes from her mother’s religious instruction: “I developed an understanding of Historical Process through the prophecies in the Book of Revelation, and a magazine called *The Plain Truth*, which my mother received each week” (17). Elsie challenges the notion of “plain truth,” and instructs Jeanette about history’s malleability and multiple

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<sup>5</sup> When considering that most critics are carrying out feminist and/or queer readings of the novel where Louie is the “intolerant heterosexual mother,” this omission becomes problematic. I do not highlight this scene to thrust Louie “out of the closet,” but to reveal the complexity of her character in the novel.

truths. Elsie “said that stories helped you to understand the world” (29) and “what looks like one thing, may well be another” (30). Jeanette explains that Elsie had pictures of a variety of people on her wall: Florence Nightingale, Clive of India, Palmerston, Sir Isaac Newton (32). Each figure represents a different kind of knowledge (medicine, politics, philosophy, science) that informs one’s world view. Elsie emphatically tells 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 progresses from Louie’s linear black and white version of the world to Elsie’s fluid and multi-layered approach to history and knowledge. Elsie’s lessons allow Jeanette to develop her own alternative world view. When she sees the orange demon for the first time, Jeanette tries to argue theology with it:

“Demons are evil, aren’t they?”

“Not quite, they’re just different, and difficult. . . . We’re here to keep you in one piece, if you ignore us, you’re quite likely to end up in two pieces, or lots of pieces, it’s all part of the paradox.”

“But in the Bible you keep getting driven out.”

“Don’t believe all you read.” (106)

The voice of the orange demon sounds suspiciously like Elsie’s voice – both see multiple truths and encourage Jeanette to forge her own way in the world.

In order to forge her own way, Jeanette must negotiate her own versions of history. Winterson realizes this rewriting process in *Oranges* by integrating myth and fairy tale into the autobiographical narrative of Jeanette. In *Art Objects*, Winterson emphatically explains that she sees “no conflict between reality and imagination. They are not in fact separate. Our real lives hold within them our royal lives; the inspiration to be more than we are, to find new solutions, to live beyond the moment. Art helps us to do

this because it fuses together temporal and perceptual realities” (143). Winterson does this explicitly by combining the “factual” autobiography with elements of the purely fictional. As well, Winterson rewrites history through the imagination of Jeanette. An early example of this occurs with Jeanette struggling to understand the alien world of the classroom:

When the children of Israel left Egypt, they were guided by the pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night. For them, this did not seem to be a problem. For me, it was an enormous problem. The pillar of cloud was a fog, perplexing and impossible. I didn't understand the ground rules. 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)

Jeanette then demonstrates the way she rearranges mathematical facts. Instead of visualizing a mathematical shape, she makes up a story about emperor Tetrahedron (47). Jeanette recreates the figure Tetrahedron into a multi-faced King, who learns “that no emotion is the final one” (48). Jeanette takes a lesson about mathematics, a subject removed from her everyday experience, and turns it into a parable about the emotional complexity that exists in life. While rewriting history is necessary in Jeanette’s process of self-identification, the task will be on-going and not easy emotionally.

Before Jeanette can begin to write her own history, she must break from her mother’s version of history. Carter explains Jeanette’s process as a rewriting of her “mother-text,” so she can expel Louie’s influence and reach a sense of wholeness with her own personal history (21). Winterson’s use of literal “mother-text,” the personal narrative offered by Louie, is especially important to Jeanette’s process of self-identification. Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* is Louie’s favourite non-Biblical text (73), but she rewrites the ending to fit her constructed world view. While she says that *Jane Eyre* gave

her fortitude when she was sad (28), she is really drawing strength from a story that she herself made up. After telling Jeanette to grin and bear it (getting married), Louie reminds her to think of *Jane Eyre*: “I did remember, but what my mother didn’t know was that I now knew she had rewritten the ending” (73). Louie has Jane marry St. John instead of having her return to Rochester. Jeanette equates her devastation at this discovery with the devastation she felt upon discovering her adoption papers (73), as both “lies” undermine not only the trust she had in her mother, but also the foundational stories that made up her personal history. Jeanette’s birth mother visits once, but Louie keeps Jeanette away:

“I know who she was, why didn’t you tell me?”

“It’s nothing to do with you.”

“She’s my mother.” No sooner had I said that than I felt a blow that wrapped round my head like a bandage. I lay on the lino looking up into the face.

“I’m your mother,” she said very quietly. “She was a carrying case.” (99)

Just as she reinvents the story *Jane Eyre*, Louie “rewrites” the origin of Jeanette’s birth to become her own authority on history. Jeanette’s mother is thus the source of her initial identity and also the model for an imaginative personal history. Jeanette remembers her mother telling her: “This world is full of sin. . . . You can change the world” (10). Like her mother, Jeanette embodies the ability to change history, and so she sets out to rewrite Louie’s version of the world.

*Oranges* is an innovative novel in the way that Winterson establishes Jeanette’s transformative narrative. Weaving fairy tale into the chronological autobiographical narrative, Winterson parallels the formation of Jeanette’s identity with the alternative “fantasy” narratives. Onega comments on Winterson’s interweaving narratives, stating that: “In the Introduction to the script of *Oranges* . . . Jeanette Winterson explained the

function of ‘the fairy tales and allegorical passages that weave themselves within the main story [as] a kind of Greek Chorus commenting on the main events’ (viii)” (Onega 142). Winterson uses popular fairy tales and other well-known stories, along with her own fanciful creations, throughout *Oranges* to comment on the novel’s autobiographical thread.

The story of Winnet and the Wizard is a particularly apt example of Winterson’s paralleling Jeanette’s quest narrative. This fairy tale’s lesson speaks to Jeanette within the text and to the audience outside of the text. The reader knows the story is intimately tied up with the story of Jeanette: a raven gives Winnet his heart, which is a rough brown pebble (made that way through sorrow) (144), just like the pebble the orange demon gives to Jeanette during her intervention (111). Rusk argues that Jeanette is the source of these stories, as she uses them to cope with her problems: “The early chapters each include one fairy tale, but after Jeanette is “outed,” the fantasies increase, which suggests that she must use all of her imaginative resources to interpret and cope with the social repercussions of her private life” (107). Jeanette may be the source of the increasing fantasies within the narrative, but there may also be a third-person narrative occurring as well. This blurring of first- and third-person narrative signifies the complexity of “factual” history that exists in autobiography – the reader is following Winterson’s own authorial voice and that of the fictional Jeanette. Winterson uses the stories to demonstrate the way people can build their own identity: by continually deepening their personal history through fiction.

Aside from using alternative stories to reflect Jeanette's growing awareness of self, Winterson also uses them to establish a mythic foundation for homosexuality. Rusk argues that Winterson "challenges us to consider the meaning of unconventionally used conventional sources, such as the Bible and Arthurian legend" (108). Culturally championed as foundational patriarchal texts, both the Bible and Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* are challenged and rewritten in *Oranges*. Jeanette challenges the Bible and her Church's reading of it early on, from subversively playing with fuzzy felt to actively disagreeing with Pastor Spratt's sermon on perfection. Jeanette recalls a sermon that "was on perfection, and it was at this moment that I began to develop my first theological disagreement. . . . 'Perfection,' he announced, 'is flawlessness'" (58). This passage is followed by a fairy tale about a prince who seeks a perfect, flawless woman for his wife. The "perfect" woman still has flaws and tells the prince that "what you want does not exist. . . . What does exist lies in the sphere of your own hands" (64). Enraged that he is wrong, the prince kills her, and then meets a man selling oranges, who gives him a copy of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (65). While the fairy tale at first seems to be a digression from Jeanette's narrative, it reinforces her own disagreements with the Church. Since she is not perfect, Jeanette creates a story that provides her with an explanation and defense of her difference. Via the fairy tale, Jeanette explains to herself that perfection is not flawlessness, but a "perfect balance of qualities and strengths" (62). While Jeanette cannot be flawless, since she transgresses gender norms, she can attain balance within the identity she creates for herself. Winterson provides more foundational support for Jeanette's homosexuality with an ongoing tale about a homosexual relationship between

King Arthur and Sir Perceval (126-127). Sir Perceval's quest for the Holy Grail parallels Jeanette's quest for self-definition, "thus adding a mythical overtone to Jeanette's individual life-story and so turning it into the archetypal representative history of lesbian women at large" (Onega 147). Winterson creates new and rewrites existing foundational texts in order to establish a new history wherein the homosexual is not the other.

Now that I have shown how Winterson incorporates an alternative history into the narrative plot, I will now discuss the importance of the Biblical structuring of *Oranges*. Winterson arranges the chapters of the novel along eight chapters of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, and Ruth. By following the structure of the Bible, Winterson overtly provides parallel "truths" to the "Word of God." In "Genesis," the reader learns the creation story of Jeanette (her adoption) and her world, as set out by Louie. "Exodus" marks Jeanette's journey out of the control of Louie and into the new world of the "Breeding Ground." Jeanette even compares herself with the "children of Israel" (47), as she continues to learn about, and then challenge, the "Law" of her mother. By the time the narrative progresses to "Deuteronomy," Jeanette has mastered the first steps of rewriting history for herself.

Winterson significantly ends *Oranges* with the chapter "Ruth," a relatively short but poignant book of the Bible. The story of Ruth tells of her decision to stay with her mother-in-law in a foreign land after her husband dies, even though she is legally free to return to her homeland. Ruth perseveres in maintaining family ties with her mother-in-law and God rewards her hard work in the foreign land with a new marriage and a son, who becomes the grandfather of David. The moral of the story is the same moral that

Winterson explores and challenges: family is a conscious commitment that will be rewarded by God. As I will discuss shortly, Winterson struggles with the notion of the traditional family as Jeanette, like Ruth, makes the choice to leave home for London, but unlike Ruth, she runs away from her family and the possibility of marriage. By following the chapters of the Bible, Winterson provides the reader with another method of rewriting history. The structure of *Oranges* demonstrates a rewriting of the Bible that puts into practice the narrator's argument that history's "lens can be tinted, tilted, smashed" (93). Winterson exploits the malleability of Biblical truth in order to create a foundational text accepting of alternative homosexual identities.

So if the lesbian is not the other in *Oranges*, who is? Winterson is unable to fully avoid creating new binaries as she rewrites "traditional" ideologies. By freeing the lesbian, she implicitly "others" the heterosexual. As Rusk explains: "What works well . . . is Winterson's reversal of the central and the marginal, by locating women, working class life, and lesbian love at centre stage; men, the 'posh,' and heterosexual relations off in the wings. This switching of focus both subverts marginality and brings to light the underilluminated" (113). While Winterson uses this switch in focus to empower Jeanette, Rusk argues that Winterson pejoratively stereotypes men as beasts and looks down on Jews (by characterizing Miss Jewsbury as someone who takes advantage of Jeanette) (113-114). While the case for anti-Semitism is an interesting one, there is not enough narrative evidence in *Oranges* to support or deny Rusk's reading.<sup>6</sup> However, Rusk's

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<sup>6</sup> In my following chapters, however, I do discuss Winterson's maligning of Jews as part of the imperialist ideology embedded in her novels, and so Rusk's observations about anti-Semitism in *Oranges*, albeit brief, are plausible.



argument regarding Winterson's unflattering stereotyping of men does require further analysis. Regardless of her intent or awareness, Winterson does take controversial approaches in portraying gender roles and family structure in *Oranges*.

Winterson separates Jeanette from stereotypical female representations, by making their construction visible. Commenting on the constructedness of gender, Judith Butler argues that "there is no power that acts, but only a reiterated acting that is power in its persistence and instability" (9). In order to defy the power of her mother and of the controlling ideology of society, Jeanette disrupts the process of reiteration. After Jeanette is given "Sweet hearts for a sweet heart," she fumes that "Sweet I was not. But I was a little girl, ergo, I was sweet, and here were the sweets to prove it" (70). Jeanette consciously rebels against the constructed signifiers of "girl" and does not reiterate them – instead of smiling demurely she had "almost strangled [her] dog in rage, and been dragged from the house by a desperate mother" (70). When her mother forces her to wear a bright pink mac, she despises it immediately: "I felt miserable. When Keats felt miserable he always put on a clean shirt./ But he was a poet./ I wouldn't have noticed Melanie if I hadn't gone round the other side of the stall to look at the aquarium" (78). Jeanette's hatred of pink symbolizes her rejection of her mother's overt gendering, and the incident leads Jeanette to her first homosexual relationship with Melanie. Jeanette completely rejects the signifiers of "girl" and moves in another direction. Instead of eagerly awaiting marriage, Jeanette has terrible dreams about being at the altar: "My new husband turned to me, and here were a number of possibilities. Sometimes he was blind, sometimes a pig, sometimes my mother, sometimes the man from the post office, and

once, just a suit of clothes with nothing inside” (69). Jeanette’s indifference to and confusion about men deepens after reading *Beauty and the Beast*, as she realizes that “it was clear that I stumbled on a terrible conspiracy./ There are women in the world./ There are men in the world./ And there are beasts./ What do you do if you marry a beast”(71)? For Jeanette, marriage is an unappealing future life. Winterson provides no real positive examples of men that interest either Jeanette or the reader – thus disrupting the reiteration of the heterosexual norm. Thus, Jeanette must create new definitions of gender relations for herself as she rejects those definitions that Louie and discursive norms construct.

Winterson’s characterization of men as beasts prompts Rusk’s criticism, but it is vital to recognize that Winterson offers this comparison in order to dismantle gender norms. The traditional knight-in-shining-armor does not have currency in Jeanette’s alternative homosexual narrative. Instead, Winterson parodies the masculinity of the “real” men in the novel, establishing the tale of King Arthur and Sir Perceval as a legitimate alternative model. By undermining the conventional notion that masculinity equates with heterosexuality, Winterson’s “queering” of the tale of King Arthur poses an alternative construction of gender and sexuality. The story then suggests that successful love relationships are not constricted to only those that are heterosexual.

As the strongest male character in the novel, Pastor Spratt embodies the intolerance of “man-made” religion. The Church exiles Jeanette after she preaches in the church, and Pastor Spratt concludes that: “The devil had attacked [Jeanette] at [her] weakest point: [her] inability to recognize the limitations of [her] sex” (132). Pastor Spratt also attacks Jeanette’s construction of history. He says that Melanie has completely

erased Jeanette from her life, and Jeanette, deeply wounded, thinks, “No, [the pastor] wouldn’t kill me, soft-voiced men do not kill, they are clever. Their kind of violence leaves no visible mark” (147). Pastor Spratt’s words reiterate the constrictive heterosexual norm, attempting to render Jeanette’s alternative world views non-existent. Jeanette reflects at the end: “I would cross seas and suffer sunstroke and give away all I have, but not for a man, because they want to be the destroyer and never be destroyed. That is why they are unfit for romantic love. There are exceptions and I hope they are happy” (165). Winterson does indeed note that there are exceptions to the rule, like Joe and the wreath-making woman at the funeral parlour, but she offers no concrete examples of successful heterosexual relationships within Jeanette’s immediate family and Church spheres. In *Oranges*, because their role in the narrative is to expose the construction of heterosexuality, men are either inconsequential, like Jeanette’s father, or threats to Jeanette’s well-being, like Pastor Spratt.

While Winterson struggles to fully break down gender binaries, she has even more trouble defining family. Is one’s family integral to one’s identity? Is it possible to completely break away from family? These are important questions for queer readers. In “Queer and Now,” Eve Sedgwick discusses the ideological power behind the patriarchal foundation of family formation. The story of Jeanette concludes at Christmas time, a particularly auspicious ending, because as Sedgwick argues: “the pairing ‘families/Christmas’ becomes increasingly tautological, as families more and more constitute themselves according to the schedule, and in the endlessly iterated image, of the holiday itself constituted in the image of ‘the family’” (5-6). *Oranges* begins with

Jeanette's family centre (her mother) and ends with it as well. Half-way through the novel, Winterson creates the sense that families only offer illusory security and are dangerous to one's individuality. For instance, there is the occasion where Melanie and Jeanette look down on the church congregation as their "family. It was safe" (86).

Winterson then follows this moment with a historical allusion to the storming of the Winter Palace, while the aristocracy sits inside ignorant of the looming danger (86-87). The allusion underscores the falsity of family security for Jeanette. Both Jeanette's extended family (the Church) and her immediate family (her mother) send her into exile once she exhibits her difference.

Regardless of the fact that she is unceremoniously rejected by her mother, Jeanette returns home at Christmas. The narrator argues that: "Going back after a long time will make you mad, because the people you left behind do not like to think of you changed, will treat you like they always did, accuse you of being indifferent, when you are only different" (156). There is still a sense that Jeanette wants to belong to her mother's notion of the traditional family. She cannot help "always thinking of going back" (155), but is unable to actually go back because, as a lesbian, she *is* different. At the beginning of the novel Jeanette is able to observe her mother's hidden depths, but she is no longer able to do that when she returns home: "The parlour has a leaded window, so no one can see inside properly" (158). Not only has Jeanette changed, which is expected, but so has her mother. The part of Louie that offered Jeanette a place of difference and an articulation of self is now closed. Jeanette is left with the unsatisfactory realization that:

Families, real ones, are chairs and tables and the right number of cups, but I had no means of joining one, and no means of dismissing my own; she had tied a

thread around my button, to tug when she pleased. I knew a woman in another place. Perhaps she would save me. But what if she were asleep? What if she sleepwalked beside me and never knew? (171)

Jeanette's mother has tied a thread to her, like the Wizard does with Winnet in the fairy tale, and pulls it as she wishes. Louie's thread is one of many, as the narrator explains: "There are threads that help you find your way back, and there are threads that intend to bring you back" (155). Even though Jeanette can never again be included within the family sphere, she still feels the tug of her past drawing her home. The threads of home, mother, and family are all part of the "string full of knots" (166) that make up Jeanette's personal history. They are places of complication and confusion that make up Jeanette's past, and as the narrator in "Deuteronomy" says: "very often history is a means of denying the past" (92). Louie is both the origin of the history that informs Jeanette's identity and the "knot" that Jeanette needs to untie in order to create a liberated sense of self. The family structure of Jeanette's future is uncertain and therefore difficult for her to even imagine. Family falls under the "friends" column in *Oranges*, and Jeanette may never cross over into that category again.

By the end of *Oranges*, while Jeanette has not successfully severed the ties to her mother, she has successfully established an independent identity for herself. Jeanette leaves the binary framework of Louie's fundamentalist religious world view, and slowly begins creating her own. It is not until Jeanette returns home that she finally realizes that Louie's dream for her is dead. Jeanette muses:

I could have been a priest instead of a prophet. The priest has a book with the words set out. Old words, known words, words of power. Words that are always on the surface. Words for every occasion. The words work. They do what they are supposed to do; comfort and discipline. The prophet has no book. The prophet is a

voice that cries in the wilderness, full of sounds that do not always set into meaning. The prophets cry out because they are troubled by demons. (156)

Jeanette will never be the missionary her mother wanted to be and tried to create. Instead Winterson characterizes Jeanette using the same religious tradition she thought she left – Jeanette becomes the Biblical prophet instead of the Church priest. Just as words (labels, names) indicate where a person falls in Louie’s binary framework, words provide Jeanette with the power of self-definition. Onega explains that Winterson

rejects the traditional univocal and totalitarian concept of history and defends the right of the individual to contribute her own subjective version of it, insisting at the same time on the truth-revealing power of imaginative story-telling and the impossibility of separating fact from fiction, the real from the unreal, the desired from the actually lived. (147)

Jeanette mirrors Winterson’s life as autobiography, as Winnet mirrors Jeanette’s life as fantasy. On each level of the narrative, the lesbian identity gains a new framework of self-reference. Winterson teaches *Oranges’* audience a new way to create identity through rewriting history, and a new way of understanding that “imagination can reveal essential truth” (Rusk 110). After carefully creating a historic and literary foundation for Jeanette to draw strength from, Winterson frees her heroine to a new, but difficult, future.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Mapping Room for Everyone in History?: *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry*

“If art, all art, is concerned with truth, then a society in denial will not find much use for it. . . . In fact, we are no more moved by the past we are busy inventing, than by a present we are busy denying.” (*Art Objects* 11)

“Neither past nor present, any more than any poet or artist, has complete meaning alone.” (*Said Culture and Imperialism* 2)

After her enormous success with *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985), Winterson furthered her experimentation with historiographic metafiction in *The Passion* (1987) and *Sexing the Cherry* (1989). In both of these later novels, Winterson continues to use alternative narrative structures found in fairy tale and magic realism to construct history as multilayered and malleable. In both novels, Winterson experiments with the way that writing about desire opens up spaces for alternative feminine histories. As geographies that have distinct boundaries, London and France are mapped male centres in the texts. Alternatively, Venice and the New World (real and imagined) are the liberatory realms wherein feminine characters are able to explore and experience desire. Within these alternative feminine realms, Winterson investigates codes of masculinity and femininity in order to break down gender binaries, but she rehearses imperial codes of racial hierarchy by othering Jews, Easterners, and New World natives. In this chapter, along with examining Winterson’s rewriting of history to create spaces for alternative identities, I will emphasize the presence of “other” places and peoples in the novels’ gendered geographical spaces.

Winterson continues to explore the themes of gender, history, and geography in both of *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry*. By taking both of these novels into consideration, I articulate Winterson's continuous project of disrupting gender norms as she moves from rewriting personal history in *Oranges* to rewriting national history in these two historiographic metafiction. As well, by examining both novels together, I am able to expose the extent to which imperialist structures inform Winterson's rewriting of subjectivity, desire, and history. I will first briefly lay out a summary of the pertinent critical work on history and geographic space in *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry*. Drawing on Said's and McClintock's work on imperialism, I will identify the new contributions that my critical approach provides in relation. Then, beginning with a discussion of the use of interweaving narratives and magic realism to disrupt the rigid boundaries of traditional history, I go on to consider Winterson's exploration of desire and geography in her (re)visioning of history, taking McClintock's notions of gendered geography as my guide. In both of these novels, Winterson separates the world into mapped masculine spaces (France, London) and unmapped feminine spaces (Venice, New World). Using ideas from Butler and Spivak, the chapter will end with a discussion of the "other" countries and peoples Winterson maintains within an imperialist framework while she is exposing and reinventing codes of gender in the alternative unbounded feminine world. I argue that Winterson's liberation of a feminine subjectivity requires the construction of these realms of delegitimated otherness in order to define and legitimize a feminine (lesbian) identity.



Several critics comment on Winterson's use of geographical space, particularly Venice, in terms of the way place reflects personal identity and facilitates its development. Helene Bengston and Judith Seaboyer both argue that Venice is a place of fascination in European history and that Winterson uses the city as a mirror for her characters. Both critics focus on Winterson's mirroring of Venice's waterways and casinos, where Villanelle finds reassurance and Henri finds confusion. Bengston identifies the way Winterson continues with the Romantic tradition in the novel, arguing that there is a "custom-made geography of romance quests" where "the Venetian cityscape is a testing ground," in this case, for Henri's love for Villanelle (18). While Bengston concludes that Winterson's conception of Venetian space suggests "a multiple reality based on personal perception and emotion, and relatively unbound by linear conventions of space and time" (18), she neglects to address the role of rural France in Henri's development as Villanelle's "knight errant." Seaboyer reads the text with the insight of psychoanalytic theory, arguing that "Venice is a figure for two privileged and inextricably linked psychoanalytic tropes: death and the body of the woman" (485). For Villanelle, Venice is the maternal body as a place of endless pleasure, but for Henri, Venice is a place of abjection where meaning collapses (499). Seaboyer, like Bengston, articulates the centrality of Venice to the narrative but does not develop an analysis of France, which reflects the leading male characters in the novel, Henri and Napoleon. Bengston and Seaboyer provide a starting point for my analysis of Venice in *The Passion* and a critical framework for approaching Winterson's use of time and space in *Sexing the Cherry*. As I consider the "foreign" others at the core of the city, I will complicate

Bengston's and Seaboyer's discussion of Venice by incorporating Winterson's construction of the other landscapes and peoples that complete the novels' spatial framework. In doing so, I perform a geopolitical reading that has been, to this point in time, missing in criticism on Winterson's work.

I will also be making stronger connections between Winterson's characters and the spaces they inhabit. Cath Stowers pays particular attention to Winterson's use of place in both *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry*. Specifically focusing on "the house, the palimpsest, the island" as communities of women in Winterson's work, Stowers argues that Winterson uses "metaphors of travel, alternative geographies, castaway groups of women" to "reclaim femininity and woman, to write both onto the patriarchal map" (73). Stowers posits that men, like Henri and Jordan, are feminized by their immersion in Winterson's feminine communities (73). Like the majority of critics, Stowers focuses only on the feminine places and ignores the role that masculine space plays in each novel. Susana Onega, in "Jeanette Winterson's Politics of Uncertainty in *Sexing the Cherry*," takes a closer look at the way the masculine Dog-Woman ruptures gender norms by being an unfeminine woman, but she does not comment on the Dog-Woman's relationship to the masculine space of London. While there is much work regarding Jordan and his real and fantastical voyages that explore desire, there is less discussion regarding London and the Dog-Woman specifically. As well, there has been no discussion regarding the seemingly uninhabited New World where Jordan and Tradescant pillage all of their fruit. I will be examining both sides of the Wintersonian landscape of desire – the

mapped/controlled and unmapped/uncontrolled – as well as those people who inhabit them in *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry*.

Building on this small body of criticism on history and geography in Winterson's work, I am developing a specific geopolitical reading of the novels. As I argued in the last chapter, "Placing the Self in History," Winterson reconstructs history through alternative narrative structures in order to create a space for lesbian identity. While Winterson experiments with postmodernism in order to break down dominant ideologies, she is unable to both identify and disrupt all of the ideologies, such as imperialism, that inform her work. Winterson believes that art can liberate historical truth, yet, as Said points out, "literature itself makes constant references to itself as somehow participating in Europe's overseas expansion, and therefore creates what [Raymond] Williams calls 'structures of feeling' that support, elaborate, and consolidate the practice of empire" (*Culture and Imperialism* 14). Although Winterson consciously rejects pieces of Western European ideology, she still enacts imperialist hegemony in her descriptions of other nations and peoples. I will analyze the ways in which Winterson capitalizes on the exotic feminine qualities of Venice as she challenges the heterosexual masculine rigidity of France in *The Passion*. In *Sexing the Cherry*, I will look at Winterson's characterization of the New World as a place of both female empowerment and imperial hierarchy. While Winterson creates room for alternative feminine histories, she reiterates the foreignness of the imperial others – Jews, Easterners, and New World natives.

In addition to Said's notions of imperialism, I am using Anne McClintock's concept of the colonial trope of gendered geography to analyze and explain the imperial

underpinnings of Winterson's work. In her discussion of Enlightenment exploration literature, McClintock argues that male writers have feminized geography in order to conquer it. She explains that "the world is feminized and spatially spread for male exploration, then reassembled and deployed in the interests of massive imperial power" (23). Winterson both builds on this trope and subverts it in order to redefine gender positions and boundaries in historical discourse. McClintock further articulates how women have difficulty "laying claim to alternative genealogies and narratives of origin and naming" because "male eyes" have symbolically reduced women to the "earth that is to be discovered, entered, named, inseminated and, above all, owned" (31). Winterson challenges this male dominance over genealogies by rewriting history from the perspective of female subjects. The relationship between Villanelle and Henri in Venice in *The Passion* is an apt example of this challenge. Villanelle and Venice represent feminine desire and, while both are in some way "inseminated" by the French – Venice by Napoleon's army and Villanelle by Henri – both feminine agents resist masculine ownership.

Also integral to my reading of *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry* is McClintock's discussion of the imperial male's obsession with mapping. She argues that while "the feminizing of the land appears to be no more than a familiar symptom of male megalomania, it also betrays acute paranoia and a profound, if not pathological, sense of male anxiety and boundary loss" (24). There is both the desire for the unlimited power the new lands appear to offer, and also a "fear of engulfment" (27). The new lands must be named, and therefore, controlled. Winterson plays with this simultaneous masculine

desire for and dread of alternative spaces by exposing the construction of masculinity within the alternative worlds and redefining desire as a positive expression of femininity, instead of as something that needs to be anxiously controlled. Yet, while Winterson's novels rupture some codes of gendered geography, they reenact codes of imperialism, making the racial others of the novels – the Jews, Easterners, and New World natives – silent and invisible. For instance, in *Sexing the Cherry*, Winterson articulates alternative histories, like those of the “Twelve Dancing Princesses,” in the space of the New World but she does not acknowledge the presence of any of the real native people who were encountered and colonized during that era.

Before I can specifically focus on the role of geography, gender, and imperialism in *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry*, I need to articulate the ways that Winterson disrupts the boundaries of traditional history. Once I analyze Winterson's narrative approaches to rewriting history, which creates the space needed for her alternative subjects and places, I will then be able to discuss the specific implications and limitations involved in such an endeavour. In general, Winterson's work echoes the Foucauldian tenet that “truth, and its original reign, has had a history within history from which we are barely emerging” (144). In *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry*, Winterson uses this notion of history to rewrite linear conceptions of “factuality” by interweaving the fictive with the non-fictive, like characterizing Napoleon as a man obsessed with eating chickens whole or having the Dog-Woman encourage the Great London Fire of 1666. By making the origin of historical figures and events fantastic, Winterson “dispels the chimeras of the origin” (Foucault 144) and underscores the necessity of reevaluating the historical

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“truths” on which people build their identities. Whereas *Oranges* deals with rewriting the personal history of Jeanette, *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry* explore the representative individual narratives that make up a national history. Winterson’s argument in both novels is that all histories, personal and national, are subjective.

Winterson attempts to reject all absolutes maintained in traditional history by creating characters who directly challenge dominant “truths.” In *Sexing the Cherry*, for example, the Dog-Woman considers killing her fortune-telling neighbour because “fate may hang on any moment and at any moment be changed.” She admits, “I should have killed her and found us a different story” (14). In this passage, the Dog-Woman demonstrates an awareness of history’s multiple “origins” and the possibility for change in “fate” afforded by that conception. Winterson establishes the possibility of multiple selves that are not bound to time and place, as Jordan observes:

If all time is eternally present, there is no reason why we should not step out of one present into another. The inward life tells us that we are multiple not single, and that our one existence is really countless existences holding hands like those cut-out paper dolls, but unlike the dolls never coming to an end. (90)

Jordan’s statement depicts history as a continuum that involves individuals throughout time, who each create new possibilities in interpretation. History exists in a state of uncertainty because of the multiplicity of selfhood; since there is no singular self, there can be no singular history. Winterson uses a Foucauldian approach to history to demonstrate how personal histories are connected and open to multiple interpretations through the various narratives in *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry*.

Through their multiple narratives, both novels reiterate the themes of history’s susceptibility to human forgetfulness and its openness to reinterpretation. One of

Winterson's concerns throughout her *oeuvre* is the effect of time on one's memory. Just as the narrator in *Oranges* states that "time is a great deadener" (166), so too does *The Passion's* Henri, as he listens to his mother reminisce about her parents (32). The nameless environmentalist woman in *Sexing the Cherry* also echoes that "time is a great deadener" (123) when her one-woman fight against river polluters is ignored. Like Jeanette in *Oranges*, the protagonists in *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry* escape from traditional history's "deadening" of emotion through alternative narratives. Bom Mette argues that Winterson uses intertwining narratives to "unmoor us [the reader] from the security of what to expect from a book and engage us in a game of guessing, questioning and analyzing the truths that our culture privileges in such books" (73). Both novels allow their subjects to move beyond the boundaries of space and time, as sites of "cultural privilege," through alternative story-telling.

One of the ways that Winterson disrupts the boundaries of "deadened" history is by reanimating language. Through Henri, in *The Passion*, the reader learns how Napoleon's wars may have felt to the people who lived and fought under him. Winterson removes objective historical distance from the Napoleonic wars by retelling them with the human emotions involved. As Henri argues:

Nowadays people talk about the things he 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)

effective text

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Stereotypical words about war have lost their emotional impact and make history palatable to later generations that learn about it. As Foucault explains, people assume that “words had kept their meaning, that desires still pointed in a single direction, and that ideas retained their logic” (139). In Winterson’s rendering of the Napoleonic wars, however, the readers can see “starvation” and “slaughter” without feeling those experiences themselves. By focusing on Henri’s personal struggles in serving Napoleon, Winterson makes sure to explain the “unpromising places” of history – “sentiments, love, conscience, instincts” (Foucault 139-140) – that are usually left out in traditional chronicles.

To great effect in *The Passion*, Winterson uses magic realism to reinstate what Foucault calls the “unpromising places” of history. There are two key instances of this technique wherein desire (love) becomes fantastic: the incident involving the loss and return of Villanelle’s heart, and Domino’s permanently frozen chain. After a passionate love affair, Villanelle literally gives her heart to her lover, and sends Henri to get it back before the woman can sew it up into a tapestry (121). Henri struggles to understand the fantastic events he encounters in Venice, even though he says that during the war, “when I say I lived with heartless men, I use the word correctly” (83). For Villanelle, an inhabitant of the transformative Venice, reality is neither linear nor closed to the fantastic. By using magic realism to describe the love affair, Winterson challenges the reader to question all of the narrative – what is real and what is not? Why is Henri’s description of the war’s “heartless men” more fitting than Villanelle’s loss of her heart to love? Winterson draws attention to the linguistic construction of history, wherein desire is



conventionally left out, so Henri's war narrative sounds more "normal" than Villanelle's literal expression of freed desire. As the narrative progresses, Henri encounters his own "ordinary miracle" (87) with Domino's ice-encased necklace. Villanelle uses it as a bargaining tool with Henri: "When you bring me my heart, I'll give you your miracle"

(117). Historical truths, like miracles, are often uncertain and open to multiple

interpretations. Each person must set down her or his own rules for defining the

"everyday" and the miraculous based on emotional and perceptual "truth." Winterson records these magic-realist events as non-traditional "truths" in her version of history.

Similarly, Winterson employs magic realism in *Sexing the Cherry* to bring language, deadened by time, back to life. Winterson reanimates language with gruesome sayings, like "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." after attending an anti-Puritan meeting, the Dog-Woman goes out, kills Puritans and takes their eyes and teeth as proof of her "good" work (83-88). In this way, Winterson uses the character of the Dog-Woman to challenge notions of linguistic certainty. Throughout the novel, Winterson plays with religion in her magic-realist descriptions of the Dog-Woman. For example, when an elephant is on display, the Dog-Woman argues theology with the trainer. He says the Dog-Woman must not weigh more than an angel, and she replies: "You know nothing of the Scriptures . . . For nowhere in the Holy Book is there anything to be said about the weight of an angel" (24). Finishing her argument, the Dog-Woman sits down on the levered plank holding the elephant, Samson, and sends him flying high into the air (25). Angel or not, the Dog-Woman's size defies rationalization just as religious truths do. In her murder of the Puritans and defiance of religious norms, the Dog-Woman challenges

the reader's faith in the language of history. Through her fantastical description of the Dog-Woman, Winterson reanimates "deadened" language and creates a character who defies the boundaries of her society, both in terms of her size and her morals.

Thus, through these narrative techniques, Winterson rewrites history in *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry* in order to illustrate its malleability. By disrupting conventional notions of history, Winterson can then develop a new historical discourse for alternative feminine identities. In her revisioning of history and her resulting experiments with gender, however, Winterson relies on historically established constructions of place (in terms of what constitutes "familiar" and "foreign"). I argue that Winterson (re)creates geographies as either masculine spaces, which are figured as mapped and rigid, or feminine spaces, which are figured as unmapped and liberated. She uses the feminine spaces in her novels to further challenge the gender norms that are reiterated throughout traditional history. Winterson exposes and ruptures gender norms by relating a specific character to a gendered place: Henri/France, Villanelle/Venice, Dog-Woman/London, and Jordan/New World. After I analyze the relationship between each of these character/place pairs, I will discuss how Winterson recreates the imperial hierarchy that Said and McClintock observe in British exploration literature. While Winterson creates these "liberated" feminine spaces as sites for legitimate feminine subjects, she excludes the possibility for certain masculine and "foreign" identities to co-exist in these same spaces.

I will start my analysis of Winterson's geographies with an examination of the masculine centres of each novel, rural France in *The Passion* and London in *Sexing the*

*Cherry*. Both of these places have rigid boundaries that are patrolled and maintained by anxious male rulers. Because of this anxiety, France and England are nations preoccupied with warfare. *The Passion* follows Napoleon's campaigns through France, England, and Russia. All of the other European countries lack distinction in Henri's narrative as the process of combat and domination reiterates itself: "Could so many straightforward ordinary lives suddenly become men to kill and women to rape? Austrians, Italians, Spaniards, Egyptians, English, Poles, Russians. Those were the people who were either our enemies or our dependants. There were others but the list is too long" (79).

Throughout the novel, Henri reinforces the sameness of Europe, stating: "I traveled distances that peasants never even think about and I found the air much the same in every country. One battlefield is very like another" (154). Seaboyer explains that in such scenes "Napoleon's indiscriminate greed becomes a nice analogy for a death-driven desire to engulf national difference into the oneness of empire, as though to resolve disconcerting European mixture into reassuring sameness" (498). By mapping Europe as the "same," the French army is able to avoid what McClintock calls "boundary loss." Winterson endows France with distinctive masculine qualities (aggressive, dominant, and heroic) which Napoleon and the French soldiers following him must continually exhibit and reinforce in the countries they conquer in order to maintain some semblance of control.

Winterson's description of France also reinforces the masculine desire for clearly defined boundaries. The description of rural France seems idyllic, especially as Henri grows homesick: "I missed the hill where the sun slants across the valley. I missed all the everyday things I had hated" (6). While Henri's remembrance is full of longing for home,

the people he left behind are not as open as the valleys they inhabit. The French avoid an excess of human contact and passion in their everyday life: “We’re a lukewarm people for all our feast days and hard work. Not much touches us, but we long to be touched. We lie awake at night willing the darkness to part and show us a vision. Our children frighten us with their intimacy, but we make sure that they grow up like us. Lukewarm like us” (7).

Henri describes his people as “lukewarm,” a label that indicates steadiness and reliability, but also a lack of emotional openness. While the farmers live off of the earth, they do not celebrate its fertility and are even cautious of their own children. Winterson characterizes the French farmers, along with other rural Europeans, as having defined emotional boundaries, which results in the people’s misplaced hero-worship and warfare.

Winterson recreates these same masculine anxieties and controls in her description of London in *Sexing the Cherry*. In this text, London represents the masculine controlled centre of the text, which is where the masculine Dog-Woman lives. Winterson characterizes London, and greater England, as a place of war under the rule of men: “At first the Civil War hardly touched us. . . . There was no feeling that the King would not win as he had always won, as kings have always won, whomever they fight” (63). War is a state of life that the people have come to take for granted. At the same time, London is a centre of increasing male anxiety and control, in part because of the emerging rule of the Puritans. So anxious are they about emotional and physical intimacy that the Puritans make love “through a hole in a sheet” (27). The first description of the city comes from the Dog-Woman, who says that “London is a foul place full of pestilence and rot” (13). By describing London as a rotten core, Winterson comments on the state of male-

dominated nations and the historical records that they produce. After the plague ravishes London, the Dog-Woman thinks: “We are corrupted and our city is corrupted. There is no whole or beautiful thing left” (141) and so “it should burn and burn until there is nothing but the cooling wind” (142). The burning of London is a literal razing of the past. On these ruins of a patriarchal history that consistently excludes women, the building of a women’s history can begin. Whereas *The Passion*’s Henri is unable to change the character of France, the Dog-Woman plays a central role in “cleansing” London of its corrupted masculine qualities.

The Dog-Woman uniquely negotiates the space of London. Susana Gonzalez Abalos argues that the Dog-Woman is female but she is not feminine (284), and “it is from her ‘unfemininity’ that most of her power and strength come” (285). The Dog-Woman’s lack of feminine “qualifiers” reflects her position as the text’s representative of London. The Dog-Woman reflects certain elements of London’s masculine geography; like England, she is a dominant force in the world, and she colonizes others in her name. The Dog-Woman finds and raises Jordan, placing a medal around his neck that reads: “Remember the rock from whence ye are hewn and the pit from whence ye are digged” (10). This act resembles that of staking a flag. McClintock describes such marking of territory as specifically masculine: “During these extravagant acts of discovery, imperial men reinvent a moment of pure (male) origin and mark it visibly with one of Europe’s fetishes: a flag, a name on a map, a stone, or later perhaps, a monument” (30). The Dog-Woman thus reflects her surrounding geography – she is dirty, large and even imperial. There is a tension, however, between her masculinity and her ability to transgress its

boundaries. While her masculine actions reflect London for the most part, the Dog-Woman displays an openness to change that the city under Puritan control does not. In the narrowly-defined boundaries of London, the Dog-Woman is unreadable,<sup>1</sup> and as such, she disrupts its constructions of gender and history. The Dog-Woman has the awareness that in order to liberate alternative narratives, the masculine boundaries that exclude desire must be burnt down and rebuilt. Indeed, the Dog-Woman liberates herself by spreading the flames of the Great London Fire. Through the Dog-Woman's actions, Winterson disrupts the security of the "familiar" conventions of societal control, in favour of the "unmapped" New World where alternative histories are possible.

In opposition to her characterization of rural France and urban London as masculine controlled places, Winterson offers her characters feminine spaces of exploration in *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry*. Venice is the watery female centre of *The Passion*, and the vast seas of the New World encompass *Sexing the Cherry*'s realm. Water represents feminine desire and power in both texts, as each narrative deals with water's fluidity and hidden depth (much like Winterson's notions about history). After Jordan takes her to see the sea at sunrise, the Dog-Woman comments: "What I remember is the shining water and the size of the world" (16). Jordan enters willingly into the vastness of the sea, as he explores new discourses of gender and history. Villanelle finds empowerment in Venice's mysterious and ever-changing canals. Paulina Palmer, in "*The*

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<sup>1</sup> As an example of the Dog-Woman's "unreadability," Jordan consistently misreads his mother. Returning home, he apologizes for talking so little, saying that "It was never my way . . . nor yours either" (134). The Dog-Woman, in response, thinks: "I was perplexed by this, since I like to think of myself as a conversationalist. Had not Jordan and myself talked forever when he was a boy?" (134).

*Passion: Storytelling, Fantasy and Desire*,” explores the type of power with which Winterson endows Venice: “While the episodes set in the camp and on the battlefield give Winterson the opportunity to discuss politics in the conventional sense of war and statecraft, the city of Venice furnishes her with an arena for exploring themes relating to sexual politics and lesbian sexuality” (109). Henri’s narrative, like the Dog-Woman’s, represents the masculine elements of space and history that Winterson wants to reevaluate. The conventional masculine narratives of war and peace that make up traditional history are juxtaposed with the feminine narratives of identity and sexuality explored by Villanelle in *The Passion* and Jordan in *Sexing the Cherry*.

Of all of the places in Winterson’s work, none has received more attention from critics than *The Passion*’s Venice; thus, Venice is the best starting point for my discussion of Winterson’s supposedly liberatory geographies. Seaboyer argues that Venice “has long served the Anglo-American imagination as a metaphor for the past as a lost object of desire; in this avatar, it is an architectural fable that exists outside the crumbling reality” (484). Henri’s masculine narrative crumbles within Villanelle’s Venice, as the city resists exploration and explanation by outsiders. With its excesses of desire, Venice fails to be contained within the mapped boundaries of the French. Bengston also posits that “Venice, which is depicted as a living city, [is a] strongly symbolic organism resisting any attempt at mapping and rationalization” (17). Venice’s resistance to linear logic, which characterizes masculine history, is witnessed by Henri who, when lost among its canals, states: “Not even Bonaparte could rationalise Venice. This is a city of madmen” (112). Unlike Villanelle, who easily moves through the city, Henri cannot find his way around,

and becomes obsessed with the city's transformative nature. Writing from his cell in San Servolo, Henri observes that:

At midnight the bells ring out from every one of their churches and they have a hundred and seven at least. I have tried to count, but it is a living city and no one really knows what buildings are there from one day to the next.  
You don't believe me?  
Go and see for yourself. (158)

Henri challenges the reader to prove his tale wrong, whereas Villanelle feels no need to make excuses or explanations for her city. For Villanelle, Venice is a city to be taken on faith. She simply states that "here, in this mercurial city, it is required you do awake your faith. With faith, all things are possible" (49). Like the element of mercury, Venice straddles the division between solid and liquid, real and unreal. Whereas Henri can provide apparently matter-of-fact descriptions of France's people and landscape, Villanelle's Venice requires a different perspective, as it is a centre of unmappable desire and feminine power.

In characterizing Venice this way, however, Winterson repeats conventional European notions about the city. As Seaboyer notes, Winterson builds on Western Europe's traditional use of Venice as a "lost object of desire" (484). Said points out that Venice traditionally plays the role of the other in Western literature (61), and Winterson continues this exotic eroticization of the city. As I have established, Winterson conceives of history as multi-layered and malleable, and these are the same qualities she assigns to Venice. Bengston discusses how the "perceived reality of Venice, like a chivalric romance landscape, meets, or mirrors, the merits and desires of the 'quester' in the same three-dimensional way" (20), as in the mirroring between Villanelle, the casino, and the



city itself. All three are fantastic. Villanelle is the only girl whose “feet were webbed in the entire history of the boatmen” (51). The casino gala defies reality: “The roulette table. The gaming table. The fortune tellers. The fabulous three-breasted woman. The singing ape. The double-speed dominoes and the tarot” (60). With the passion and fear of the gamblers as its business, the casino appears “otherworldly” with its singing ape and three-breasted woman. And Venice defies convention as “a city surrounded by water with watery alleys that do for streets and roads and silted up back ways that only the rats can cross” (49). Venice is a city that exists without the organization of city-planners and without the standard of stone streets. Venice, and the paralleling figures of Villanelle and the casino, perform fluidity instead of stasis, and the exotic instead of the familiar. With their alternative values of faith, passion, and fluid boundaries, Winterson’s descriptions of Villanelle, the casino, and Venice, challenge traditional notions of history.

In *Sexing the Cherry*, Winterson furthers her “exploration” of alternative values in feminine spaces as Jordan journeys to places both real and imaginary. Primarily through Jordan’s narrative, Winterson characterizes the New World as seemingly boundless and unmappable. Unlike Henri in *The Passion*, who searches for the “familiar,” Jordan searches for the “foreign” as a site of freedom. Winterson frames Jordan’s journeys in *Sexing the Cherry* with the Hopi’s conception of time. The Hopi “have a language as sophisticated as ours, but no tenses for past, present and future” (8). As she breaks away from conventional ideas about time as linear, Winterson creates the New World as a place of multiple dimensions. Bente Gade comments that “the purpose of telling [Jordan’s] story is not to make log-book records, but to record his journeys with another dimension

of ‘truth’” (31). Jordan explores boundless spaces and geographies that cannot exist in the mapped reality of London and greater Europe. Stowers explains that although Jordan initially wants to be a hero, “he ultimately turns away from male paradigms and sets his own feminised modes of travel and representation in opposition to those figured by Tradescant” (76). By adopting his own feminized modes of travel, Jordan is able to escape the confines of London in order to safely explore the emotional and sexual desire shunned by Puritanism. Jordan begins his journey into the feminine realm of the New World at a young age. The Dog-Woman takes him to see the herbalist Thomas Johnson display in public, for the first time in England, a banana (11). She remembers how she “put [her] head next to his head and looked where he looked and [she] saw deep blue waters against a pale shore and trees whose branches sang with green . . . This was the first time Jordan set sail” (13). Through his imagination and through his literal voyages, Jordan “sails” to places that embody challenges to the constrictive masculine ideology he encounters in London.

Winterson approaches Jordan’s exploration of the New World with the perspective that “round and flat, only a very little has been discovered” (81). Like the watery interior of Venice, the watery New World also resists male exploration and mapping. In London, even the fruit<sup>2</sup> of the New World poses a representational challenge. Certainly, the introduction of the pineapple to England creates multiple narratives as it resists the bounds of a traditional historical narrative. The Dog-Woman simply states: “It was 1661, and from Jordan’s voyage to Barbados the first pineapple had come to

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<sup>2</sup> Fruit, of course, has long stood metaphorically for female reproduction and sexual organs in literature.

England” (104). While the Dog-Woman’s account is linear and factual, Jordan’s version is more fanciful. He recalls that just as the pineapple was to be cut in half, “Mr. Rose, the royal gardener, flung himself across the table and begged to be sawn into bits instead. Those at the feast contorted themselves with laughter” (104). This humorous episode is contradicted by an artistic rendering of the event that inspires current day Nicolas Jordan to join the navy: “‘Mr. Rose, the Royal Gardener, presents the pineapple to Charles the Second.’ The artist is unknown, probably Dutch. Mr. Rose in his wig is down on one knee and the King in his wig is accepting the pineapple. Colours of fruit and flowers make up the painting” (113). Through these parallel representations, Winterson demonstrates the power of the feminine, represented by the pineapple, to embody multiple truths. Although each depiction reflects the single event – the date of the pineapple’s arrival, the folly of the gardener, and the presence of the King – none of the narratives represent the whole story. Whereas traditional history strives to maintain a singular narrative, a feminine discourse allows for multiplicities. Like its vast seas, the fruit of New World resists the masculine’s attempt to map and take ownership of it.

Winterson uses *Sexing the Cherry*’s New World and *The Passion*’s Venice as feminine places that promise to liberate alternative narratives and identities. In discussing the role of the feminine space in Winterson’s novels, I must also examine her motives for creating such gendered geography. Winterson’s watery multi-layered realms represent as a positive the “boundary loss” feared by masculine powers (McClintock 26). Part of that “boundary loss” occurs when the construction of masculinity become obvious, instead of “natural,” in the feminine spaces. The reiterated norms of masculinity are made visible

once their limits and controls (over measurable space and time) can no longer function as stable identity markers. What I am arguing is that Winterson uses the liberated space of the feminine to investigate the performativity of heterosexuality and masculinity. As Butler theorizes, the “regime” of heterosexuality shapes the “materiality” of sex, which is then sustained through the repetition of those norms that produce heterosexuality (15). By placing Henri and Jordan, figures of masculine heterosexuality, within the feminine realm, the repetition of sex norms is ruptured, as certain elements of masculine identity (warrior and heroic explorer) become exposed as these characters fail to perform them in the usual ways.

In response to this exposé of gender norms, Onega directly questions Winterson’s motives for her “attack” on masculinity, wondering if she is defending women from patriarchy or creating an equally oppressive matriarchy (311). Onega observes that after his explorations into the feminine New World, “Jordan would be a new kind of artificially grafted ‘feminized male’, victimized into accepting the role of ‘Other’ within a new but equally sexist, self-righteous and intolerant order ruled by the Phallic mother” (309). While Onega finds Winterson’s feminization of men to be counter-productive, Stowers reads Winterson’s feminization of her male characters as a positive innovation.

Discussing *The Passion*, Stowers posits:

Although the feminine is other, represented as it by the watery realm of Venice, Henri dives deep into that streaming female fluidity, journeying to a world of mixed genders and masquerade highly reminiscent of the “feminotopias” explored by Mary Louise Pratt’s female travellers which “present idealized worlds of female . . . empowerment, and pleasure.” (73)

Stowers' argument articulates Winterson's uncovering of gender as "masquerade" (what Butler calls performativity). I find it particularly interesting that Winterson exposes the construction of masculinity by placing male characters within feminine geography. When set against the fluidity and openness of the feminine realm, the dominant construction of masculinity becomes starkly visible, and is made available for reconstruction. To illustrate this point, I offer the example of the cook in *The Passion*. While the cook's violence towards Henri at Boulogne resonates with the violence of the battlefield, his violence towards Villanelle in Venice is grotesque, requiring his removal (death) from that feminine space. By disrupting its reiteration in the feminine realm, Winterson exposes the construction of masculinity.

Whereas *Oranges* makes only passing reference to male characters, both *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry* have lead male protagonists, which provides Winterson more room to experiment with gender norms. In *The Passion*, Winterson begins her exposure of masculinity's construction through the figure of Henri. She uses Henri to parody the masculine rationale for warfare. Henri's narrative opposes Villanelle's throughout the novel. An apt example of their differing approaches can be located in Henri's rationalization of war: "Why would a people who love the grape and the sun die in zero winter for one man? Why did I? Because I loved him. He was my passion and when we go to war we are not a lukewarm people any more. What did Villanelle think? Men are violent. That's all there is to it" (109). Henri argues that war allows the French men to express their passion – by following Napoleon into war they are no longer "lukewarm."

In the end, Villanelle's argument that men are violent, regardless of their nationality and leader, is more persuasive. Tying together Henri's and Villanelle's narratives, the violent cook is just one example that proves true Villanelle's assessment of men. The cook is unable to interact peacefully with those around him, and he makes his profit from war (63). *The Passion* ends with Henri, linear history's representative, going insane because of his inability to accept alternative realities and control his desires for love and murder, while Villanelle becomes an independently wealthy mother of a baby girl. While Villanelle is tempted again by the Queen of Spades, she is able to control her desire because, as she says: "If I give into this passion, my real life, the most solid, the best known, will disappear and I will feed on shadows again like those sad spirits whom Orpheus fled" (146). Villanelle's female power succeeds where Henri's male power cannot – in the areas of desire and adaptability. Henri chooses to stay in San Servelo (152) not because it is pleasant but because there he has some semblance of stability, even though he is haunted by his own "sad spirits" – Napoleon, his mother, the cook, and Patrick (147). In *The Passion*, masculine desires are often expressed as war, and when given the freedom of expression in a feminine place, like Venice, not all people are capable of embracing the feminine realm's fluidity.

Winterson continues to expose codes of masculinity in *Sexing the Cherry*, specifically focusing on the masculine role of the heroic explorer. Jordan initially sets out to become a traditional hero, as he discusses in his explanation of fruit tree grafting:

But the cherry grew, and we have sexed it and it is female.  
 What I would like to do is to have some of Tradescant grafted on to me so that I could be a hero like him. He will flourish in any climate, pack his ships with precious things and be welcomed with full honours when the King is restored.

England is a land of heroes, every boy knows that. (79)

Jordan wishes to be grafted with Tradescant, actively drawing attention to the material and semiotic construction of the heroic explorer. As Butler argues, gender is performative,<sup>3</sup> and Jordan's explicit desire to have Tradescant grafted on to him exposes that male heroism is as constructed as a grafted cherry tree. The unnamed environmentalist woman also explains this masculine desire for heroism: "I don't hate men, I just wish they would try harder. They all want to be heroes and all we want is for them to stay at home and help with the housework and the kids. That's not the kind of heroism they enjoy" (127). Through Jordan's and the unnamed woman's comments on heroism, Winterson seems to argue that men have difficulty embracing feminine notions of heroism because of their fear of "boundary loss."

As well as making the role of the heroic explorer visible, Winterson brings into question the idea of "fixed" gender and one's ability to move between gender roles. The construction of Jordan's masculinity becomes visible as he enters and experiences desire in the feminine world through his search for Fortunata. Jordan's narrative questions the rigidity of masculine codes, as he grafts pieces of the feminine world onto himself, but his transformation is never flawless: "In my petticoats I was a traveller in a foreign country. I did not speak the language. I was regarded with suspicion" (31). While Jordan wears the

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<sup>3</sup> Jordan's grafting metaphor is analogous to drag queens' desire to have femininity grafted onto themselves in Jennie Livingston's film *Paris is Burning*. Butler argues that: "drag is subversive to the extent that it reflects on the imitative structure by which hegemonic gender is itself produced and disputes heterosexuality's claim on naturalness and originality" (125). Butler argues that the drag queen demonstrates the way a person performs gender and so exposes the constructedness of so-called "normal and natural" gender roles.

“petticoats” (signifiers) of femininity, the reader still “reads” him as male since he cannot achieve an “approximation of realness” where “the body performing and the ideal performed appear indistinguishable” (Butler 129). Jordan is unable to successfully perform femininity because he makes it visible. To Jordan, femininity is still a “foreign country,” and so, unable to master the “language,” he ultimately fails to merge with the feminine realm. Thus, through his failure to “perform” gender, and specific gender roles such as “heroic explorer,” Jordan exposes its construction in *Sexing the Cherry*.

What I want to pursue now is a dimension of this gendered mapping that has also been largely ignored by critics: namely, that as Winterson consciously and playfully exposes gender norms, she is only able to do so by creating the traditional imperialist opposition between the centre and periphery, and the self and the other. Whereas in *Oranges Louie* and the Church community offer Jeanette a ready-made list of othernesses, in both *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry* Winterson reaches past religious and moral difference and maintains the traditional imperial (national) “others” found in English literature: the Easterner, the Jew, and New World peoples. Winterson exposes masculinity in the alternative feminine realms, but as she does so, she still embodies the “white gaze,”<sup>4</sup> which maintains the imperialist racial hierarchy. Although Winterson intends the feminine realm to liberate alternative identities, like the lesbian’s, the imperial others of English literature do not find freedom there. While Winterson uses tropes of

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<sup>4</sup> I am taking this term from Butler’s discussion of bell hooks’ critique of *Paris is Burning*. Butler states that: “bell hooks is right to argue that within this culture the ethnographic conceit of a neutral gaze will always be a white gaze, an unmarked white gaze . . . which presumes upon and enacts its own perspective as if it were no perspective at all” (136).



alternative travel and space in order “to reclaim femininity and woman, to write both onto the patriarchal map” (Stowers 72), she ends up marginalizing those people and places not involved with her specific agenda. McClintock describes the imperial notion that “colonized people – like women and the working class in the metropolis – do not inhabit history proper but exist in a permanently anterior time within the geographic space of the modern empire as anachronistic humans, atavistic, irrational, bereft of human agency – the living embodiment of the archaic ‘primitive’”(30). While Winterson goes back and foregrounds women in history, she leaves the colonized people within the imperial hierarchy and, as I will show, focuses on their “primitive” modes of survival as signs of the abject.

Gayatri Spivak provides specific criticism of texts, like Winterson’s, that forward feminist politics but overlook their imperialist hierarchies: “As the female-individualist, not quite/not-male, articulates herself in shifting relationship to what is at stake, the ‘native female’ as such (within discourse, *as* a signifier) is excluded from any share in this emerging norm” (244-245). Spivak argues that Anglo-American feminism privileges the (white) female as individual subject (instead of “her” being Other in the text); however, in many of Western feminism’s most celebrated texts, the female individual still maintains the imperial othering of the native. When Winterson rehearses the codes of gender, she makes them visible, but when she rehearses codes of race and exploration in Venice and the New World, she does not make them visible, and so maintains the imperialist hierarchy. More specifically, what I want to argue is that in order to establish the legitimacy of new feminine identities, Winterson maintains the illegitimacy and

abjection of these “foreign” others. I will be referring to both non-Europeans and Jews as the imperial others in Winterson’s texts. In her discussion of the eighteenth-century’s scientific development of the evolutionary family Tree of Man (37), McClintock notes that although they at first appear to be disparate groups of “foreigners,” the branches for “Semites” and all other non-European races are beneath the “Aryan” branch (38). Situated as such below the Aryans, all other peoples were deemed inferior. McClintock further argues that “as domestic space became racialized, colonial space became domesticated” (36). Because of this “co-mingling” of domesticity and colonialism, all non-Aryan races, abroad and at “home,” were seen as “racial deviants” and “atavistic throwbacks” (McClintock 43). In *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry*, Jews, Easterners and New World natives are the illegitimate others Winterson maintains in order to legitimize her feminine subjects.

Despite their emphasis on fluidity and boundary transgressions, both novels are built on a division between legitimate and illegitimate identities. From the outset of *The Passion*, Winterson constructs the French as representatives of masculine Europe who must maintain a rigid us/them worldview in order to consolidate their reiterated identity. Leaving to join Napoleon’s army, Henri tells a young village girl that the “enemy” is “Someone who’s not on your side”(8). Henri’s simple definition of enemy resonates throughout the text, as he struggles to find himself in a Venice which embodies the “other side” of identity that he cannot understand. Winterson continues to reinforce the division between legitimate and illegitimate identities in *Sexing the Cherry*. For example, when the Dog-Woman sees and learns how to eat a banana, she decides: “There was no good

woman [who] could put that to her mouth, and for a man it was the practice of cannibals. 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” (13). Here the text echoes back to *Oranges’* Louie and her own misinformation about and disdain for the Heathen. While the repressed Dog-Woman and the crowd react with revulsion, Jordan, repeating Jeanette’s fascination with the Heathen, becomes enamored of the banana’s exotic origins, and “sets sail” (13) for the first time to the New World. Even though Winterson’s narratives at first appear to be inclusive of all identities, by using the labels of “enemy” or “Heathen,” no matter how self-consciously, she establishes a clear division between who can be considered legitimate and illegitimate subjects.

A brief, but telling, example of Winterson using the codes of imperialism to construct otherness occurs during Henri’s visit to a brothel in *The Passion*. As a first time traveler, Henri looks at Europe through naïve eyes. His naïveté reflects his general lack of knowledge in all areas of life – in particular the ways of women and foreigners. His impression of the first whore house he visits combines a strange mix of the familiar and the exotic: “The brothel was run by a giantess from Sweden. Her hair was yellow like dandelions, and like a living rug it covered her knees” (13). The dandelions suggest Henri’s nostalgic recollection of home, but whereas the dandelions in France serenely dot the countryside, the Swedish giantess’s dandelion hair is wild and enveloping. As well, Henri cannot stop staring at “a flat faced wooden doll” from Martinique (13) that the giantess wears around her neck. Everything about the giantess is exoticized and excessive– her size, her hair, and her accessories – and this is both entrancing and

frightening for Henri. Henri leaves the brothel as he is unable to accept the giantess with her exotic qualities that exceed the bounds of the familiar. While Winterson demonstrates the masculine's inability to accept the excess of the other, she uses codes of imperialism (exotic as threat) to do so.

Winterson's reference to foreigners in *The Passion* becomes even more complex when the narrative involves Venice; right at the centre of the Venetian landscape lie its own marginalized others. Asensio Arostegui notes that Venice "hides within itself all those groups marginalized by society that Linda Hutcheon (1988) calls the 'ex-centrics'" (272). McClintock explains that these marginalized people – often Jews, prostitutes, criminals and the insane – "were collectively figured as racial deviants, atavistic throwbacks to a primitive moment in human prehistory, surviving ominously in the heart of the modern, imperial metropolis" (43). These "ex-centrics" and "racial deviants" at the heart of Venice have no voice of their own, as even Villanelle is dismissive of their presence. Villanelle describes Venice as a place of throw-away people: "We became an enchanted island for the mad, the rich, the bored, the perverted" (52). The ancient toothless woman, who asks the time and tells Villanelle her future (53-54), does speak, but none of the other foreigners living in Venice's centre speak for themselves. The only knowledge the reader has about them comes from Villanelle. As the readers' sole guide to this space, Villanelle becomes the privileged "centre" and she sees the foreigners as other to her. Her most striking description of the city's others comes during a journey through lost canals:

In this inner city are thieves and Jews and children with slant eyes who come from the eastern wastelands without father or mother. They roam in packs like the cats

and the rats and they go after the same food. No one knows why they are here or on what sinister vessel they arrived. They seem to die at twelve or thirteen and yet they are always replaced. I've watched them take a knife to each other for a filthy pile of chicken. (53)

Drawing on ambiguous images of the East, Winterson places these children from the “eastern wastelands” on the same level as cats and rats. Whereas Winterson construes Villanelle’s mobility as positive and empowering, the mobility of the “slant eyed” children is animalistic and they become the text’s abject beings. Villanelle’s liberated passion is progressive because it involves “matters of the heart” and is not the instinctual passion of the eastern children’s brutal knife-fights. Here, in order to negate traditional history’s gender norms to free alternative identities, it seems that Winterson maintains imperialist hierarchies regarding race.

This racial hierarchy repeats itself in *The Passion* during the introduction of the man who gambles for a human life. Villanelle explains: “It seemed that his companion, this stranger, had come from the wastes of Levant, where exotic lizards breed and all is unusual. In his country, no man bothered with paltry fortunes at the gaming table, they played for higher stakes. A life” (91). Again, Winterson refers to the East as a wasteland and as “unusual.” In doing so she echoes Butler’s concept of the abject, which “designates here precisely those ‘unlivable’ and ‘uninhabitable’ zones of social life” (3). While Winterson consciously creates Venice as an abject space for continental Europe wherein gender norms rupture, the Levant is the true “uninhabitable zone” that is, at the same time, already part of Venice, incorporated into the landscape and marginalized within it.

Along with Winterson's marginalization of the East, there is also a troubling dismissal and distrust of Jews throughout *The Passion*. As I have already discussed, McClintock notes that Jews, like Easterners, have a long history of being figured as a "degenerate class" and "racial throwbacks" in imperial literature (43). In *The Passion*, like the "slant eyed children," the Jews are given no voice of their own, and are cast as suspicious and dangerous people. On New Year's Eve, Villanelle records ominously: "I saw no Jews. Their business is their own tonight" (74). According to her narrative, Jews live off the misery of others in the city's interior and practice customs that even the open-minded Venetians find mysterious and foreign. Villanelle says that the exiles in the interior live off "the odd bit of gold plate stuffed in a bag as they fled. So long as the Jews will buy the plate and the plate holds out, they survive. When you see the floating corpses belly upwards, you know the gold is ended" (53). Jews live off of those who are, in a sense, already dead as exiles, and financial gain is their only apparent motive. Clearly, in *The Passion*, Winterson maintains traditional British stereotypes about the Easterner and the Jew as the "foreign" other.

In *Sexing the Cherry*, Winterson repeats her elision of racial difference to critique gender and revalue the feminine. The foreigners in this novel also inhabit the realm of the feminine. Early on in the narrative, Winterson refers to a certain set of myths about people in Africa and the New World that were revived in the seventeenth-century. The Dog-Woman desires Jordan to stay in London with her, "but he would not stay. 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). Although this is a reference to

early writings about Africa by classical writers like Pliny,<sup>5</sup> which were picked up again in the modern era of exploration and colonization, Winterson does not cite the source for readers unfamiliar with such texts. While Winterson is faithful in some ways to the era's conceptions of the New World, there is little mention of the real people that Jordan and Tradescant must have encountered in their explorations and who contradict those outdated views. The only New World peoples Winterson mentions are the Hopi, and she is only interested in their concept of time. There is a neglect throughout *Sexing the Cherry* of the greater historical context involved in New World exploration. Winterson avoids this territory by having Jordan relate only his imaginary journeys. Perhaps the closest representative of the New World people is Fortunata – Jordan actively searches for her and longs to “lose himself” in her. At the end of the narrative, the Dog-Woman sees a woman besides Jordan on the ship: “I thought I saw someone standing beside him, a woman, slight and strong. I tried to call out but I had no voice. Then she vanished and there was nothing next to Jordan but empty space” (144). I read this as an apt description of the role New World people play in the story. They make up the exotic other world for England and its male explorers, only to be figured as a fleeting presence with no voice once English interests are fulfilled. It is troubling to observe that, while she rewrites history in the era of exploration, Winterson does not address the issues of New World exploitation.

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<sup>5</sup> Jesus Benito and Ana Manzanar, in “The (De-)Construction of the “Other” in *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*,” comment that the tradition of making the “other” monstrous “went back to the classical historians such as Herodotus and Pliny, who had already peopled Africa with monstrous wonders such as being without heads and with mouth and eyes in their breasts” (47)

Thus, while Winterson rewrites history in order to expose gender constructs and create a legitimate feminine subject in *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry*, she is only able to do so by maintaining the imperial other as illegitimate. In both of these novels, Winterson exceeds the boundaries of traditional history by arguing that history is larger and more complex than singularity and fact. While *Oranges* briefly touches on the role desire plays in history's formation, both *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry* investigate in greater depth the consequences (war, violence, insanity) of maintaining rigid boundaries against desire, as well as the liberatory potentialities of releasing desire (traveling through space and time). Winterson figures the masculine spaces of the texts (France and London) as anxious and narrowly-defined, and then explores desire in the texts' feminine spaces (Venice and the New World). She creates these feminine geographies in order to liberate feminine identities from repressive masculine versions of history, yet in order to accomplish this, she maintains an imperial hierarchy that relies on the "foreign" other (the Jew, the Easterner, the New World native). In *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry*, Winterson expands history to include feminine narratives, but, as with the masculine histories she is criticizing, her feminine histories are still not "the whole story."



## CHAPTER FOUR

### History Goes On-Line: *The PowerBook*

What will happen when there are no more Public Libraries and the world is on CD-Rom? Where will we go, we exiles from actuality? (*Art Objects* 155)

Winterson continues to explore the disruption of history and gender norms in *The PowerBook* (2000), her second-latest novel for adult readers.<sup>1</sup> Unlike *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry*, which are set in clearly defined eras, *The PowerBook* further complicates the temporality and spatiality of its historical events and characters by setting the narrative in cyberspace. The novel is an eclectic mix of history, fairy tale, romance “cover-versions,” and a present day love-affair, all of which take place in an on-line world. Winterson describes *The PowerBook* as “21<sup>st</sup> Century fiction that uses past, present, and future as shifting dimensions of a multiple reality.”<sup>2</sup> In *The PowerBook* she moves her narrative from the national level, as explored in *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry*, to the supposed “global” space of the internet. In this final chapter, I argue that Winterson intends to use cyberspace as a discursive medium that “liberates” her characters from conventional notions of space and time as linear and controlled. Although Winterson does this in order to disrupt gender norms, she still maintains imperial hierarchies in the geographies she (re)creates in cyberspace.

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<sup>1</sup> *The King of Capri* (2003) is a children’s story, and Winterson’s latest novel, *Lighthousekeeping*, will have its North American run in 2005.

<sup>2</sup> “The.Powerbook.” Jeanette Winterson. 8 July 2004 <<http://www.jeanettewinterson.com/index.asp>>.

Since criticism on *The PowerBook* has yet to be published, I will extrapolate from the existing discussion of Winterson's *oeuvre* in order to examine significantly different points of emphasis. As well, I will draw on recent critical work done on internet tourism and passing to provide support for my argument that Ali is the privileged "white centre" of the text. My analysis will articulate the ways that Winterson's use of cyberspace exemplifies the notions of history, gender, and geography posited by Friedman, Foucault and Butler. I will examine the various narrative techniques she uses to incorporate Foucauldian tenets, such as the rejection of absolute truths, in *The PowerBook* in order to achieve her own notion of a "liberatory space." Winterson continues to rewrite history, for example, through her alternative versions of canonical texts (like Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*). I will then explore the ways she attempts to "dissolve" the materiality of the body as she creates new narratives through the medium of the internet. Once I establish the ways in which Winterson rewrites history and disrupts gender norms, I will examine the tension that exists in the text as she reiterates imperial hierarchies in this supposedly global narrative, using McClintock's theoretical discussion of gendered geography and mapping as my primary frame of reference.

*The PowerBook* provides a fitting ending to my discussion of Winterson's rewriting of history in order to disrupt gender binaries and create spaces for alternative identities, as she continues to complicate and transform issues regarding time, space, and gender. She explains that *The PowerBook* "is the end of a cycle" of works that explore "the intersection of the real and imagined," which starts with *Oranges* and moves through



*The Passion and Sexing the Cherry*.<sup>3</sup> What I wish to argue is that Winterson repeats the imperial practices – such as mapping and creating the dichotomy of the self and other – of those other novels in *The PowerBook*, as the novel intersects the same axes of gender, history, and geography. Because of its emphasis on plurality, cyberspace intensifies the way these multiple axes intersect, making their construction visible to the reader. *The PowerBook* simulates that plurality with its multiple narratives that travel across time and space. While Winterson’s work suggests that a plurality of identities mediated by cyberspace is encompassing of all narratives, the space she recreates in *The PowerBook* is still constructed according to more persistent racial hierarchies.

My approach to reading *The PowerBook* follows Susan Friedman’s argument that “any given identity or practice can be read as the place where different axes intersect, axes of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, class, sexuality, age, and the proverbial so forth. No one axis exists in pure form, but each is mediated through the others in the form of historically specific embodiments” (109). In this chapter, I examine the interplay between the axes of gender, imperialism, geography, race, and individual identity. Friedman, reading the work of Virginia Woolf geopolitically, further argues that “the domestic – the local – is always already global and transnational. And vice versa” (126).<sup>4</sup> The same can

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<sup>3</sup> “The.Powerbook.” Jeanette Winterson. 8 July 2004 <<http://www.jeanettewinterson.com/index.asp>>.

<sup>4</sup> As an example of the way the domestic world is linked to the global in Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, Friedman refers to the parody of Mr. Ramsay’s recitation of Tennyson’s “Charge of the Light Brigade: “Patriarchal folly at home is both a cause and a reflection of militarist and nationalist folly abroad. And vice versa. The geopolitical battles among nations – exacerbated by the stupidity and incompetence of their leaders – are both a cause and a reflection of gender politics at home” (124-125).

be said of Winterson: although she places her work in a “global” sphere, cyberspace, her text reflects her domestic concerns of gender and sexuality. Winterson experiments with altering the axes of gender and time, but because she relies on specific geographies in order to do this, her work necessarily invites readings along the axes of race and imperialism.

Does the reiteration of these axes in a text intended to mimic cyberspace change the way in which they are to be read? Are the boundaries of body and geography disintegrated or reintegrated in cyberspace? Taking up such issues of on-line performativity, Lisa Nakaruma argues that “cyberspace”

participates in a topographical trope which, as Stone (1994) points out, defines the activity of on-line interaction as a taking place within a locus, a space, a ‘world’ unto itself. This second ‘world’, like carnival, possesses constantly fluctuating boundaries, frontiers and dividing lines which separate it from both the realm of the ‘real’ (that which takes place off-line) and its corollary, the world of the physical body which gets projected, manipulated and performed via on-line interaction. (716)

After noting this differentiation between the fluctuating world of cyberspace and the “real” world of the physical body, Nakaruma goes on to posit, however, that the “realities” of the world of the physical body are reiterated in the supposedly separate realm of cyberspace. Even though many internet users and critics claim that cyberspace is an international space that is free from the constraints of race, Nakaruma observes that certain racial stereotypes are assumed or “performed” by on-line users:

The borders and frontiers of cyberspace which had previously seemed so amorphous take on a keen sharpness when the enunciation of racial otherness is put into play as performance. While everyone is ‘passing’, some forms of racial passing are condoned and practised since they do not threaten the integrity of a national sense of self which is defined as white. (712)

In other words, Nakamura argues that cyberspace is a “white” space, wherein users must choose to either pass as white or perform accepted, but problematic, racial roles.<sup>5</sup> It is from this theorization of cyberspace that I will be critiquing Winterson’s imagination of it as a “liberatory” space. While she intends cyberspace to include all identities, I argue that Winterson’s novel is based on the assumption that the “national sense of self” is white.

A reading of racial performance in *The PowerBook* is therefore necessary to my analysis, as Winterson’s central character, Ali, participates in both gender-bending and racial “passing.” What underlies Ali’s characterization is that even though her “meatspace”<sup>6</sup> coordinates only define her broadly as a Londoner, there is an assumption of Ali’s whiteness. In her “role” as a young Turk, Ali becomes what Nakamura calls an “internet tourist.” Discussing the popularity of on-line games, like LambdaMOO, Nakamura argues that such games allow white players to “travel” in cyberspace and “perform” other races. These cyberspace “vacations” offer “the satisfaction of a desire to fix the boundaries of cultural identity and exploit them for recreational purposes” (715). Through her “travels” in cyberspace, Ali’s “vacations” allow her to fix and exploit cultural boundaries for her own project of self-definition. Ali is essentially an on-line romance travel agent, arranging “freedom, just for one night” (3). Yet the “freedom” she

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<sup>5</sup> Nakamura provides the example of a LambdaMOO (an on-line fantasy game) player coming under attack from other players after he/she attempted to pass a “Hate-Crime” petition that would punish players who racially harassed other players. Nakamura explains that many players were upset that the issue of race was even raised. Even more problematic, was that the anti-petitioners felt those players who do raise the issue of race deserve to become “sacrificial lambs” because they have the option to hide their race, and therefore race should be a non-issue (717).

<sup>6</sup> In the context of cyberspace, Winterson uses the term “meatspace” to refer to the immediate physical world. Ali’s “meatspace” is Spitalfields in London (188).

offers through her fictional travels – to Turkey, France, and Italy – is bound by her own agenda to experience desire in those places. Talking to her lover, Ali says that Paris is “another city. Another disguise” (41). Her cyberspace travels to each country highlight their stereotypical qualities, providing Ali with “foreign” elements of disguise for her amusement. So while Winterson intends cyberspace to be inclusive of all narratives, in actuality she creates a hierarchal space as Ali becomes a “performer” of the stereotyped other.

Before I can analyze the way Winterson maintains imperial hierarchies through cyberspace in *The PowerBook*, I need to first articulate the ways in which she “opens up” history to alternative narratives. Using the language of cyberspace, Winterson attempts to escape the confines of the “domestic” constraints on identity for potential liberation in the “global” space of the internet. As I have extensively argued in the preceding chapters, Winterson’s work embodies Foucauldian conceptions of history and genealogy that disturb their simple acceptance of “truth.” My analysis of *The PowerBook* begins by detailing the ways that Winterson uses the techniques of historiographic metafiction to: first, communicate the need to question absolute “truths” in history; second, reanimate the emotional immediacy of language; and third, explore history’s inscription on the “body.” By setting her novel in cyberspace, Winterson repeats and extends the Foucauldian tenet that all events are constructed and are therefore open to reevaluation.

When Winterson exposes the fabrication of the novel as an imaginative work, she also exposes the edifice of the history woven into *The PowerBook*. By drawing attention to such constructions, Winterson moves the reader’s focus from the “factuality” of the

historical event to the “truth” of the narrative. As a way of explaining Winterson’s Foucauldian approach to history, Bente Gade states that there is an “imperative to focus analysis upon discourse rather than the essential truths they claim to represent” (28). This sentiment is repeated by Ali, when she says that “facts never tell the truth. Even the simplest facts are misleading” (43). All of *The PowerBook*’s “truths” are in contention with what is conventionally believed to be historical “fact” – what is real and what is false? By the end of the novel, Ali laments that “the more I write, the more I discover that the partition between real and invented is as thin as a wall in a cheap hotel room” (108). Because no “truths” are singular, Ali argues that all historical narratives must be broken and reassessed so that new possibilities – of gender, social interaction, and identity – may be realized: “Stop. Break the narrative. Refuse all stories that have been told so far (because that is what the momentum really is), and try to tell the story differently – in a different style, with different weights – and allow some air to those elements choked with centuries of use, and give substance to the floating world” (63). By refusing to write a continuous linear narrative in *The PowerBook*, Winterson requires the reader to consider the invented status of every event.

Once she dismantles the notion that history is fact, Winterson then imagines multiple realities across both space and time. Winterson says *The PowerBook*’s “shape, its structure, its language, is a different way of working” to ask the “big questions and to defamiliarise what’s important.”<sup>7</sup> Readers are denied the simple answers to the who, where, when, what and why of the text. It is difficult to ascertain the novel’s central

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<sup>7</sup> “The.Powerbook.” Jeanette Winterson. 8 July 2004 <<http://www.jeanettewinterson.com/index.asp>>.



narrative – where is Ali in time and space? Ali says that she lives in London, a city whose buildings embody several possible eras of history made into reality. She ponders: “I wonder, maybe, if time stacks vertically, and there is no past, present, future, only simultaneous layers of reality. We experience our own reality at ground level. At a different level, time would be elsewhere” (220). *The PowerBook* is a journey through those different levels of reality. Ali rejects living on the ground level just as Foucault rejects the “origin.” Winterson poses the idea that in cyberspace the self is able to traverse these simultaneous layers of reality.

The structure of *The PowerBook* reflects this mobility through space and time, by Winterson using the computer world as its narrative model. The book’s type is Minion, “a typeface produced by the Adobe Corporation specifically for the Macintosh personal computer,”<sup>8</sup> and the chapter titles are a mix of creative headings (such as “terrible thing to do to a flower”) and common computer prompts (such as “VIEW AS ICON”).

Winterson’s use of Minion font and computer prompts in the chapter headings reinforces the narrative’s investment in the unique symbolization of reality within cyberspace. Just as web pages have links to other sites, so do the chapters in *The PowerBook*. In some instances the novel acts as a “search engine”<sup>9</sup> that finds both “SEARCH,” a rewriting of Sir Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte D’Arthur* (77-87), and “SPECIAL,” a story about George Mallory’s 1924 Everest expedition and the final discovery of his body in 1999 (173-180).

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<sup>8</sup> “Note on the Typeface,” *The PowerBook* (2000).

<sup>9</sup> A search engine is a navigational tool that internet-users employ to find specific websites and pages based on key words and phrases.

Winterson plays with the name “Mal(l)ory” and uses both of the stories as narratives of desire, one romantic and one heroic, that disrupt the linearity of the text. The narrator of Turkish Ali’s story explains that “St. Augustine had said that the universe was not created *in* time but *with* time. This is true of stories. They have no date. . . . Stories are simultaneous with time” (254). By using the internet as her model, Winterson creates a narrative that rejects a notion of time believed to be one continuous succession of events. This play allows for multiple stories to exist simultaneously in the novel, which resembles the innumerable sites that exist simultaneously in cyberspace, and the multiplicity of links that readers can follow within and between electronic texts.

Winterson’s “cover-versions” of canonical stories also contribute a substantial part of the narrative devices in *The PowerBook*. At first these stories might seem out of place in a “21<sup>st</sup> Century novel” that claims to deliberately challenge the suppositions of how literature is conceived. Winterson believes, however, that the “great” writers of the past “are your private teachers and private ancestors. Their work informs your work, which is why, out of respect, you should never copy them, but try to honour their experiments with those of your own.”<sup>10</sup> Calling her homage to the writers of the past “cover-versions,” Winterson “honours” several writers throughout *The PowerBook*, most notably Malory and Dante. In her study of Winterson, Pykett explains that “some stories are more true than others, and storytelling is (it would seem) more trustworthy, and also more vital, than history” (55). As Pykett aptly notes, Winterson rewrites the foundational

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<sup>10</sup> “The.Powerbook.” Jeanette Winterson. 8 July 2004 <<http://www.jeanettewinterson.com/index.asp>>.

stories because they embody more important “truths” than historians record in their chronicles. For instance, the love of Lancelot and Guinevere expresses the force of the desire that moved people in the fifteenth-century, instead of just the “cold hard facts” – the names of rulers and dates of wars – that ignore the existence of emotion in history.

Winterson builds her base for exploring desire by drawing on these well-known writers of the past. As *The PowerBook*'s narrator says: “There is no greater grief than to find no happiness but happiness in what is past./ This is the story of Francesca da Rimini and her lover Paolo. You can find it in Boccaccio. You can find it in Dante. You can find it here” (145). In a self-referential moment, Ali tells her lover to read the great romances: *Romeo and Juliet*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Sand and Dust*, and *The Passion*. With reference to the last listing the lover responds: “Never heard of it” (29). Ali’s (and Winterson’s) exploration of desire gains narrative authority from these well-known texts. Yet, Ali also articulates that the process of story-telling never ends, as not one writer can express the “whole story.” Arguing about the future ending of their relationship, Ali and her lover banter: “‘I don’t know how to give you up,’ I said./ ‘You could rewrite the story.’/ ‘I’ve tried. Haven’t you noticed?’/ ‘Isn’t there a better ending than either/or?’/ ‘I can’t write it’”(155). Winterson shows that stories expressing desire will continue to be told from multiple perspectives in every era in every place. By weaving in multiple “cover-versions” into *The PowerBook*, she expresses that no individual “self” can achieve the “truth” as there are no origins.

Along with her “cover-versions” of writers like Malory and Dante, Winterson also revisits *Oranges* in *The PowerBook*. Winterson says that: “I have gone back into some

*Oranges* territory, but that was because there was something left to say. Now I'm done."<sup>11</sup>

Ali's story contains several echoes of Jeanette's story. One connection is that both girls are adopted in order to fulfill their parents' unrealized desires. Ali recounts the circumstances of her adoption: "And yet an orphan was what they wanted. A changeling child. A child without past or future. A child outside of time who could cheat time. A lucky bag. The smallest silver key on the heavy keyring. The key that opens the forbidden door" (159). Living off waste – the used-up, thrown-out pasts of other people – Ali's parents want her to be the key to an unblemished future. Even her full name Alix reflects their obsession with treasure: "My parents called me Alix because they wanted a name with an X in it, because X marks the spot. I was the one who would find the buried treasure" (161). Like Jeanette, Ali learns through her mother's Biblical language that the "treasure" is to be found beyond the outside world. Ali's mother tells her that she needs to journey into the Wilderness to get to the Promised Land (227). Reminiscent of Jeanette's missionary "destiny," Ali is the key to the treasure and the path to the Promised Land so desired by her mother, but she can never reach the Promised Land because she keeps recreating herself on-line. There is no final "land" because there is no final "self." Whereas Jeanette is left wondering about her future at the end of *Oranges*, Ali learns that there is always another chance to "find the way." She philosophizes that "I live in one world – material, seeming-solid – and the weight of that is quite enough. The other worlds I can reach need to keep their lightness and their speed of light. What I carry back from those worlds to my world is another chance" (65). Like the alternate "realities" that

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<sup>11</sup> "The.Powerbook." Jeanette Winterson. 8 July 2004 <<http://www.janettewinterson.com/index.asp>>.

she moves between, Ali's journey is not linear or predestined. Winterson, traveling within her own body of work, gives herself another chance to revisit the "knotted ball of string" she picked up in *Oranges* and provides her heroine with a vision of her future opportunities and possible selves.

Along with her undermining of absolute "truths" in a timeless, self-referential narrative, Winterson strives to reanimate the immediacy of language. In his discussion of language, Foucault argues that "the world of speech and desires has known invasions, struggles, plundering, disguises, ploys" and that the genealogist must retrieve these elements lost in history (139). Winterson consistently strives to reanimate the visceral meanings of language. Mette Bom observes that "in the experimental writings of Jeanette Winterson, there is a rebellious spirit, an urge to transform language and thereby the established structures and conventions of modern society" (78). Because the internet is itself a creation of language – it is the product of mathematical code transformed into written language – Winterson is able to challenge, what Bom calls, the established structures of society with an intense level of awareness of their construction. This awareness is evident in Ali's narrative. As cyberspace envelops her, she claims that she is "looking for meaning inside the data" (74). In reference to such uses of language in postmodern writing, Lee contends that "there is no single, direct correspondence between the written word and 'reality'. Language creates 'reality', and language is inescapably plural" (39). In *The PowerBook*, Winterson goes to great lengths to demonstrate the plurality of language through the multiple narratives that exist in cyberspace. Writing her own love story, Ali explains how "we train as our own Egyptologists, hoping the

fragments will tell a tale. We work at night as alchemists, struggling to decipher the letters mirrored and reversed” (90). Her comment identifies the writer’s struggle to manipulate and animate language in any text and it encourages readers to rework the fragments of the narrative for themselves.

In *The PowerBook*, Winterson creates a narrative that echoes Foucault’s position that the genealogist must seek out the plurality of experience found in “sentiments, love, conscience, instincts” (139). By doing so, Winterson is able to rewrite history with qualities – like desire, ambivalence, and fluidity – which are left out of traditional history. Without a reinvestment in language, Winterson suggests, not only will there be an absence of feminine identities in history, but it will be difficult to establish feminine identities in the future. Winterson takes up Foucault’s challenge through the character of Ali. Retelling her childhood, Ali explains that: “Reading and writing were both forbidden at the Muck House. My mother could do both, my father could do neither, therefore they had no value” (163). Both Ali and her mother, who have the power of language (to read and write), are kept silent by Ali’s father. Ali explains how her father negated the desires of her childhood. Among his sealed jars in the basement, Ali discovers one that is full of love. Her father threatens: “Never touch that jar. Never. If that ever gets loose we’re finished” (165). While he attempts to control Ali’s desires, she finds escape through her mother’s brief “word lessons” and through her own stories.

Similar to Louie’s modeling of history for Jeanette in *Oranges*, Ali’s mother provides a basis for Ali by remembering her own history: “Her desire told itself as memory. Her past was a place that none of us could visit without her. It was the only

kingdom she could control” (166). Ali becomes a bridge between the past her mother controls and the future Ali herself embodies. The bridge, in true Wintersonian fashion, is constructed through story-telling. Ali remembers: “I loved the fire. The coals were my books. Heated to story temperature, they burst into flame and I read in them the stories that no one would read to me” (170). Through her stories, Ali is able to free herself from her parents’ Muck Midden, a place of narrowly defined boundaries of experience controlled by her illiterate father. Through story-telling, Ali, like Jeanette, attempts to create her own personal history over the one imagined by her parents.

Through her story-telling, Ali not only strives to free herself from her childhood home, but she strives to free herself from society’s constraints on her identity. Through Ali’s multiple narratives, Winterson strives to dismantle the notion of a singular “self.”<sup>12</sup> At the end of the narrative, Ali asks: “Why did I begin as I did, with Ali and the tulip? I wanted to make a slot in time. To use time fully I use it vertically. One life is not enough. I use the past as a stalking horse to come nearer to my quarry” (247). What is her quarry? The answer reads: “you and I, caught in time, running as fast as we can” (247). The “you” and the “I” in the line have multiple referents. The “you” can mean the reader, Ali’s lover, or even Ali. Winterson’s point is that story-telling transforms both the reader and the writer as it frees them from the constraints of linear time and absolute truth, making multiple referents of “self” possible. She reiterates this idea in the narrator’s discussion of Rembrandt’s self-portraits; she/he explains that Rembrandt painted himself differently

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<sup>12</sup> Recognizing this imperative in Winterson’s *oeuvre*, Pykett argues that “like many postmodernist writers Winterson is preoccupied with the space-time continuum, and with simultaneity. . . . The preoccupation with simultaneity is also articulated as a concern with parallel lives” (54-55).

every time because “he was there, but, just as importantly, because he wasn’t there. He was shifting his own boundaries. He was inching into other selves” (253). Ali uses the medium of the internet in the same way that Rembrandt uses the medium of painting: “When I sit at my computer, I accept that the virtual worlds I find there parallel my own. I talk to people whose identity I cannot prove. I disappear into a web of coordinates that we say will change the world. What world? Which world?” (109). Through such discourse, Winterson brings the construction of a unified self and the singular world into question, and claims that there are unlimited possibilities for Ali’s transformation in cyberspace.

The last major Foucauldian element that Winterson explores in *The PowerBook* to free Ali from the constraints of traditional history is Foucault’s metaphor of the body. As we have seen, Foucault argues that “the body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated Self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration” (148). The genealogist’s task “is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history’s destruction of the body” (148). Throughout the novel, Ali deconstructs the unity of the body. In her role as the creator of multiple stories, Ali says: “The alphabet of my DNA shapes certain words, but the story is not told. I have to tell it myself. . . . I can change the story. I am the story” (4-5). Ali is not only a contributor to history; she is both a creator and bearer of history. The narratives exist because of her desire to create and explore their possibilities. Within these internet narratives, Winterson attempts to expose the constructedness of the historically imagined body. Ali argues that “we are our own oral history. A living memoir of time./ Time is downloaded into our bodies. We contain it.



Not only time past and time future, but time without end. We think of ourselves as closed and finite, when we are multiple and infinite” (120-121). Through Ali’s description of the self, Winterson dissolves the body’s illusion of unity. Even within the narrative of Turkish Ali and the tulip, the subject dissolves into a discontinuous stream of language. The “tulip” segment ends with the narrator musing that as Ali “knots himself into a history that never happened and a future that cannot have happened, he is like a cross-legged Turk who knots a fine carpet and finds himself in the pattern” (254). By opening up the realm of possible experience, the subject also exposes the construction of events that inform an individual’s identity. The construction of the body, of self, then becomes visible. The last line of *The PowerBook* reads: “Your body is my Book of Hours./ Open it. Read it./ This is the true history of the world” (289). History, Winterson repeatedly avers, is written on the body, and the body, like language, is in a process of continual disintegration and reintegration.

Moving on from my discussion of the body’s dissolution in *The PowerBook*’s narratives, I will now read the “body” through Butler’s notions of performativity. Often in postmodern literature, like *The PowerBook*, “the more intense the confrontation between realism and the particular sensitive area (literary tradition or historiography) it is brought into conflict with, the more intense will be the questions raised by the text’s ontological status” (Todd 118). Winterson purposely sets the “fact” of history against the “realism” (or lack thereof) of cyberspace. By setting the narrative(s) in cyberspace, Winterson draws attention to the effect of language upon notions of gender. Thus, the text’s problematic ontology specifically brings the naturalness of gender into question.

Winterson discusses how “one of the exciting – and dangerous – things about email is that we have no way of discerning gender, and that upsets a lot of notions about innate masculine or feminine traits.”<sup>13</sup> Butler theorizes the constructed status of what are presumed to be innate masculine and feminine traits. As she sets out in her preface to *Bodies that Matter*:

Thinking the body as constructed demands a rethinking of the meaning of construction itself. And if certain constructions appear constitutive, that is, have this character of being that “without which” we could not think at all, we might suggest that bodies only appear, only endure, only live within the productive constraints of certain highly gendered regulatory schemas. (xi)

The emergence of the new internet languages demands a rethinking of the way the “body” is constructed on-line. This rethinking necessarily raises the question: are the same gendered regulatory schemas reiterated in cyberspace? By setting her narrative in the realm of cyberspace, Winterson attempts to demonstrate that bodies, along with the markers of gender they “wear,” only exist within constrictive regulatory schemas. Winterson’s text assumes that the internet loosens those gendered schemas, and therefore, dissolves the body’s illusion of a unified gender.

Winterson strives to avoid constructing gender as innate and natural throughout *The PowerBook*. For example, during an on-line conversation between Ali and her lover, the relevance of gender is questioned: “‘Male or female?’/ ‘Does it matter?’ /‘It’s a coordinate.’/ ‘This is a virtual world’” (30). Winterson consistently challenges the construction of gender in all of the novel’s narratives as a way of rethinking the body. The second chapter of the novel, “OPEN HARD DRIVE,” involves the literal “building”

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<sup>13</sup> “The.Powerbook.” Jeanette Winterson. 8 July 2004 <<http://www.jeanettewinterson.com/index.asp>>.

of a man. The woman Ali wears a tulip stem and bulbs between her legs to become the young boy Ali: “There are many legends of men being turned into beasts and women into trees, but none I think, till now, of a woman who becomes a man by means of a little horticultural grafting” (12). Echoing Jordan’s discussion of cherry tree grafting in *Sexing the Cherry*, Winterson shows that gender is constructed, and therefore, it can be transformed.

Imagining cyberspace as this kind of liberatory realm for queer identities is prominent among internet users and critics alike. However, Shoshana Magnet, drawing on cyberspace critics such as Nakamura, states that “it seems possible that rather than embracing difference, the Internet will instead solidify both the stereotypes and the borders of sexual orientation” (5). Winterson attempts to expand the borders of sexual orientation, yet both Ali and her lover clearly embody the norms of their female gender in the “meatspace” sections of the novel. While cyberspace may offer alternative sexualities a slight reprieve from certain regulatory schemas, Winterson is still unable to consistently reject gender norms throughout *The PowerBook*. Since she cannot completely dissolve the gendered body in the physical world, she chooses to experiment with the “performance” of gender in cyberspace.

The novel also indicates how society imposes its gendered regulatory schema in the way that the past is narrated. Butler argues that “linking the process of ‘assuming’ a sex with the question of identification, and with the discursive means by which the heterosexual imperative enables certain sexed identifications and forecloses and/or disavows other identifications” (3). In the chapter “spitalfields,” there is a brief but

poignant demonstration of Butler's assertion that only those identities enabled by the heterosexual imperative are able to exist in discourse. After the bank of the Thames reveals a coffin from the Roman occupation, there is an assumption that the body inside will be the male Roman Governor of London (196-199). Once the coffin is opened and the skeleton's pelvis exposed, the story immediately stops on the words "it's a woman" (199). It is as if there is no language to account for this discovery. Winterson shows how traditional history has not only excluded women, but how it is unable to even enter women into its discourse. The woman in the coffin shatters the "assumptions" of identity – a governor must be male, only the male body is worth preserving, the historical subject is always male – and therefore becomes that which is disavowed. By setting her novel in cyberspace, Winterson frees her characters from such restrictive materiality and underscores the liberatory potential the internet offers alternative identities that are otherwise disavowed in the historical discourse of "meatspace."

Winterson plays with the language of the internet to create spaces that she imagines to be free from the constraints of the material gendered body; if the self is not tied to chronological time or to its material body, then gender binaries seem less constituted and alternative identities can be experimented with and articulated. Even though cyberspace is supposedly unconnected to "meatspace" in *The PowerBook*, Winterson recreates real "meatspace" geographies on-line. As with her geographies in previous novels, *The PowerBook*'s narrative is organized in terms of mapped/controlled and unmapped/liberated geographic spaces. McClintock explains that "the formative categories of imperial modernity [race, class, gender] are articulated categories in the

sense that they come into being in historical relation to each other and emerge only in dynamic, shifting and intimate interdependence” (61). This interdependence is evident in *The PowerBook* as Winterson maintains her seemingly imperial preoccupation with territory and mapping. Cyberspace provides Ali the freedom to travel to any land in any era, because “this is a virtual world. This is a world inventing itself. Daily, new landmasses form and then submerge. New continents of thought break off from the mainland. Some benefit from a trade wind, some sink without trace. Others are like Atlantis – fabulous, talked about, but never found”(73). Even though Ali has the opportunity to search out the “fabulous” lands, she sticks to recreating well-known and historically established countries. Through the narrator’s descriptions of London, Turkey, and the Italian island of Capri, Winterson repeats the tropes of gendered geography. Again she creates feminine lands that are spaces with shifting boundaries that offer legitimacy for alternative narratives and masculine lands that are highly mapped and controlled spaces that force questing individuals to move away. Ali is the one figure who is enabled to negotiate all of these geographies. She moves beyond the constraints of her physical body through her internet fiction from the constrictive space of London to explore seventeenth-century Turkey and modern day Capri.

As she does in *Sexing the Cherry*, Winterson again establishes London as a highly mapped and controlled place. Instead of escaping London through imagination like Jordan does, Ali travels to other lands through cyberspace. The locus of Ali’s narrative is London, and greater England, if her childhood is taken into account. Describing the circumstances of her birth, Ali explains the way her birth parents “bred their own kind, as

sheep and pigs do, but humankind is not pigs and sheep. They bred me, unexpected, unwanted” (183). Like the French peasantry of *The Passion*, Ali’s birth parents are characterized by their lack of emotional expression. They do not celebrate life since they only live to “mind the machine” (183). In her description of London there is a greater sense of the region’s human history, but it is exclusively a masculine one. Ali says that Spitalfields is “right in the City. Roman London, Falstaff London, Dickens London” (189). Whereas Venice, in *The Passion*, is a feminine city of mazes where a Queen of Spades lives, Ali takes the reader through a part of London that “is an Emperor’s maze of streets that darken into alleys, and alleys that blank into walls” (193). Instead of having Venice’s continuous maze of alleys, London is full of dead-ends, as there are no new avenues of identification. London is a centre of stagnant history, and its main waterway, the Thames, “is a dirty river. Centuries have been pumped into it. This is the past pumped through time and taken out to sea. Mammoths used to drink from the shallow sandbanks. This is a Roman river, an Elizabethan river. This is the route to the Millennium Dome” (288). Although history flows out of London, it is not transformative or empowering. London’s history recycles itself throughout time – from the Roman past, through the Elizabethan era, and into the future millennium – but it remains “dirty” as it does not provide new possibilities for alternative narratives. By describing the Thames as “dirty,” the novel gives a sense of its history of accumulation, corruption, and impurity. London’s imperial past is not washed out with the river, rather it is reiterated.

Part of that imperial past is evident in Ali’s description of the “other” people living in London. Reminiscent of the foreigners living in the centre of Venice as

described by Villanelle in *The Passion*, Ali's London foreigners are marked by their pejorative and cursory differences. While "foreigners" are integrated into the city's commerce, they are still contained within "Old London." Ali explains that "this part of the city has always been a place for refugees. Exile or sanctuary, they come here and have done since the Huguenots with their bales of cloth, since the Bengalis with their sweatshops, and since the quiet people from Hong Kong with their money" (193).

Finding such cursory descriptions problematic, Spivak argues that the Anglo-American feminist subject requires the native Other. She posits that: "No perspective *critical* of imperialism can turn the Other into a self, because the project of imperialism has always already historically refracted what might have been the absolutely Other into a domesticated other that consolidates the imperial self" (253). Winterson creates a feminine subject who is indifferent to the "always already historical refraction" that imperial England has sustained in her consolidation of self.

Ali gains this consolidation of self in the narrative by noting the differences of the "other" people she observes in London. As tour guide, Ali tells the reader: "The yellow faces of the Chinamen were once downriver where the opium boats came in. Now the yen trades with the euro and alongside the oldest profession, which has always thrived here and still does – the short skirts by the hot-dog stand in front of the church" (193). For Ali, the privileged traveller and narrator of the text, to free herself from history's gender norms she must create an other. And so the "Chinamen" and prostitutes are both marginalized – Ali is *not* the economic-minded "Chinaman" and she is *not* the woman who "profits" (no matter how perversely) from selling her sex. Her experience of

significant difference within London, seen in the figures of the “Chinaman” and the prostitute, illustrates the way in which imperialism “others” to the extent that these “other” identities, although they are indeed pejorative and cursory, are immediately recognizable and familiar. Winterson imagines a privileged feminine subject who is above the matters of the “dirty” physical world – money – which characterize the “others” in the novel.

This seemingly straightforward designation of the other as one who is characterized by involvement with money is complicated when reading the role of Turkey in the novel. At first, Winterson’s characterization of seventeenth-century Turkey emphasizes its spirituality. Ali describes the country’s exotic, ethereal qualities: “In the spun cloth, the thrown earthen ware, the beaten pot and the silver box, is Allah – the spirit of God in the things of the world. Atom and dream” (14). This description of Turkey emphasizes the country’s unlimited potentiality, with the immensity of Allah emanating out of the everyday. It is this “other-worldliness” that frees Ali to experience life as a young man by strapping on two tulip bulbs and a stem. Although Ali “travels” to Turkey in her search of her “real” self, freed from the constraints of her corporeality, the country still exhibits the imperial other’s qualities of excess and mystery (a pattern that I have discussed extensively in the previous chapter). In the historical narrative, Ali sets sail with a ship whose captain was “regularly corgoing the tin, coarse cloth and the shot the Sultan needed for his armies, in return for the jewels and luxury stuffs the English loved” (15). And so, seventeenth-century Turkey becomes a site of surplus in the novel. The fact that Turkey’s exports are things of luxury, and not utility, points to the country’s



indulgence in unnecessary wealth. This same preoccupation with excess occurs in *The Passion*, as Venice's indulgences escape the control of the French. While the description of Turkey's "spirit" is seemingly positive, it is undermined by the focus on its exportation of excess. Thus Turkey becomes what Said conceptualizes to be a desired but subordinate place in the imperialist imagination.

As a way to further explain Turkey's subordinate role as a subordinate place in *The PowerBook*, I refer to Nakaruma's argument regarding "internet tourism" and performance of the other in cyberspace. In this scene of seventeenth-century Turkey, Ali is Nakaruma's "internet tourist" who is performing the Turk as other. Like the on-line fantasy game players Nakaruma discusses, Ali's decision to "play" the other brings the Turkish citizen "into the discourse, but only as a token or 'type'" (714). A scene that exemplifies Ali's role-playing occurs during the captain's story about the fall of Antioch to the barbarians. When Ali asks "'Who were the barbarians?' The Captain said, 'You. The Turks destroyed the aqueduct to Antioch'" (19). Seeing Ali offended by his comments, the captain explains to him that:

There is always a city. There is always a civilisation. There is always a barbarian with a pick axe. Sometimes you are the city, sometimes you are the civilisation, but to become that city, that civilisation, you once took the pickaxe and destroyed what you hated, and what you hated was what you did not understand. (19)

While championing fluidity and predisposition for change, all civilizations, the Captain argues, fear ways of life unknown to them.<sup>14</sup> Ali proudly states that now the Turks are

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<sup>14</sup> This passage echoes the way that Winterson characterizes the French in *The Passion*. Both the French in that novel and the Turks in this story forcibly re-image other nations in their likeness. Again, McClintock's conception of the male anxiety of boundary

invincible, to which the Captain replies: “In three hundred years the Turk may be back among his goats” (20). Of course, when read today, Ali’s defiant comment about the invincibility of the Turks appears naïve because most readers will not think of Turkey as a centre of “modern culture” when compared to present-day London. Modern-day Ali is in control of the performance of the Turks; both the captain’s sage wisdom and the boy Ali’s naïve response are representative of Ali’s assumptions about the other. Ali’s privileged position as “internet tourist” maintains the country’s subordinate position in *The PowerBook*’s narrative.

The geography that offers the most performative potential for Ali’s exploration of self in *The PowerBook* is the Italian island of Capri. While it is clear from the narrative that Turkey is a place of Ali’s imagining, the reality of Capri fades in and out the text. The reader is unsure whether or not Capri is part of Ali’s cyberspace travels or the actual geographic place. The narrator blurs the boundaries of the island’s physical reality, describing Capri as “an idea of itself – and imaginary island and a real one – real and imaginary reflecting together in the mirror of the water” (99). Like London, Capri has a lengthy history, but unlike London, the history of the island is not stagnant but fluid. After a tour guide explains how Tiberius would throw people off the cliffs, the narrator comments: “Of course, it may well be that spiteful Suetonius was a slandermonger. Perhaps Tiberius never did hurl his enemies into space-time. An imaginary island invents itself. It takes part in its own myth” (101). “Meatspace” and cyberspace collide in Capri as Winterson brings the reader’s perception of place into question: what representational

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loss is evident here – the barbarian must defeat that which he does not know in order to regain control over his “mapping” of the world.

qualities make one place different from another? How do we know if each place's history is "true"? The narrator's answer is that the "true" essence of a place exists in the tension between its material and ideal extremes: "The island itself is a tension between land and sea, height and depth. Poverty and riches have always lived on either side of the olive tree. . . . For Capri, the secret of success has been found in maintaining these tensions" (105). These tensions of geography and economics parallel the island's tension between its material and imagined histories. Capri is a liberated space because its boundaries, real and imagined, are in constant fluctuation, pulling "reality" between the poles of the island's existence. Because she understands the simultaneous fluctuation and tension that exist in cyberspace identities, Ali is able to negotiate the space of Capri. Without any absolute referents, the island becomes the most "empowered" space for Ali and other such alternative feminine figures.

Alongside *The PowerBook's* discussion of these geographic territories of London, Turkey, and the island of Capri, there are extensive references to the territory of the body. It is as if the internet's lost geographic boundaries become displaced on to the body in order to alleviate the anxiety of what McClintock refers to as "boundary loss" (24). McClintock argues that in imperialist documents "map-making became the servant of colonial plunder, for the knowledge constituted by the map both preceded and legitimized the conquest of territory" (27). Winterson, while focused on exposing the construction of gender, reiterates this particularly imperialist tendency of mapping in her process of rewriting history for feminine identities. As I have just discussed, Ali uses her internet stories to travel out of London; she explains that her stories are maps "of journeys that

have been made and might have been made. A Marco Polo route through territory real and imagined” (63). In her self-description, Ali repeats this metaphor of mapping, saying that “on the day I was born I became the visible corner of a folded map” (183). For her adoptive parents, in particular her mother, Ali represents the way to the Promised Land. As a new life, a child makes visible part of the parents’ journey as well as illuminating the starting point of his or her own. The “map of life” is folded because the future is replete with possibilities. Ali is aware of her unlimited potential once freed from her material body. She can use her “map” – her imagination and mastery of language – and travel anywhere in space and time through the supposedly “unmapped” internet.

Ali uses the medium of cyberspace to write herself anew. As Ali embraces her desires, Winterson (re)imagines Ali’s body as the “global” space wherein all narratives are possible. For Winterson, the territory of the feminine embodies desire. It is a realm that traditional masculine experience has denied by making history greater than an individual experience. In *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry*, Winterson challenges this denial by focusing on the impact of individual lives on the nation. In *The PowerBook*, she also focuses on individual experience, and argues that once the self is freed from its imposed gender constraints, it is open to limitless possibilities: “We were universes dripping with worlds. All we had to do was choose” (271). As the main narrator, Ali actively maps out her choices in the narrative that she creates for herself and her lover. Winterson places her feminine characters into the “global” space of the internet in order to externalize the same innumerable potentialities that they contain within themselves. Ali explains that she becomes lost in the love-affair of her own weaving: “In this space which

is inside you and inside me I ask for no rights or territories. There are no frontiers or controls. . . . This is Utopia. It could never happen beyond bed. This is the model government for the world” (205). Winterson requires the existence of the “real” places of London, Turkey, and Capri to enable the existence of these internal territories. The “truth” cannot exist in a temporally and spatially contained place, which is why in the tension of Capri, Ali feels the most empowered. In essence, Winterson subverts notions of the real/unreal, habitable/uninhabitable spaces, transforming the “global” space of the internet into the unbounded territory of the self.

All alone on a page by itself in bold font, there is this line: “The world is a mirror of the mind’s abundance” (20). Winterson uses cyberspace as her narrative model for *The PowerBook* in an attempt to make the novel a “mirror of the mind’s abundance.” Ali, the central narrator, weaves multiple tales that overlap and intertwine with one another. Constraints of time and space are not respected, disrupting a reiteration of gender norms. Winterson attempts to liberate her feminine character into the “global” space of the internet, which in turn is the “global” space that already exists inside the Wintersonian subject. While Winterson’s story-telling releases the hidden potentials of the mind, it also communicates hidden imperial hierarchies at the same time. In order for Winterson to “free” her feminine subject, the text must embody her other, which for Winterson, is the foreign other of imperial hierarchies. Even in a “global” space, her narrative returns to specific European geographies.

As I mentioned at the start of this chapter, *The PowerBook* is the end of a cycle that begins with *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. Just as the narrator in *Oranges* makes a

cat's cradle out of the "string full of knots" (91), Ali comments: "I keep pulling at the rope. I keep pulling at life as hard as I can. If the rope starts to fray in places, it doesn't matter. I am so tightly folded, like a fern or an ammonite, that as I unravel, the actual and the imagined unloose together, just as they are spliced together – life's fibres knotted into time" (249). Even in a text dedicated to the language of cyberspace, Winterson returns to the organic "meatspace" image of the knotted string. Regardless of her efforts to do away with the materiality of the "real" world in *The PowerBook*, Winterson continues to pull at the threads that tie her so fixedly to current day England. Winterson keeps knotting up the string of history in *The PowerBook*, and while she manages to retie and make new knots for gender and sexuality, she gets caught up in the imperial threads that she does not seem to see dragging behind her.

## CONCLUSION

### Tying Up the Loose Ends

Throughout her body of work, it seems as though Winterson encourages her readers to “knot” the “string” of history. Not only does she place her feminine characters at the centres of their respective narratives, but she encourages readers to share those spaces. Friedman advises approaching such discursive spaces with caution. In her demand to read all texts geopolitically, Friedman insists that:

Geopolitical thinking must be attentive to complex questions of power and hybridizing forms of transculturation in the context of empire and postcoloniality. But it should not be limited to tracking the effects of western conquest, imperialism, and dominance of nonwestern others since such an implicit description makes the eurocentric assumption that no other parts of the globe have engaged in such geopolitical activities. (112)

I point to this directive in Friedman’s work, not to undermine my own analysis of Winterson’s texts, but to prepare a space for further geopolitical readings of her work. As Friedman posits: “Geopolitics may reside as much in the reading process as in the text itself” (126). My analysis in this thesis is necessarily confined to the “effects of western conquest, imperialism, and dominance of nonwestern others,” but it lays the groundwork for further analysis of the other geopolitical axes that inform Winterson’s *oeuvre*.

As I have extensively argued, Winterson creates alternative realities, histories, and subjectivities in her novels in order to challenge her readers’ notions of history. Who writes history? What makes history “true”? Who is the privileged historical subject? By adopting the Foucauldian conception of genealogy, Winterson is able to imagine feminine realms of experience, wherein the construction of gender norms are exposed. In each of

the novels I have discussed, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, *The Passion*, *Sexing the Cherry*, and *The PowerBook*, Winterson develops new narratives by interweaving fairy tale, autobiography, cyberspace text, and “cover-versions” of canonical texts. Her focus on rewriting history moves from the personal (in *Oranges*), to the national (in *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry*), and then to the “global” (in *The PowerBook*). Building on a Foucauldian rejection of absolute truths, Winterson breaks down traditional history’s insistence on linear time and space with her multilayered texts. In doing so, she is then able to move the “feminine” subject, marginalized in traditional history, into the centre of the text.

Yet, as my incorporation of a geopolitical reading shows, this “centering” of a feminine subject is not without its difficulties. Moving an “alternative” subject, such as the lesbian, into the centre of the text necessitates that certain constructions of gender and sex are reevaluated. Butler’s theorization of performativity informs my analysis of Winterson’s work by allowing me to articulate the ways in which she figures her process of gender “performance” as positive and progressive. Because Winterson demonstrates that time and space are fluid and multiple, she is able to make the construction of gender visible. By marginalizing the role of men (in *Oranges* and *The PowerBook*) or exposing codes of masculinity and femininity (in *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry*), Winterson attempts to create an empowered space for feminine identities. This exposure and subversion of traditional gender norms requires that Winterson move her characters from spaces she deems mapped and controlled, like London in *Sexing the Cherry* and *The*



*PowerBook*, to “liberated” spaces that offer the possibility to explore desire in all its facets, like the New World in *Sexing the Cherry*.

Of course, as I stated at the end of Chapter Three, Winterson’s creation of a specifically feminine history is “not the whole story.” In order for her to establish the alternative feminine identity as legitimate within history, Winterson relies on the “native” and “foreign” others of imperialism. My analysis of Winterson’s novels demonstrates that a geopolitical reading of texts primarily considered as feminist or queer opens up new and complex lines of inquiry that can complicate current notions about gender and sexuality. While Winterson makes several innovative and important narrative moves towards developing historical “space” for alternative homosexual and feminine identities, she legitimizes these new subjects by maintaining the illegitimacy of the imperial other (Jews, New World natives, or Easterners). As Spivak argues, the female subject “articulates herself in shifting relationship to what is at stake, the ‘native’ female as such . . . is excluded” (245). Winterson draws attention to feminine narratives, but, unable or unconcerned to “free” herself from her own imperial history, she neglects to extend her narrative scope to include imperial others. In order to avoid repeating this type of exclusionary discourse in analyzing feminist texts, Friedman encourages that “the study of any historically specific gender formation – in other words, any local knowledge of gender – ought to be informed by the transnational” (112). By incorporating the study of geographical space into my dissertation, I have brought some sense of the transnational into the discussion of Winterson’s experiments with gender.

Overall, my reading of Winterson demonstrates that it is difficult for any narrative to tell the “whole story.” When the writer’s focus only takes into account the place of the individual subject in history, she recreates imperial subjectivities because that legitimized self will always require a delegitimated other. While Winterson could attempt to use the same fictional strategies to break down imperialist codes simultaneously along with gender, she does not do so to a productive extent in any of the novels discussed here. As well, it is important that readers study all of the geopolitical axes that inform Winterson’s work, regardless of her explicit focus on gender and sexuality. As Friedman and Said argue, we must “read” the global in the local and the local in the global. My reading of Winterson shows that it is simply not enough to “admire” and “knot” up the “string full of knots” a bit more; it is essential that we do not “get bored, grow old, go away” (*Oranges* 166), and that we ask: who is tying the knots in the first place?

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