Challenging Biblical Boundaries: Jeanette Winterson's Postmodern Feminist Subversion of Biblical Discourse in *Oranges are not the Only Fruit* (1985) and *Boating for Beginners* (1985)

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in the Department of English

at Rhodes University

by

Shirley Erasmus

Supervisor: Prof. Sam Naidu

April 2017

Abstract

This thesis investigates the subversion of Biblical discourse in Jeanette Winterson's first two novels, *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit* and *Boating for Beginners*. By rewriting Biblical stories Winterson challenges traditional Western religious discourses and their rules for heteronormative social and sexual behaviours and desires. Winterson's texts respond to the patriarchal nature of socially pervasive texts, such as the Bible, by encouraging her readers to regard these texts with suspicion, thus highlighting what can be seen as a 'postmodern concern' with the notion of 'truth'.

Chapter One of this thesis comprises a discussion of Biblical boundaries. These boundaries, I argue, are a process of historical oppression which serves to subjugate and control women, a practice inherent in the Bible and modern society. The Biblical boundaries within which women are expected to live, are carefully portrayed in *Oranges* and then comically and blasphemously mocked in *Boating*. Chapter One also argues that Winterson's sexuality plays an important role in the understanding of her texts, despite her desire for her sexuality to remain 'outside' her writing.

Chapter Two of this thesis, examines the mix of fact and fiction in *Oranges*, in order to create a new genre: fictional memoir. The chapter introduces the concept of the 'autobiographical pact' and the textual agreement which Winterson creates with her readers. In this chapter, I examine Winterson's powerful subversion of Biblical discourse, through her narration of Jeanette's 'coming out' within a Biblical framework.

Chapter Three of this thesis examines Winterson's second book, *Boating,* and the serious elements of this comic book. This chapter studies the various postmodern narrative techniques used in *Boating* in order to subvert Biblical and historical discourse. Chapter Three highlights Winterson's postmodern concern with the construction of history as 'truth'.

Finally, Chapter Four compares *Oranges* and *Boating,* showing the texts as differing, yet equally relevant textual counterparts. This chapter examines the anti-feminine characters in both texts and Winterson's ability to align her reader with a feminist or lesbian viewpoint. This thesis argues that Winterson's first two texts deliberately challenge Biblical discourse in favour of a postmodern feminist viewpoint.

Contents

Dedication

Dedicated to my late parents: Josephine and Rassie Erasmus.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the following people:

To my thesis supervisor, Professor Sam Naidu, for her encouragement, guidance and unwavering patience with me as I wrote this thesis. Her constructive criticism and invaluable feedback contributed significantly to the preparation and writing of this thesis. Thank you for your kindess.

To my Dad, without whom this thesis would never have been possible. Thank you for your never-ending love, for long phone conversations and steadfast faith in my ability to write this thesis even when I was convinced I couldn't. Words can't explain how much I miss you.

To my boyfriend and my best friend, John de Bruyn; words are not enough. I am incredibly blessed by you and everything you have done and continue to do for me.

To Mark and Corlia de Bruyn, for their constant support and encouragement, and for their kind, gentle reminders to live a little. You are both my daily inspiration! Thank you for keeping me going.

I must express my love and appreciation for my friends who have been a support structure to me over many years and especially during the last two years. Kelly Hugill and Sisa Mapetu, thank you for all the coffee and all the pep talks.

My sincere thanks must be extended to Rhodes University and the staff of the Department of English Literature for the support, both financially and emotionally, provided to me over the years.

Finally, my gracious thanks to the National Arts Council for their generous bursary for the year of 2016 which provided me with the financial means to write this thesis. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at, however, are my own and should not be attributed to the Foundation.

Introduction: Complicating the 'Whole Truth'

> *"'We've got to get the story straight,' he chomped, 'the story of how all this happened and why. I don't want to complicate things for future generations by telling them the whole truth and nothing but the truth. This is a historic occasion and so we should keep it simple"* (Winterson *Boating* 44).

Jeanette Winterson emerged into the public limelight with the publication of her award-winning first novel, *Oranges are not the Only Fruit.* [1] The novel won the 1985 Whitbread Award for First Novel (Onega 132) and was later adapted into a screenplay. *Oranges* has since been read, studied and reviewed by countless readers, scholars and critics. Winterson's second novel, *Boating for Beginners* (1985), [2] was not as well received as *Oranges*. The text is a vast departure from the literary style developed in *Oranges* and the voice for which Winterson became well-known. *Boating* is a playful, comic appreciation of the Bible which satirically retells the story of the Flood. Winterson's 'serious' tone conveyed in *Oranges* takes on a feverish comic tenor in *Boating,* where she openly mocks Western, Pentecostal Christianity, a religion which she satirically illustrates in *Oranges*. The difference in style, tone, and genre between the two texts piqued my attention immediately. The texts are fascinatingly different and yet, in an intrinsic way, they perform the same political task and deal with the same issues. Both *Oranges* and *Boating* demonstrate Winterson's concerns with feminism, fundamentalism, postmodern narrative techniques and the radical revising of well-known stories. Surely the texts can be read as differing, yet meaningful counterparts?

Merja Makinen (2005), a leading Winterson scholar, argues that "[t]he main focus of the reception of Winterson's novels has been twofold: the discussion in relation to her as a lesbian writer and in relation to her as a postmodern writer" (2). Yet within these discussions of Winterson's sexuality and her writing of postmodern literature, *Boating* has rarely been the subject of 'serious' critique. As a noticeably postmodern text, I believe that *Boating* plays an important role in illustrating Winterson's concerns with feminism, fundamentalism, and postmodernism, concerns which are also prevalent in *Oranges*. Thus, the discussion of

---

[1] *Oranges are not the Only Fruit* will be abbreviated to *Oranges* throughout this thesis.
[2] *Boating for Beginners* will be abbreviated to *Boating* throughout this thesis.

Winterson as a postmodern feminist author (and as a lesbian author) and the discussion of her novels as dealing with these themes should include *Boating* as a highly relevant though unusual text in her oeuvre. Both *Oranges* and *Boating* radically challenge the Bible. Winterson's bold engagement with and deep knowledge of Western culture's most noticeably patriarchal text is arguably what makes her works so indisputably relevant today. Her engagement with the Bible in her texts is frequently a deliberate revision of Biblical narratives and it seeks to resist the legitimacy of patriarchal metanarratives. Maretha Jacobs, a feminist scholar, explains the relevance of feminist Biblical interpretation and revision:

> [f]eminist [B]iblical interpretation takes seriously the patriarchal nature of [B]iblical texts, especially those pertaining to women, that is, the fact that they originated and functioned in a patriarchal, male-centred society and mostly still function this way. According to feminist criticism these texts should therefore not merely be taken over as authoritative texts with universal meaning, but should be read against the grain of their patriarchal rhetoric and their traditional interpretation, that is, with suspicion and resistance. (85)

By rewriting and subverting Biblical stories in her texts, Winterson challenges traditional Western religious discourses and their accompanying rules for heteronormative social and sexual behaviours and desires. Winterson's texts respond to the patriarchal nature of socially pervasive texts, particularly the Bible, by encouraging her readers to regard the text with suspicion, thus highlighting what is a 'postmodern concern' with the notion of 'authoritative truth'.

Winterson's first novel, *Oranges*, is startlingly similar to her own life and the text has since been referred to as 'semi-autobiographical'. Winterson, however, has not relished the classification of *Oranges* as autobiographical and therefore 'true' in any way. The ambiguous status of her stories as either fact or fiction links her novels to "postmodern approaches to history" (Neumeier 189). The protagonist in *Oranges* shares Winterson's first name and the narrative closely resembles Winterson's personal experiences growing up in a Pentecostal Christian community, but the narrative is fantastically interwoven with fairy-tale parables which are reminiscent of Biblical parables as well as modern fairy-tales. The narrative of *Boating*, unlike *Oranges,* is clearly a fictional text; however, it is similarly interwoven with parables and fairy-tales. It is obvious that both texts exhibit a concern with the Bible, which Winterson seeks to challenge in *Oranges* and *Boating* alike.

Following the success of her first novel, *Oranges*, Winterson has written twenty-two novels between 1985 and 2015. She continues to write and publish books which are captivating and provocative. Her most recent novel, *The Gap of Time* (2015), like *Oranges* and *Boating*, takes on another literary canon; it is a story which re-tells Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* from a modern American perspective. Winterson's interest in appropriating and re-telling historical stories is again displayed in *The Passion* (1987), which was published shortly after *Boating*. The novel follows the adventures of the daughter of a Venetian gondolier and Napoleon's chicken chef. She then published the hugely successful *Sexing the Cherry* (1989), a novel set during the English Civil War about Winterson's famous grotesque character, the 'Dog Woman' and her adopted child, Jordan. The grotesque is a theme which Winterson engages with in both *Oranges* and *Boating*, but it is only fully realized in the character of the Dog Woman. *Sexing the Cherry* is her most sustained reference to Russo's theory of the female grotesque, a theory which Winterson alludes to with her anti-feminine characters in *Oranges* and *Boating*. Her next three texts explore issues relating to love triangles, gender and experimentation: *Written on the Body* (1992) is a story whose narrator is not given a name or a gender, leaving the readers to make their own assumptions about love and sex. *Art and Lies* (1994) is a tale with very little plot in which the three principal characters, Handel, Picasso and Sappho, meet on a train in London, all drawn together by a strange book. Another book which is widely considered and read is Winterson's book of essays about art and culture: *Art Objects* (1995). *Gut Symmetries* (1997) is a story about a love triangle between Alice, Stella and Jove, framing the story through the Grand Unified Theory of physics (GUT) a play on words as well as an age-old question of how everything in the universe fits together. She is also the author of a collection of short stories called *The World and Other Places* (1998). Winterson's novel *The PowerBook* (2000) was adapted for the National Theatre in 2002, a story about an e-writer called Alix who writes tailor-made stories provided the commissioner of the story is prepared to enter the plot of the story, a concept which she uses with in *Oranges* and *Boating*, through the character of the orange demon. Her following novel, *Lighthousekeeping* (2004), tells the tale of Silver, who is taken in by the keeper of the Cape Wrath lighthouse, Mr Pew. Winterson is also the author of a science fiction love story, set in a post-apocalyptic world: *The Stone Gods* (2007). This is a love story which tells the story of Billie and Spike. Their relationship highlights Winterson's concerns with modern society's commodity culture. Jeanette Winterson has also written several children's

novels: *The Battle of the Sun* (2009), *The King of Capri* (2003), *Tanglewreck* (2006) and *The Lion, The Unicorn and Me* a story, like *Boating*, which re-tells the Biblical tale of the first Christmas. She is a diverse writer, who frequently writes about history, truth and the Bible. *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* (2012) has been described as the 'silent twin' of *Oranges* in which she deals with many of the issues first developed in the narrative of *Oranges*. She is fascinated by her past and the universal past, which makes up the history of the world, themes which almost all of her texts deal with in some form. Her texts are full of stories, parables and fairy-tales. Winterson's work explores themes of time, history and even time-travel. Many of her texts seek to tell stories in ways which defy traditional 'rules' of plot, genre and theme. Similarly, her characters seek to undo, defy and challenge traditional notions of identity and sexuality. Her texts leave much to be explored and require far more space than is permitted in this dissertation. As the first two novels in Winterson's oeuvre, *Oranges* and *Boating* pave the way for many of the themes which she develops in her later texts and thus function as two of the foundational texts in her collection.

Feminism and Postmodernism: Reconciling Terms

Postmodernism is a fascinating and complex term. It suggests that 'modernism' is paradoxically situated in the past, despite being 'modern' and thus a 'current' issue. Postmodernism, as a result, suggests that new ways of understanding the world and making meaning must be found. The essence of postmodernism is that it seeks radically to critique discourses of the past and the process of 'meaning-making' in literature. Similarly, feminism, which advocates the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes requires that literary discourses of the past be interrogated. Paulina Palmer (2001), in her essay 'Lesbian Postmodern Fictions' draws attention to the connections between postmodern perspectives and feminist or lesbian perspectives.

> They are related in terms of historical period, since the advent of Women's Movement and Gay Liberation in the second-half of the twentieth century coincided with the emergence of postmodernist trends in culture. They also reveal, to a degree at least, intellectual affinities. Just as the postmodern defined by François Lyotard, is characterized by the rejection of a totalizing vision and the breakdown of the concept of a centre, so the feminist/lesbian challenges a norm of sexual behaviour by concentrating on marginalized groups and foregrounding a plurality of sexualities and lifestyles. (181)

While postmodern literature seeks to deconstruct meta-narratives of modern culture, so feminist literature seeks to address and challenge various essentialist notions of gender, sexuality, and identity which are frequently perpetuated by dominant discourses. According to Palmer, both fields, therefore "employ intellectual and linguistic approaches involving deconstruction and denaturalisation" (181). Winterson's fiction can be read as deeply postmodern, and, as a lesbian author who writes about lesbian and feminist issues, her texts are also fundamentally feminist in their critique of dominant discourses. Winterson's sexuality and her role as an author are discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, where the structure of *Oranges* as autobiographical metafiction is also closely examined. Her role as the author and as a lesbian feminist in *Oranges* and *Boating* cannot be ignored, in one sense because she is both lesbian and feminist and this impacts on the reception of the texts and, in another sense, because she writes about authors and the various layers involved in creating a text. Winterson delves into the layers of truth, fantasy and fairy-tale involved in the creation of not only her own texts, but also other well-known texts. She renders the process of creating stories deeply ironic in *Boating*, a text which critiques the book of Genesis and the Bible as a whole, by dramatising the story of Noah and the Flood in a sustained parodic retelling of the Biblical story. *Boating* is a comic, blasphemous, feminist subversion of the patriarchal story of the Flood, foregrounding the story of Noah and subverting it for a feminist purpose by placing anti-feminine, feminist women at the forefront of the narrative.

It is pertinent to note the distinct and somewhat irreconcilable differences between feminism and postmodernism; these differences centre on notions of 'agency' and 'politics'. According to Hutcheon the postmodern can be "politically ambivalent, doubly encoded as both complicity and critique" (168). The core of feminist concerns are *political.* Feminism seeks to challenge patriarchy in society in its radical attempt to change the lives of women by fighting for equality in human rights as well as social and political change. These connections and differences between feminism and postmodernism are particularly relevant to the study of Jeanette Winterson and her fiction. Beate Neumeier (2001) believes that Winterson's fiction "[…] creates an interplay between the two positions, maintaining a tension between their disparate interests" (182). Winterson makes deliberate subversive use of postmodern narrative strategies in her texts, thereby bringing to the fore the tensions and similarities between the feminist and postmodern positions, while simultaneously destabilising and delegitimising

Biblical and patriarchal discourses in her texts. She uses these strategies in order to deconstruct totalising patriarchal systems. The postmodern strategies evident in her texts are intentionally used for a feminist purpose. Chapter Two examines how these postmodern narrative strategies are made apparent in *Oranges,* while Chapter Three examines the various postmodern narrative techniques in *Boating* in order to subvert Biblical discourse. Chapter Four of this thesis argues that the subversive effects of *Boating* in their challenge to Biblical boundaries are just as powerful and effective as they are in *Oranges*, even though the text has not been as widely studied and is not considered to be one of the core texts in Winterson's collection.

In this thesis, I will concentrate on Winterson's mix of fiction and autobiography in *Oranges* and the satirical humour inherent in *Boating*. Both texts attempt to undermine Biblical and historical discourses, discourses which contribute to the subjugation of women. The undermining of Biblical and historical discourse is undeniably linked to feminism. Onega muses on Winterson's desire to challenge historical discourse, noting that

> […] the traditional 'Western tale' is undoubtedly told from the perspective of *male* Western eyes. By contrast, Winterson's proposal to conceive history as the recording of the individual memories of the past allows for the articulation of the heroine's subjectivity, even if only as coiner and interpreter of her own history. (140)

Winterson's narratives show that Western history is a *male* story told by *men* and seen from *male* perspectives. Western history is a deeply biased story, one which is significantly void of female voices, yet it is frequently understood to be the 'truth'. *Oranges* and *Boating* seek to redefine history by telling the stories of women. These histories and the process of recording and narrating female stories become stories in which the female, lesbian, feminist self is actively reasserted in her texts. Both texts follow the pattern of a quest narrative, in which the heroine seeks self-individuation; however, this *bildungsroman* genre is subverted by placing anti-feminine female characters at the forefront of the texts. Through the narratives of these female characters, Winterson seeks to "[…] rewrite the most totalitarian, patriarchal but also the most unquestionable history of all: sacred history, written, according to Jewish and Christian doctrines, by God himself […]" (Onega 140).

Chapter One: Challenging Biblical Boundaries and Questioning 'The Truth'

Delineating Biblical Boundaries

As the title of this thesis suggests, this study undertakes to explore 'Biblical boundaries'[3] in Western culture and how the provocative postmodern feminist author, Jeanette Winterson, challenges these boundaries in her first two novels. Boundaries are used to divide and signal the limits of a particular area. The reference to 'Biblical boundaries' in the title of this thesis refers to the limits and rules enforced by the Bible. These Biblical rules enforce a belief that certain behaviours and manners of living are considered 'moral' by Biblical standards. The most well-known set of Biblical rules is almost certainly the Ten Commandments. These commandments, according to the Biblical tale, were given to Moses by God and serve as rules for living in a Godly manner. The Ten Commandments, however, are not the only rules dictated by the Bible. The Bible enforces many rules and boundaries throughout its sixty-six books.[4] The Bible demonstrates in its many parables and stories which behaviours are considered 'holy' and which behaviours are 'unholy'. The Bible delineates the kinds of behaviours which are acceptable to God and to a Godly community. What falls outside of these parameters, or deliberately contradicts the rules laid out in the Bible, is considered 'immoral' and therefore unacceptable to God. The boundaries which exist in the Bible, a historical religious text, have become an indisputable characteristic of Western culture. While some of the commandments within the text hold moral and humane validity, the position of women within the Bible is clear. Within the Bible, female voices are largely ignored or silenced. Their stories are told through the perspectives of men, and they have chiefly been represented in Biblical stories as evil temptresses who lead good, holy men into temptation. A passage in 1 Timothy illustrates one of the many negative positions which the Bible takes on women:

> [a] woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed

[3] The 'Biblical boundaries' to which this thesis refers are the religious and political 'boundaries' of acceptable sexual identities and behavior in Western culture.

[4] The number of books in the Bible differs according to different branches of Christianity. This thesis will refer to the Protestant canon which contains sixty-six books in total. Thirty-nine books are in the Old Testament and twenty-seven books are contained in the New Testament.

> first, then Eve. *And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.* (1 Timothy 2:11-14, my emphasis)

This passage refers to the creation story of Adam and Eve in Genesis. In this book of the Bible, Eve is responsible for being deceived by Satan (in the form of a serpent). Eve then leads Adam into sin by encouraging him to knowingly disobey God. As a result, both Adam and Eve are cast out of the Garden of Eden and are forever separated from personal communion with God (who would come to the garden every evening to meet with Adam and Eve). The passage asserts that 'Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner'. Similarly, throughout the Bible the guilt of sin and immorality is assigned to women. The Bible demands that women should be seen and not heard. Paul reminds his congregation in a letter to the Corinthians that "[w]omen should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, *as the law says*" (1 Corinthians 14:34, my emphasis). Similarly, the Bible sets out boundaries of femininity, by which women are expected to abide. Should they divert from the Biblical outline of femininity and acceptable beauty, they are considered to be temptresses who lead 'holy' men astray. For example, the story of King David and Bathsheba. Bathsheba is a married woman, who while bathing one evening on a rooftop, is seen by David. David is said to have lusted after her and she is brought to him and forced to have sexual intercourse with him (despite the fact that David knows she is a married woman). When Bathsheba falls pregnant David conspires to have her husband sent to the frontlines of the war to ensure that he is killed in battle. In this instance, King David is guilty of leading Bathsheba into sin, however Kind David is still lauded in the Bible as an honourable man of God. Samson and Delilah is another Biblical story which places the woman in the role of evil temptress. Delilah seduces Samson into her bed and then allows the Philistines to shave off his hair (the source of his Godly strength) while he slept (Judges 13-16).

The Bible dictates clear rules for how a woman should appear and behave:

> […] likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, [10] but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. (1 Timothy 2:9-10)

The Bible is more than merely an ancient historical religious text. Rather, it is a political and cultural discourse which, maintains the inferior status of women by asserting their ungodliness from the beginning. Although the Bible is perceived by Christians to be a text which is divinely inspired and written by 'holy' men, it is imperative to acknowledge that the Bible is also a text full of deeply misogynistic principles. A verse in Paul's letters highlights the position of women in the Bible: "[a] man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man" (1 Corinthians 11:7-10). The Bible frequently asserts that the purpose of a woman is to serve men, or alternatively to serve and submit to her father, brothers or husband: "[w]ives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord" (Colossians 3:18). The Bible consistently indicates that women should have no agency or voice. It can be argued that the Bible is a product of its time and the men who wrote the Bible were writing in contexts such as first-century Judea, in which women were not only subjugated and silenced but also frequently brutalised. Thus, when a text such as the Bible is read and interpreted as a straight-forward manual for living, the boundaries of acceptable behaviour are automatically aligned in favour of *men*. For example, the Bible advocates that a girl who is raped should be sold to and married to her rapist (Deuteronomy 22:28-29). The Bible also commands that if a woman has sexual relations before she is married, she should be stoned in the street by the whole community (Deuteronomy 22:20-21) and that a woman who is menstruating is considered so unclean that she should be isolated for the time of her cycle and that whatever she touches or sleeps on also becomes unclean. The Bible is a deeply misogynistic text which is considered to be the word of God which must be obeyed by Christians and God-fearing people. It is considered by Christians to be the rules by which God commands his people to live. Biblical boundaries are limits enforced by dominant discourses, [5]which claim to be the absolute truth and serve to regulate behaviour and inform acceptable (and unacceptable) societal practices. Jeanette Winterson's texts, particularly her debut novel, *Oranges* (1985) and her second novel, *Boating* (1985), seek to specifically challenge the Bible and these Biblical boundaries which powerfully regulate societal behaviour and uncover the unjust treatment of women (as commanded by the Bible) by narrating female stories through a female voice.

[5] In this thesis, dominant discourses will refer to historical and political discourses such as the Bible and religious discourses which inform Western culture.

The Bible, Postmodern Feminism and Feminist Revisionary Fiction

The format in which the words "the Bible" will be presented in this thesis are influenced by feminist Biblical theorists such as Amador (1998) and Fiona C. Black (2006) who choose to present the words not italicised. The Bible is frequently used as a powerful tool to regulate behaviour and subjugate women, whether or not one is Christian. This is clearly demonstrated and challenged in Winterson's texts. Winterson asserts that "[w]hether or not you know the Bible, whether or not you believe, or how you believe, doesn't change the fact that it profoundly affects all our lives" (Winterson, *New Statesman* 38). The profound effect of the Bible in Western society and on Winterson herself is a central element of Winterson's first two texts. Winterson chooses to challenge the Bible and its regulations for 'normal' relationships and behaviours in her texts by drawing attention to the deeply misogynistic nature of Biblical discourse and the negative effect that the Bible has on Western culture. While many critics consider the Bible to be merely a fictional book, Winterson acknowledges that it is a fictional book with great political and historical power and relevance. The power of the Bible is situated in its claims to 'truth', 'historical accuracy' and its claim to morality. Winterson, having grown up in a Pentecostal Christian community, recognises the cultural power of the Bible and sets out to dismantle that power in her texts. She uses various postmodern narrative techniques to undermine the power of this ideologically laden discourse. These narrative techniques used in *Oranges* and *Boating* effectively deny the Bible a position of supreme power and allow the voices of women to become the focus of her stories.

It is necessary to clarify and define the context in which the complex theory of 'postmodern feminism' is used in this thesis and the intricacies which fall under the various definitions of these terms. In this thesis, the terms 'postmodern' and 'feminist' or 'feminism' are used in tandem. Indeed, the theories 'postmodern' and 'feminism' are not the same and both are made up of multiple, often conflicting arguments. It is important to consider that there is "no one 'postmodern' critique […] any more than there is one feminist critique" (Hekman 45). Susan Hekman (1990), a postmodern theorist, contends that although "many critics argue that the debate […] is unresolvable because the participants cannot agree on precise definitions of either 'modern' or 'postmodern,' the broad themes of the dispute are nevertheless clear" (1). Both postmodern and feminist theories propose to challenge the "epistemological foundations of

Western thought and argue that [...] Western philosophy is fundamentally misconceived" (Hekman 2). Hence, postmodern and feminist theories suggest that a different way of understanding and theorising western thought needs to be found. Since the Enlightenment human knowledge has been understood in terms of '*man*' (Hekman 2, my emphasis). Consequently, both feminism and postmodernism share a common goal which is to provide a "challenge to the masculine/feminine dichotomy as it is defined in western thought" (Hekman 2). This dichotomy informs what postmodern scholars challenge, even if this aspect is not always made explicit. While both feminism and postmodernism are complex theories which resist a simple interpretation "the focus of both positions, at least in epistemological terms, is challenging the hierarchical dualisms of Enlightenment thought" (Hekman 8). That the subject has been fundamentally conceptualised as masculine in modern thought is one of the significant factors which serves to uphold the inferior status of women even today (Hekman 45). The Bible, which is considered a patriarchal master discourse, is one such masculine conceptualisation that serves to subjugate and silence women. The subjugation of women is a central concern of feminism and this is where the concepts of postmodernism and feminism intersect.

Jean-François Lyotard defines postmodernism as a movement characterised by a suspicion of, or "incredulity towards metanarratives" (xxiv). Similarly, postmodern theorists demonstrate a distrust towards metanarratives because these 'master discourses' assume an absolute and authoritative truth. Throughout this dissertation, the term 'postmodern' refers particularly to "the problematising force in our culture today: [postmodernism] raises questions about (or renders problematic) the common-sensical and the 'natural'" (Hutcheon Preface xi). Winterson frequently makes use of various 'postmodern narrative techniques' such as satire, irony, parody and intertextuality. Winterson contributes to "a tradition of British women writers who employ fantasy and the fabulous in their fictions, a tradition which coincides with so many postmodernist stylistic interests" (Grice and Woods 16). Winterson follows the legacy of writers, such as Angela Carter and Anne Sexton who have paved the way for female writers who employ fantasy and fairy-tales in their fiction. While fable, fantasy, parody, satire and intertextuality are not by definition *postmodern* literary techniques, the subversive ends for which these techniques are used by postmodern authors such as Winterson, locate them in postmodern fictional practice. Here, Pykett concurs:

> Winterson's fiction undoubtedly has many of the [techniques] which we have come to associate with postmodernist fictional practice in the late twentieth century: parody, irony, pastiche, self-reflexivity and playfulness, a sense of multiplicity, fragmentation, instability of meaning, and an apparent distrust of grand narratives. (quoted in Grice & Woods 64)

Thus, the term 'postmodern feminism', as used in this dissertation, is a term which rejects and challenges the masculine bias of the Enlightenment's rationalism. The Enlightenment and the scholarship of modern Western culture in the past, attempted to

> reveal general, all-encompassing principles which can lay bare the basic features of natural and social reality. This attempt can be related to an earlier, more religiously based belief that the purpose of scholarship was to make evident the word of God as revealed in his creations. While the relation of God to basic ordering principles of the universe grew increasingly distant, Western scholarship remained committed to the discovery of such principles. (Nicholson 2)

The result of this legacy of scholarship is that it expressed a view which favoured certain perspectives, rather than a scholarship which transcends the perspectives of one gender, person or group (Nicholson 2). While this is a simplified summary of Enlightenment rationalism and does not do justice to the multitude of wide-ranging and diverse positions relating to this theory, it does highlight the reason that feminism became deeply concerned with the 'postmodern turn'. To many scholars, feminism and postmodernism appear to be theories which are irreconcilable; there are also many points of overlap between postmodern stances and feminism. Postmodern feminism argues that "there is not one (masculine) truth but rather, *many truths*, which are not privileged along gendered lines" (Hekman 8, my emphasis). Postmodernists therefore contend:

> [n]o particular worldview can claim to have the truth because the meanings which are constitutive of a worldview cannot be known to be true objectively. This is because there is no objective knowledge. All knowledge is *contextual* and is influenced by culture, tradition, language, biases, background concepts, and so on, and is, therefore, in some very important sense, *relative* to these phenomena. (Sweetman 140)

Brendan Sweetman's (2005) observation explains an important aspect of postmodern theory and highlights Winterson's concerns with the effect of Biblical discourse on Western thought; that "women's treatment in patriarchal societies is repugnant and in need of reformation" (Amador 43). Winterson's texts, being both feminist and postmodern in themes and concerns, aim to

challenge and subvert the epistemological foundations (in the form of grand narratives/ metanarratives) which perpetuate sexist thought and practice.

Winterson's texts illustrate the manner in which Biblical metanarratives become socially entrenched stories which regulate and define our culture and behaviour. Winterson's texts thus aim to subvert Biblical patriarchal discourses into alternative models of interpretation. Her texts have in many ways "broken the [...] traditional interpretations of the Bible [...]" and (Brown 234) work to challenge the political bias inherent in the Western, Christian status quo and provide a powerful political commentary. Some critics, however, disagree that Winterson's novels function as a form of political commentary. Patricia Dunker (1998) contends that Winterson's "[...] texts are too playful and oblique for politics" (Dunker in Makinen 12). However, as a postmodern feminist author, Winterson's texts are also political in their defiant scrutiny of patriarchal society and the Bible. Winterson is principally concerned with storytelling, an act which "can help to not only construct political realities but also transform them" (Hutchinson 351). The stories which Winterson's texts tell regularly blur the lines between history and fiction. Hutchinson concurs: "telling stories—telling fictions—can help to recast how individuals, scholars, and politicians perceive of and understand the world. Stories can, put simply, be transformative" (354). Winterson is a postmodern feminist story teller who writes what she refers to as "stories within stories within stories" (Winterson *Art* 189)[6]. Winterson's texts illustrate "that notions of gender and history are neither natural nor fixed: they are part of an inherently political process through which we assign meaning to them" (Hutchinson 367).

The telling of stories as a political process requires a re-visioning of the past and of history and the way in which history is conceived and understood. It is an inherently political process because it is a way of challenging traditional ways of understanding gender, history and religion. This is a process which is deeply postmodern, since postmodernism involves an interrogation of narrative and representation. Adrienne Rich (1972) devised the term "re-visionist" theory in her essay *When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision*. In this essay, she calls for a radical reconsideration of Western cultural and social metanarratives in favour of a

[6] Jeanette Winterson, *Art Objects* 1995

're-visioning' of metanarratives. This process of re-visioning is exactly what Winterson accomplishes in her texts. Winterson re-writes and re-visions those totalising narratives which perpetuate the subjugation of women. Amador affirms that feminist interpretation and subversion of the Bible "[…] seeks to uncover the structures of exploitation and oppression […] to bring to central focus the role of women in history, theology, and ethics; and to critique the images of women as portrayed by the writers of the [B]iblical text" (40-41). Winterson's stories challenge the traditional interpretations of the Bible and rework Biblical narratives into alternative, feminist stories that subvert traditional patriarchal discourses. In a feminist fashion, Winterson desacralises the Bible in her texts, in order to provide a site where female identity can be explored and reaffirmed; she does this by subverting notions of 'natural' sexuality and notions of what a 'good' woman is and is not.

Winterson's feminist revisionary project emerges particularly through her first two novels, which tell the stories of women navigating patriarchal religious societies. She writes them as anti-feminine heroes, who seek to recreate their own stories, a theme which is consistent in many of Winterson's texts. Winterson is not interested in writing stories about women who are not strong:

> I'm quite prepared to display their vulnerabilities and their questionings and conflicts, but I don't believe women are weak. *The overall portrayal in much fiction of women as essentially weak is very disturbing*. As a woman writer you would want to redress the balance on that because it is not true. (Interview with Catherine Bush 56, my emphasis)

Winterson's female protagonists challenge the traditional Biblical roles of women in favour of a powerfully feminist viewpoint. Duncker examines early forms of feminism in her essay 'Jeanette Winterson and the Aftermath of Feminism' (1998 in Grice and Woods) and asserts that the early feminism of the 1960s and 1970s created the perfect "context and audience for [Winterson's] work" (78 Grice and Woods), which "transforms, extends and subverts many themes […] [and] proclaimed itself radical, feminist, lesbian" (78 Duncker in Grice and Woods). Winterson's writing often defies one singular genre, such as postmodern or feminist. This study asserts that Winterson's writing is a complex combination of these elements, which work together in order to challenge the "concept of a singular, bigoted, linearity of truth or meaning" (Makinen 49). Feminist writers such as Winterson seek to expose the "structures of exploitation and oppression in the Bible; to bring to central focus the role of women in history, theology, and

ethics; and to critique the images of women as portrayed by the writers of the Biblical text and as explored by its interpreters" (Amador 40- 41). The Bible frequently emphasises that women are to submit to men in *all* things, for men were created to rule over women (Genesis 3:16). Women are also to be seen and not heard; the Bible commands them to "be silent" (I Timothy 2:11-14). All aspects of a woman's behaviour are scrutinised in the Bible, which orders that a woman may not dress in clothes which are related to men's clothing and women who do so are an "abomination to God" (Deuteronomy 22:5). Women are not only given very little status in the Bible: they are also frequently beaten, stoned and raped by decree. The inferiority of women in the text is subtly hidden within obviously misogynistic practices: the Bible commands that a woman who gives birth to a male-child is considered 'unclean' for seven days, while a woman who gives birth to a female child is considered to be 'unclean' for *two weeks* (Leviticus 12:2-5). Both the overt and the subtle misogyny inherent in the Bible are what Winterson's texts seek to address. She creates stories which stand in clear opposition to the supposed overarching 'truth' of patriarchal Biblical discourses.

Jana L. French (1999) emphasises Winterson's postmodern feminist concern with the relationship between language and power (231), an aspect which Winterson herself speaks of in her interview with Catherine Bush:

> I do not feel trapped in any way by language. I don't feel it's a male language that I have to deal with, although it's been largely wrought by men. I feel enormous freedom in the face of language. […] I believe I can bend it to my purpose, *and because I am a woman those purposes will be womanly ones*. (Winterson 57, my emphasis)

Winterson speaks of writing with a 'womanly purpose' which asks readers to be aware of the "historically privileged discourses on heterosexuality and gender dichotomy, discourses that inappropriately constrain desire and the fluid expression of identity […]" (French 231). Her texts engage with feminist concerns such as the "phallocentric" (Makinen 49) patriarchal culture in which women exist. As a result, her texts are, "liberating […] within a culture of *compulsory heterosexualism*" (Makinen 49, my emphasis). The concept of compulsory heterosexuality is founded by Adrienne Rich in her 1980 essay 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence'. In her essay, she suggests that heterosexuality is not a natural human instinct, but

rather a political tool which can be used to render women subordinate. In this essay, Rich demonstrates the concept of lesbianism as another form of feminism, a concept which can be applied to Winterson's texts as well. Lesbianism, Rich claims, is a challenge to the political institution of heterosexuality. Thus, as a lesbian and feminist author, who writes about issues of sexuality, and produces texts with lesbian characters, Winterson's texts also defy the political institution of heterosexuality by addressing postmodern feminism and alternative models for living in her texts.

Jeanette Winterson and the Relevance of her Sexuality

Since Winterson's writing has become so widely read, the discussion of her sexuality has often gone hand in hand with her classification as a postmodern feminist author. She is regularly considered first and foremost lesbian, *then* a postmodern feminist. However, for Winterson, it is an injustice to place too much significance on her sexuality. This poses a problem for critics and scholars alike. Winterson's rebellion against the supposed 'immorality' of homosexuality in Biblical discourse is a key element in *Oranges*, a text which draws largely on her own experience. However, in her essay, *The Semiotics of Sex* (1996), Winterson is contemptuous of critics who consider her a 'lesbian writer' and characterise her writing through her lesbianism rather than reading her writing without predisposed bias. She refers to this classification of her writing as "harassment by the back door" (Winterson *Art* 104). Winterson considers it a pity "to be labelled at all. [She has] never called [herself] a lesbian writer, and [she] would hate to be one. [She] [is] a writer" [7] (Winterson). Winterson scorns the constant attention her texts receive based on her sexuality alone. Despite her desire to discount the relevance of her sexuality, Winterson's texts frequently address issues of sexuality and gender. Many critics, including Laura Doan (1994),

> [praise] the writer precisely for the ways in which her texts manipulate and reverse established sexed hierarchies. […] Winterson's novels, in playing with gender and sexuality, re-appropriate the discursive structures that legitimise heterosexuality in the service of 'a forceful and positive radical oppositional critique' (Doan 138).

[7] www.jeanettewinterson.com 'Clare Balding' *(The Standard)*. Jeanette Winterson. 2004

Critics and scholars of Winterson's texts find themselves in a precarious position, Winterson herself hopes that her own sexuality will remain outside of her 'art' while critics insist that her texts serve as "an encouraging intimation of the political power that might be wielded by a *lesbian* postmodern" (Morrison 174, my emphasis). Her sexuality is undoubtedly one of the core reasons that she writes texts which challenge the Biblical boundaries of sexuality and compulsory heterosexuality. Doan argues that "for the lesbian writer the task, the political agenda if you will, is to displace and explode the binary" (Doan 147). Indeed, Winterson's texts are concerned with creating alternative stories in which multiple bodies and sexualities are celebrated, rather than stories in which homosexuality is represented as the only form of true love above heterosexuality or any sexuality at all. Jago Morrison believes that Winterson's process of rewriting the Bible is "much less in order to affirm and celebrate lesbian sexuality, than to reclaim and rebuild a Christian imaginary of the soul as energy, transcending both earth and flesh" (176). Winterson is surely not unaware of the "burden of expectation placed on her work, both by feminist critics and by her fans" (Morrison 178). The sexual-political aspect of her fiction is an integral reason that she has become such a widely read and studied author. Morrison argues that: "[w]hat makes the reading of Jeanette Winterson a matter of sexual-political significance, surely, is the conjunction of her wide popularity with her public institutionalisation as a writer of consequence" (179) yet, it is important to consider Winterson's own desire to have her work read without bias.

Winterson acknowledges the importance of lesbian and gay literature, but resists the classification of her literature as purely 'lesbian fiction', stating that her texts are not a "lecture delivered to a special interest group" (Winterson *Art* 106). Winterson hopes that her texts will be read and appreciated because they are socially and politically relevant, not because they are written by a *lesbian* author and fall into the category of 'lesbian fiction'. As a writer with a large readership, she has provided an opening for the discussion of sexuality and gender and has in many ways exposed the lack of these discussions in mainstream literature. Critics have nonetheless maintained a certain way of responding to Winterson's texts, "often in the face of the writer's own commentary, privileging questions and concerns in which some of her recent texts are, at best, only peripherally interested" (Morrison 179). It is therefore crucial to note that this thesis takes into consideration Winterson's sexuality as a lesbian, because it informs one of the core aspects of her challenge to Biblical boundaries. It is relevant that Winterson is an author

whose concerns with feminism, postmodernism and the Bible play an important role; however, her sexuality is not the key focus of this examination of her texts. This thesis will examine lesbianism and homosexuality where they concern the characters in Winterson's texts and the ways in which their sexualities push the boundaries of Biblical discourse. Winterson emphasises "I am a writer who happens to love women. I am not a lesbian who happens to write" (104). [8]

Morrison notes that

> Winterson speaks about her work in terms that reflect the themes of her essays, connecting her individual talent to the literary tradition and the larger goals of Art. As in her journalism, formulaic reference is made to the background in Accrington and early experiences as a child preacher *but attempts by questioners to view her work primarily in terms of sexuality, biography and personal revelation are most strenuously resisted.* (170, my emphasis)

Although *Oranges* contains many similarities to Winterson's own history, she is reproachful of critics and scholars who are too quick to identify *Oranges* as simply autobiographical, insisting that by doing so they are missing the point. As she makes clear in her essay 'The Semiotics of Sex', she considers the classification of her writing as simply 'lesbian fiction' incredibly restrictive. She urges readers to forget about her sexuality and consider the work itself: "[o]ver and over again, I say to people, particularly in connection with "*Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, forget about me and look at the work" (Bush, 55). Winterson shies away from personal scrutiny because she feels that "people (newspapers) [get] the facts wrong or rather never [bother] to check them" [9] (Winterson, para 2) resulting in what she regards as an oversimplification of her 'art'. This dissertation does not rely solely on Winterson's position as a lesbian author, nor does it seek to place too much emphasis on her sexuality, but rather seeks to critically examine the way she uses themes of sexuality, homosexuality and gender (among others) to subvert Biblical boundaries in her novels. Hutchinson discusses this very aspect of Winterson's writing in *Oranges:*

> [t]hrough Jeanette's search for self and a society accepting of her sexuality the reader learns of the struggle of lesbian desire in a heteronormative culture. In this way, Jeanette's story—in her search for identity and meaning—offers a challenge to patriarchal discourse by revealing that notions of heterosexual (as good and

[8] *Art Objects* 'The Semiotics of Sex', 104, 1996.
[9] www.jeanettewinterson.com/boatingforbeginners. Date accessed: 17/02/2015

> natural) and homosexual (as evil and unnatural) are social constructs that both foster and derive all too much power from society's status quo. (361)

Winterson rightfully urges critics to 'look at her work' and engage with what has been *written* in the text rather than automatically reading her texts through a lesbian viewpoint.

Chapter Two: *Oranges*: Winterson's Autobiographical Fiction

Jeanette Winterson's 'Textual Agreement': Autobiographical Fiction, Autobiography and the Role of the Author

Winterson's debut novel *Oranges* comprises a careful blend of autobiography and fiction. *Oranges* is often considered to be an autobiographical novel written in the realist mode; however, the novel is particularly powerful because it contains a postmodern 'mix' of genres. It is vital to note that in *Oranges*, Winterson is both a fictional character in the novel, as well as the autobiographical author (with 'prominent status') of *Oranges*. That Winterson plays the role of both author and character creates confusion as to what the text is *really* about and into what category *Oranges* can be placed. *Oranges* cannot be easily categorised as either an autobiographical or a fictional text, despite the fact that the central narrative of *Oranges* bears a close resemblance to Winterson's own life. *Oranges* is written in a narrative mode, "*which straddles the generic divide between autobiography and fiction*, in the production of autobiographical fiction" (Grice and Woods 5, my emphasis). Rather than the question of what genre the novel can successfully fit into, one should consider Winterson's greater purpose in the narration of *Oranges*; that is, a challenge to dominant religious discourse. By playing with the form and genre of autobiographical writing in *Oranges*, Winterson is able to create a form that overlaps and connects both autobiography and fiction and create *autobiographical fiction*. *Oranges* is both entirely 'true' and it is also *fiction*. That *Oranges* is fictional, however, does not mean that it is not inspired by 'true/real' events from the author's life. The text is entirely believable and subversive in its intent, despite being a work of fiction, which is written in a manner that mimics autobiography. Thus, the postmodern question arises: to what extent is autobiography also a form of fiction? Similarly, what role does the author's life play in the production of autobiography and fiction? It is worth examining what makes autobiography different from fiction, in order to understand what makes *Oranges* autobiographical fiction. Kate Douglas (2001) draws attention to the various contradictions surrounding the role of the author in the production of autobiography and fiction alike:

> [a]t a time when two, or perhaps even three generations of literary theorists have primarily been raised on the notion that the biography of the author is almost irrelevant to the text, in the contemporary world of book publication and

> marketing, *the author has if anything become even more crucial to a book's success*. (806, my emphasis)

The biography of the author is certainly relevant to the study of Jeanette Winterson's texts and particularly to *Oranges*, which presents itself as a hybrid form of autobiographical metafiction. Many of her texts are an unusual combination of fantasy, fiction, and autobiography. However, according to Douglas, "[m]ost critics and reviewers refer to [*Oranges* as] being an 'autobiographical novel'" (810). [10] Winterson herself has drawn attention to the novel's autobiographical form in her introduction to the 1996 Vintage edition of *Oranges*, when she anticipates her reader's question: "[i]s *Oranges* an autobiographical novel?" and answers, "[n]o not at all and yes of course" (Winterson, *Oranges* xiii)". *Oranges* is made up of a mix of fiction and biography, presenting itself as autobiographical fiction. The term 'autobiographical fiction' is paradoxical, since a text cannot be autobiographical (attempting to be true to life/fact) 'fictional' (made-up) at the same time. Thus, the terms appear to be incompatible. However, Douglas argues that

> [...] autobiography may not only be closer in form to fiction than to biography, but there may also be less expectation of truth and greater valuing of artistry, at least in some critical circles. In the case of Winterson's [...] writing, for example, in the current climate there seems ample opportunity for an autobiography to be more than just an autobiography and yet not be expelled from the autobiography genre by marketers and critics. (816)

Philologist Georg Misch (1950) defined the genre of autobiography as "the description (graphia) of an individual human life (bios) by the individual himself (autos)" (Misch 5). However, autobiography is more complex than it may appear; it is 'more than just autobiography'. The life of the author in the production of either an autobiographical or fictional text is always pertinent to the production of the text. Despite Barthes' assertion that the author is dead, the increasing interest by readers in an author's personal life can certainly be read as indicative of modern culture's resistance to Barthes' theories of the 'death of the author'. Indeed, the author's biographical information plays a deliberate and crucial role in the creation *and* the reception of a text, both in fiction and autobiography alike. That an author can be 'accessible' to the reader, both through his/her text and to a certain extent through mainstream media, suggests that authors of autobiography owe a substantial part of their "authorial authority" (Douglas 820)

[10] Grice and Woods (1998)

to their readers, who seek out the "constructed accessibility of the autobiographical author" (Douglas 820).

The reader and the author of autobiography enter into a relationship, a theory which Philippe Lejeune (1975) refers to as the "autobiographical pact" (27). This 'pact' considers autobiography to be a communicative act where the author and the reader agree upon a 'contract'—the 'autobiographical pact' in which the readers of autobiography can assume that there is a correlation between the name of the author and the narrator of the story or the character in the book. The author's name on the cover of the book, for the reader, is indicative of one autobiographical subject which identifies the author, narrator and the protagonist as one person. This is certainly true of *Oranges*. That Winterson is both the author of the text, as well as a character in the novel, suggests to the reader that some of the text is 'true'. Lejeune argues that "[t]he autobiographical pact is the affirmation in the text of this identity, referring back in the final analysis to the *name* of the author on the cover" (14). The author (and the apparent connection to the author through the text) remains crucial to the success of contemporary autobiographical texts. The revival of the importance of the author in this case

> has been facilitated by the autobiographical form itself, which like biography, documentary, or fly-on-the wall television, professes to allow a unique glimpse into the life of someone notable that will tell readers/viewers something valuable about their own lives. In this way, autobiography, [...] encourages the consumption of 'authorized and authenticated lives'. (Smith and Watson 3)

The consumerist agenda of the literary industry is vehemently critiqued in Winterson's second novel, *Boating,* and brought to the fore by the characters of Noah and Bunny Mix. This element of *Boating* highlights Winterson's frustrations with becoming a world-famous author after the publication of *Oranges*. The reader and mainstream media's desire to pry into the author's life and examine to what extent the novel's events can be read as '*true*',[11] suggestive of the desire for the autobiographical pact— is what later leads Winterson to plead with her readers to "forget about me" and focus on the text (Bush 55). This apparent contradiction in Winterson's

[11] 'Truth' in this dissertation refers to the extent to which the reader can verify that the events which the author of the 'autobiography' refers to, actually happened in reality. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2010: *Reading Autobiography*) refer to this phenomenon in the search for truth in autobiographical writing: "[i]n trying to differentiate autobiographical narrative from biography, the novel, and history writing, we encounter a fundamental question: what is the truth status of autobiographical disclosure? How do we know whether and when a narrator is telling the truth or lying?" (16).

presentation of the text as autobiographical fiction and her desire to remain separate from the text, suggest that her text is made up of multiple layers of truth and fiction and should not be read as 'truth', the same way in which her texts encourage readers to not read the Bible as 'truth'. However, Jeanette Winterson as the author of *Oranges* and, to a certain extent, also the main character in the book, cannot be ignored entirely. That Winterson's own life shares various similarities to the life of Jeanette, the protagonist in the novel, is both relevant and imperative to the interpretation of the text.

Authorial control over the text begins with the connection between the author and the reader and the text's correlation to the biographical details of the author. However, in autobiographical writing, using a biographical reading of a text to establish the veracity of the story can create various dilemmas for literary interpretation. When a text is written in first person past tense and the narrator has the same name as the author, it becomes difficult for the reader to extract the author from the text (Douglas 813), despite the fact that it is important to do so because the reader can never know that the author is telling the truth. Mark Freeman (2003) muses on the necessity of rethinking certain terms associated with autobiographical writing; terms such as 'reality' and 'fiction' and 'truth' in autobiography (120) because, as D. L. Schacter (1995) writes, "the output of human memory often differs—sometimes rather substantially—from the input. Remembering can fail not only because information is forgotten over time, but also because it is changed and distorted" (quoted in Freeman 119). As a result, Freeman suggests that the reader considers that the '*constructed*' element of autobiography is not necessarily *untrue*. He argues that the concept of 'truth' in autobiographical writing is more complicated than simply a matter of fiction or reality. Freeman urges the reader to "think beyond" (127) the concept of 'truth' in autobiographical writing and rather focus on the kind of truth that is "made available by narrative and by the poetic processes that go into the telling of the past" (126). This is what enables readers of autobiography to believe the author and participate in the autobiographical pact. The fact that both the author and 'character' or protagonist in the text have the same name suggests that the author wishes to create an 'autobiographical pact' with the reader and focuses not on the historical accuracy of the text, but rather on a genuine effort to tell the truth about their past, despite the fact that Lejeune later added that the "contract" in an autobiographical text implies "the possibility of some kind of verification" (3). The

'autobiographical pact' that the author presents to the reader is an agreement with her readers that they are indeed reading about an actual person whose existence is legally verifiable (Lejeune 11) and therefore the text can be verified as having a semblance of truth, or historical accuracy. Consequently, the author's life becomes a relevant focus of an autobiographical text, even if it is against the author's wishes that it be so, in order for the reader to establish the text's accuracy and reliability. While this may not be true for authors of fiction, it is certainly necessary when reading *Oranges*, because Winterson's own biographical life plays an important role in the meaning of the text. The reader must mediate the tension between language's "referential promise and its threat of mendacity" (Spicer 387) and must negotiate the various contradictions between the truth of a text, the historical accuracy of a text and the objectivity of the text.

According to Jakki Spicer (2005),

> [t]he very category of autobiography requires readers—consciously or not—constantly to engage in these mediations in their practices of reading. They must decide whether what they are reading refers to what had once existed in the world, in the life and/or the mind of the author; whether it is an entirely self-contained textual universe; or whether it exists in some middling ground between the two. Thus, although the name of the author influences the practice of all kinds of reading, in autobiography, the figure of the author, as a ghostly presence animating and providing the life for the text, has pressured reading practices in sometimes difficult and troubling ways. *The figure of the author is the pivot around which questions of autobiography's relation to or difference from fiction finally turn*. (387-388 my emphasis)

Spicer refers to the reader's process of reading the autographical text, a practice which Tonya Blowers[12] (1998) is interested in. Blowers argues that the autobiographical text can be seen and read as a textual contract in which the author and reader know that the genre "implies a specific mode of reading: autobiography, not fiction" (Blowers 115), suggesting that the reader accepts the reality outside the text as well as the text's *representative* nature. Naturally, the author of autobiography and fiction plays a significant role in the creation of meaning within a text. That autobiography and fiction share certain aspects is certainly also relevant to the study of Winterson's texts, particularly *Oranges*, because it is a hybrid of both. Autobiography provides

[12] Tonya Blowers' thesis: 'Locating the self: re-reading autobiography as theory and practice, with particular reference to the writings of Janet Frame', suggests that a new approach is needed to the interpretation both the self in society and the relationship between narrated self and context.

the reader with an element of intimacy which is not always available in fictional texts; access to the author in a very personal form. In addition, the reader's access to the author's biographical information via the text's blurb or via the internet, although perhaps not provided in the text, allows the reader to determine the veracity of certain elements of the text, an access which is not always necessary to readers of fiction, because they are at once aware of the fact that they are reading something fictional, even if it has been inspired by true events. This is despite the fact that the reader is not always acutely aware of the constructed nature of autobiography because the reader assumes that the writer of autobiography is telling the 'truth'.

Many of these issues come into play in Winterson's text *Oranges*, particularly because the text is a blend of both autobiography and fiction. In fact, this is what makes *Oranges* such a powerful text. Winterson is aware of the apparent contradiction between autobiography and fiction, which is why her use of fairy tales, fantasy and fiction are carefully interwoven through Jeanette's narrative. The character of Jeanette both is and is not Winterson herself. Similarly, the events which Jeanette narrates in *Oranges*, are inspired by true events and interwoven with obviously fictional aspects. James Olney (1980) argues that autobiography is the site upon which individuals have "discovered, asserted, created a self in the process of writing it out— [and it] requires the reader […] to participate fully in the process, so that the created self becomes [...] almost as much the reader's as the author's" (24). Thus, the reader undertakes the task of imagining that the author of the autobiographical fiction is writing about reality, though a reality in the past. According to Spicer "[a]utobiography thus both asserts that there are unique individuals, [and] claims that this individuality is written by employing a narrative model, through the technique of crafting one's story so that it is readable, interesting, and familiar—as if it were realist fiction" (398). Certainly, Winterson achieves this in *Oranges,* regardless of the fact that she is writing *fiction*. Jeanette's story is humorous, making it a story which is relatable and apparently 'true'.

Autobiography therefore, to an extent, takes on the task of the novel, both of which, "in writing the *particular* [and] the *unique* individual, provide the story of individuals' existences as a truth beyond the pages of the book and cover over the contradictions inherent in this category" (Spicer 400). Spicer goes on to argue that "at the level of the text […] and at the level of the concept" (400), there is no difference between the novel and autobiography, suggesting that both

do the same ideological work, which is to offer a medium for interrogating the world in which we live. The novel and autobiography alike can "show us how exactly the phenomena we see as facts are contingent on our very representations of them; and that other forms of representation can provide us with different insights" (Hutchinson 367). Yet there are many contradictions in the identification of the differences between fiction and autobiography, which is why critical scholars struggle to come to a conclusion regarding "a clear and definitive distinction between supposed transcripts of reality and alleged fabulist creations" (Spicer 400). Rather, the difficulty is deciding on these distinctions between autobiography and fiction due to "their emergence out of the same set of textual, political, and epistemological principles" (400).

The classification of *Oranges* as autobiographical fiction leaves much to be explored in the various fictional aspects of the text. The novel certainly appears to be autobiographical in that Winterson narrates the experiences of Jeanette. She also imbues the text with various layers of intertextual references, fiction, and fairy-tales. Thus, the question arises as to how much of *Oranges* can be considered autobiographical and to what extent the fictional aspects of the text achieve a subversion of dominant discourses as a semi-autobiographical or fictional text. *Oranges* encourages readers to enter into a form of the autobiographical pact with Winterson the author, because Jeanette, the protagonist of the novel, appears to be both the author of *Oranges* as well as the protagonist of the text, suggesting that the novel is in part about the author herself and a period in her life and in part fictional. However, the text is also saturated with elements of fantasy which the reader can only assume to be fiction (for example the appearance of the orange demon). The reader should also be aware of the fact that the author places the experience of the past in relation to what has since happened (Freeman 123). This means that the experience has been "understood and re-understood from [...] the moment of narration" (Freeman 123) and is therefore a 'reconstruction' of the past from memory. Consequently, although Winterson creates an autobiographical pact with her readers, this pact is *entirely fictional* because Winterson's text cannot be considered to be entirely autobiographical. Thus, the autobiographical pact created when reading *Oranges* is what powerfully aligns the readers with Jeanette and a lesbian viewpoint, because the reader understands the text to be inspired in part, by true events experienced by Winterson the author. While *Oranges* contains many elements of verifiable truth, these elements of truth are combined with layers of fantasy, fiction and fairy-tale. The text is what Winterson herself refers to as "fiction masquerading as memoir" (Winterson *Art* 53).

"Fiction Masquerading as Memoir": Autobiographical Fiction, Fairy-Tale and Fantasy in *Oranges*

Oranges masquerades as an autobiographical tale about Winterson's life growing up with her adoptive, Pentecostal parents. Yet the narrative is interspersed with intertextual and Biblical layers as well as fantasies and fairy-tales; elements which are clearly fictional. The novel narrates Winterson's experience of 'coming out'[13] in a Christian community, from the perspective of her younger self – Jeanette. It is a deeply personal narrative, yet its themes of religion, love, gender, family and sexuality have universal power, as a result of which the text is widely read and studied. It is perhaps the most well-known of all her books. These themes foreground many of the issues which Winterson scrutinises in her subsequent texts. The emergence of these issues in her debut novel is particularly significant because Winterson argues that they are themes that are vastly different from the conventions of writing by women in the 1980s. Winterson asserts "1985 wasn't the day of the memoir- and in any case, I wasn't writing one" (Winterson *Happy* 3). In her later memoir, *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal* (2011), Winterson explains what she had hoped to achieve when writing *Oranges*:

> [...] I was trying to get away from the received idea that women always write about 'experience'- the compass of what they know - while men write wide and bold – the big canvas, the experiment with form [...]. Those things made me angry. [...] Why should a woman be limited by anything or anybody? Why should a woman not be ambitious for literature? Ambitious for herself? (Winterson *Happy* 3)

The above feminist perspective is profoundly explored in *Oranges*. Winterson's text experiments with form, while simultaneously writing a story which is both deeply personal and relatable. In this context, Winterson's refusal to be 'limited' is illustrative of her challenge to the Biblical and patriarchal boundaries within which Jeanette narrates her story. Winterson later writes about her mother's confrontation about the truthfulness of what she has written in *Oranges*: "she confronts me with the fact that I have used my own name in the novel – if it is a story, why is the main character called Jeanette?" (Winterson *Happy* 4) This episode again leads to the question of how much of *Oranges* can be considered autobiographical. Winterson writes that she is often asked

[13] For the purpose of this thesis I will rely on Mary Lou Rasmussen's (2004) definition of the term 'coming out', which she defines as "[...] becoming aware of one's sexual orientation or gender identity and beginning to disclose it to others" (144).

about what parts of *Oranges* are "'true' and what [are] not 'true'?" She asserts that "[t]ruth for anyone is a very complex thing. For a writer, what you leave out says as much as those things you include. *What lies beyond the margin of the text?"* (Winterson *Happy* 5 my emphasis). Despite the fact that the textual agreement between the reader and Winterson as the author means that the reader is aware of the inconsistencies of memory which will never be entirely true, the reader, however, still *trusts* the author to tell the truth. Swirski (2010) argues that "it does matter whether what we read is fiction or not. [The reader] care[s] whether [they] are hoaxed into believing that what [they] read is truth or make-believe" (74). Smith and Watson (2010) argue that readers often

> conceive of autobiographical narrators as telling unified stories of their lives, as creating or discovering coherent selves. But both the unified story and the coherent self are myths of identity. For there is no coherent 'self' that precedes stories about identity, about 'who' one is. Nor is there a unified, stable, immutable self that can remember everything that happened in the past. (61)

Throughout *Oranges*, notions of the self and reality are illustrated as narrative constructions and sites upon which meaning can be created, erased and changed. *Oranges* presents itself in the vein of a *bildungsroman,* which Winterson subverts for a feminist purpose. In this text, Winterson narrates the trials and tribulations of Jeanette, culminating in her ostracisation by her family and community for her refusal to 'renounce' her homosexuality.

Autobiography's claim to truth is that the story which is being told is one which happened in reality and therefore requires the reader to *imagine* the reality of the story. Consequently, it can be argued that the imagining of truth exists in autobiography the same way in which it exists in fantasy and fiction. Spicer asserts that "[…] the autobiographical subject might be understood as an imagined presence that animates and gives autobiography its meaning and power [and] that holds in place the law of autobiography" (391). Spicer identifies the role that the author of the autobiography plays as storyteller:

> […] storytellers, who are invested more in the story—and the experience that it communicates—than they are in themselves as tellers, give way to authors, who are utterly invested in themselves as individuals; the prominent status of the author's name is the clearest indication of this (whereas storytellers are generally nameless), and this investment is nowhere more apparent than in autobiographies. (397)

In the central chapter of the narrative "Deuteronomy, the last book of the law" (Winterson 91-93) Winterson seems to embark on an explicit consideration on 'history' and its relation to the category of 'stories'. She effectively collapses history into an act of storytelling, and questions the claims to objectivity in traditional historical discourses. As Jeanette states in *Oranges*, "[p]eople like to separate storytelling which is not fact *from history which is fact*" (Winterson 91, my emphasis). Indeed, all history involves the subjective process of re-telling and reimagining stories. History, argues Jeanette, can be a means of "denying the past," which "is to refuse to recognise its integrity. *To fit it, force it, function it [...] until it looks the way you think it should*" (93 my emphasis). Here, Winterson ponders on the capacity of history to represent the past fully, because "[e]veryone who tells a story, tells it differently, just to remind us that everybody sees it differently" (93) and concludes that history is merely a "reducing of stories" (93). In this chapter, Winterson effectively collapses 'history' into an act of 'storytelling' and draws attention to the fictional aspects of history. She suggests that history cannot ever be entirely truthful, but it is rather a distorted, biased oversimplified version of the past. Winterson consequently cautions that dominant historical and religious discourses often become 'a means of denying the past' and function as a socially acceptable way of separating fact and fiction so that people "know what to believe" and "where they [belong]" (Winterson 91-92), suggestive of dominant patriarchal discourses and their tendency to create boundaries within which to live. Winterson's text highlights the manner in which the Bible masquerades as 'historical truth' despite the fact that history and truth are part of the process of telling and re-telling *stories*, a process which is inherent in fiction. Winterson, as the author and autobiographical presence in *Oranges*, imbues the text with "meaning and power" (Spicer 391), similar to the way in which God as the supposed 'author' of the Bible and the inspiration behind the text, imbues the text with meaning and power. Winterson parallels *Oranges* with the Bible and by blurring the lines between autobiography and fiction, also draws attention to the fictional aspects of the Bible and Biblical discourse.

The prevalence of fairy-tales and fantasy in Winterson's text is an important element of Winterson's narration. The fairy-tales and fantasies in the text are what define *Oranges* as a hybrid mix of autobiography, fantasy, and fiction. These elements illustrate the

> plurality of history and the inability to fully represent reality. Through the novel's multiple, frequently fantasy-based narratives, a reader sees [that] there are so

> many more options; the ways of knowing, being and understanding are diverse. (Hutchinson 360)

Winterson's efforts to represent 'Jeanette' in the narrative take the form of many different alter-egos whose narrations Winterson weaves into the seemingly straightforward narration of Jeanette. Smith and Watson argue that "the project of self-representation [can] no longer be read as providing direct access to the truth of the self. Truthfulness becomes a more complex phenomenon of narrators struggling to shape an 'identity' out of an amorphous subjectivity" (201). Thus, in these fairy tales which fragment Jeanette's narration, Jeanette is made up of several semblances, both male, and female, but finally becomes a "Wintersonian alter ego, Winnet Stonejar" (Hutchinson 366) which is also a cleverly constructed near-anagram for Jeanette Winterson. The story of Winnet Stonejar is the main fairy-tale of the novel because it echoes Jeanette's own story in a fairy-tale world. Similar to the way in which the story of 'Winnet Stonejar and the Wizard' reflects the various events in Jeanette's own story, the other fairy-tales in the text act as counterpoints to various episodes in Jeanette's narrative and are often interwoven into a particular episode in which Jeanette learns an important lesson. For example, Jeanette's nightmares about marriage are interwoven with the fairy-tales of *Beauty and the Beast* and *Red Riding Hood*; fairy-tales in which an innocent young woman encounters a beast[14] in one form or another. Similarly, when Jeanette discovers her adoption papers, her mother becomes the horrifying Queen of Spades in the fairy-tale of *Alice in Wonderland*. This life-changing moment in Jeanette's life is paralleled with a fairy-tale and draws attention to the element of construction, which pervades the narration of memory. Onega discusses the episodes of realist mode which are interspersed by fairy-tale/fantasy narrative modes, and narrated by an internal and external narrator (144): "the first-person sections narrated by the adult Jeanette are focalised from the perspective of the younger character, and she can only express what happened to her by fictionalising it or dreaming about it" (144). Hence, the fairy-tales within the text also function as a psychological means for Jeanette to express the inexpressible, a form of catharsis by which she can reject traditional discourses and her mother's totalising view of truth, fact, fiction, good and evil. Jeanette's maturation and the process of self-discovery in the text is always paralleled

[14] Jeanette struggles to understand the difference between fairy-tale 'beasts' and 'real beasts' since women in her community regularly refer to men as beasts. Thus, Reisman (2011) contends that "Winterson uses the conventional fairy-tale plot of women transforming beasts into men through a kiss in order to reveal that this construction of heterosexual female desire does not work for Jeanette" (6), and as a result she struggles to meet the expectations of norms in her society.

by a fairy-tale. Rusk notes that "[…] when fantasy elements appear, they simply interrupt the main narrative, without any transition to make it clear who thinks them, the narrator or the protagonist" (107). This is also what Pascual suggests makes the narrative 'chaotic'. It is interesting to note that after Jeanette 'comes out' in her community, the elements of fantasy in the text increase, suggestive of the fact that Jeanette "must use all of her imaginative resources to interpret and cope with the social repercussions of her private life" (Rusk 107). Indeed, Jeanette asserts in her narrative that "[s]tories [help] you to understand the world" (Winterson 29). Thus, fantasy and fairy-tales are used by Winterson as a subversive means to make sense of her situation in retrospect.

The myth of Sir Perceval runs parallel to the myth of Winnet Stonejar and to Jeanette's own narrative. Perceval is a knight at King Arthur's round table and is leaving Camelot on a quest to find the holy grail. In this fairy-tale King Arthur represents Jeanette's mother. Sir Perceval reflects: "[h]e felt himself being pulled like a bobbin of cotton so that he was dizzy and wanted to give in to the pull and wake up round familiar things" (Winterson 174). At this point in Jeanette's narrative, Jeanette has had to leave home and she reflects like her alter ego, Sir Perceval: "[my mother] had tied a thread around my button to tug me whenever she pleased" (176). The fairy tales within the text serve to facilitate Jeanette's own journey into self and sexual maturation, but also provide the text with a mythical dimension, which disrupts the autobiographical elements of the text. The fairy-tales within the text "from their unique and often empathetic perspectives—can lead to a more complete, or at minimum more reflective, understanding of history than any 'official' version might claim" (Hutchinson 365). Thus, Winterson's inclusion of elements of fantasy and fairy-tale in her autobiographical fiction serve to provide a greater understanding of the events which Jeanette narrates. The fairy tales are as much a psychological expression of trauma, as well as an intertextual layer of meaning within the text. The fairy-tales are juxtaposed by the Biblical fables and allusions, which imbue the text with parables such as the parables, found within the Bible.

Oranges are not the Only Fruit, the Orange and the Orange Demon

That dominant patriarchal discourses are also inherently political practices is highlighted and criticised in *Oranges*. Jeanette's story "offers a challenge to patriarchal discourse by revealing that notions of heterosexual (as good and natural) and homosexual (as evil and unnatural) are social constructs that both foster and derive all too much power from society's status quo" (Hutchinson 361). Winterson illustrates in *Oranges* that dominant patriarchal discourses serve to silence those 'other' discordant voices that threaten to destabilise the power of dominant patriarchal society, just as Jeanette is almost silenced by her community and the way in which Jeanette's first girlfriend, Melanie, is silenced into contrition. When Jeanette encounters Melanie a few years after their relationship has ended, Melanie is married to a man and visibly pregnant. Jeanette reasons that Melanie has been "brainwashed" into denying her lesbian identity; however, Melanie simply contends that "those sorts of feelings were dead" (Winterson *Oranges* 171), suggesting that their relationship was merely a phase. Winterson suggests that Melanie's denial of her past is indicative of the effect of dominant discourses and their power to silence those 'other' discordant voices. Melanie, seemingly unaware of the power of Biblical boundaries, contends that the way Jeanette sees their history "would make a good story", while her version is "just *the history,* the nothing-at-all facts" (Winterson *Oranges* 171, my emphasis). This highlights the way dominant Biblical discourses privilege certain stories over others. Jeanette's version of the events (their lesbian relationship) is merely a 'good story' according to Melanie, while Melanie's version of the events (merely a brief moment in her past) is *just the history*. Melanie has chosen to conform to patriarchal society's heteronormative expectation of a woman. She has become the Biblical version of a Godly woman, that is, heterosexual, compliant and "serene" (Winterson *Oranges* 171). Heterosexuality as represented by Melanie (as she appears later) is a political institution which serves the interests of male-dominated society. In this patriarchal society focussed on capitalism and gender identity, heterosexuality is demonstrated as the only acceptable form of sexuality and all who refuse to conform to this sexuality are deemed a threat to society. During this encounter, Melanie offers Jeanette an orange, which Jeanette refuses. This exchange serves as a metaphor for Jeanette's refusal to conform to heterosexuality in the same way as Melanie has conformed to the patriarchal religious society's norms. The motif of the orange emerges frequently throughout the text and

signifies two contrary belief systems. On the one hand, the fruit represents dominant discourse and the only way of living for Melanie and for Mrs Winterson (which is why Jeanette frequently refuses the fruit when offered to her by her mother). Eating oranges is a practice which, for Jeanette, signifies conforming to dominant religious and patriarchal norms and a denial of her true self because it is what has been prescribed by her mother and the church. On the other hand, Winterson subverts the motif of the orange into an alternative symbol, by introducing the character of the orange demon, which helps Jeanette to come to terms with her homosexuality. The orange demon signals for Jeanette that there are alternate belief systems and models for living. The orange and the orange demon therefore become contrasting motifs. The orange signifies conforming while the orange demon, a little orange-coloured creature, encourages Jeanette *not to conform* to Biblical discourses. The motif of the orange as an act of conforming is reinforced frequently in the text. Jeanette's mother often gives Jeanette the fruit at crucial moments in her life. Jeanette recalls the moment she lost her hearing and was sent to the hospital. Jeanette recollects feeling frightened and confused, at which point her mother gives her an orange: "I peeled it to comfort myself, and seeing me a little calmer, everyone glanced at one another and went away" (Winterson, 36). The peeling of the orange provides comfort to, Jeanette because it represents the traditions she is used to. Similarly, her community is satisfied when she peels the orange, symbolically suggesting that they too are happy when Jeanette conforms. It is in the chapter "Joshua" that Jeanette contemplates issues of love and demons. She believes that everyone has their own demon and hers is an orange demon "that beguiles" (Winterson 138). At one point in the chapter, as she tries to peel an orange given to her by her mother, she begins to wonder about other fruits like grapes or bananas. This is the first time in the text that Jeanette begins to doubt that oranges are the only fruit and begins to wonder what alternatives there might be. Symbolically, the orange represents the law and the idea that oranges are the *only* fruit signifies the Biblical boundaries within which Jeanette is expected to live and conform. However, unlike Melanie, who surrenders to the church and its law, Jeanette chooses to follow her demon and rebel against the Biblical boundaries which her mother and her community impose on her, thus rejecting the orange fruit and seeking alternative 'fruits'.

It is relevant to note that the motif of the orange demon emerges not only in *Oranges* but also in *Boating*, suggesting of the similar themes in the two texts. The motif of the orange demon

in *Boating* will be addressed in detail in Chapter Three. In *Oranges*, the orange demon emerges after Jeanette is isolated in a closet without food or water for thirty-six hours. The orange demon is the primary manifestation "of the fantastic" (French 233) in the novel and is neither "male nor female, [thus] the demon is that ambiguous part of [Jeanette] which defies categorisation, but which is nonetheless fundamental to her sense of coherence" (French 233). The demon, like so many of Winterson's characters, refuses "to be classed according to normative gender codes" (French 233). When Jeanette asks the demon about its gender, it responds, "Doesn't matter, does it?" (Winterson *Oranges* 109*),* reproaching Jeanette before she makes gender-based assumptions. The orange demon is both an element of fantasy as well as a manifestation of Winterson's subconscious that arrives at various moments within Jeanette's narrative and provides clarity and wisdom to Jeanette. [15] The demon asserts that "[e]veryone has a demon" (Winterson *Oranges* 108) and should Jeanette choose to accept hers she will have a very "different, difficult time" (Winterson *Oranges* 109) because she will not be accepted by her community or society. The demon comes to represent Jeanette's struggle to remain true to her beliefs and desires. The demon informs Jeanette: "[w]e're here [the demons] to keep you in one piece, if you ignore us, you're quite likely to end up in two pieces, or lots of pieces" (Winterson *Oranges* 109), suggesting that the demon has emerged in her consciousness to protect her. Consequently, Winterson transforms the character of the demon from a traditional religious symbol of evil to a manifestation of "individuality and freedom" (Rusk 111) in the text. This subversion illustrates how Winterson frequently plays with Biblical themes, subverting symbols traditionally seen as evil into good and vice versa. French argues that the orange demon and

> its centrality as an image in the text [underscores] heterosexuality's cultural dominance. If the demon is a hallucination, Jeanette has unconsciously appropriated and transferred the association between "orange" and heterosexuality to her own situation, so that what was once dominant is now marginal, and vice versa. (234)

[15] Fiona Black (2006) questions in her essay 'Writing Lies: Autobiography, Textuality and The Song of Songs', whether Winterson's fairy-tale characters are merely several versions of the same self, "as part of a lengthy experiment with love and identity" (Black, 163). She wonders whether this one fluid character is perhaps Winterson herself, who uses the act of writing as a process of cleansing and "recreating" (Winterson in an interview with Eleanor Wachtel, 1997).

The demon thus becomes a manifestation of Jeanette's subconscious. Jeanette concludes in *Oranges*, "[i]f I let them take away my demons, I'll have to give up what I've found" (Winterson *Oranges* 108). This is the very core of Winterson's postmodern Biblical subversion, that conforming to societal ideals requires one to deny one's 'true' self. Similarly, Brown argues that Winterson's

> articulation of a lesbian subject is actually inseparable from her revisionary engagement of the Bible. By repeatedly turning and re-turning several types of narrative about the origins of identity and story-making, Winterson reconstructs both some [B]iblical texts and a hallmark of the gay and lesbian literary tradition as precursors for the prophetic voice of the main character. (233)

The intertextuality of the Bible in Winterson's texts not only draws attention to the subversive effects of Biblical discourse and the process of resignification, in which the Bible no longer holds a position of supreme authority, but it also serves as a vehicle for representation of the lesbian subject (Brown 234).

Jeanette's conscious decision to 'keep' the demon is suggestive of her refusal to submit to patriarchal models of 'normal' and 'acceptable' social and sexual behaviours and her desire to break free of Biblical boundaries. These behaviours are ascertained through the ideological indoctrination of culturally appropriate stories. The Biblical stories are illustrated as behavioural models for Jeanette as a young girl growing up in the church. Nancy Armstrong (1987) comments on this process of indoctrination, where the Bible "helped to define what men were supposed to desire in women and what women, in turn, were supposed to desire to be" (251). Similarly, Reisman confirms that in *Oranges*, "Winterson both shows the ways in which the Biblical stories that Jeanette is exposed to early on reinforce the fundamentalist religious beliefs and works to expose the political, sexual, and religious bias in these texts as a way of subverting their naturalizing function" (12). It is thus highly ironic that Winterson's challenge to patriarchal Biblical discourses advances through the framework of the first eight books of the Bible. By establishing the first eight books of the Bible as the framework for Jeanette's story to unfold, Winterson remakes these Biblical discourses into precursors for the articulation of a different way of living, no longer articulated by religious and political discourses. The overtly religious framework of the text can be disorientating as the reader discovers that the narrative is, in fact,

autobiographical fiction: a tale of Jeanette being forced to 'come out' within a hypocritical religious community.

Lesbian Desire Articulated through a Biblical Framework

The mix of genres and themes in Winterson's text produces a narrative which is unsettling and often seemingly chaotic due to the mix of realist and fantastical narratives. Mónica Calvo Pascual (2000) compares the narrative of *Oranges* to chaos theory and argues that in the theme of "postmodernist writing, Winterson engages in a subversion of a master narrative through parody revision —she works from within the foundations of patriarchal thought that she intends to undermine by transforming them into the bases of her lesbian political manifesto" (22). According to Pascual, female desire is embedded into the narrative structure of *Oranges* through the chaotic structure of the text, made up of a disordered mix of realist narrative, fantasy and fairy-tale. She refers to Paulson's definition of a chaotic text: "an open system, never completely decipherable or interpretable [whose meaning] is impossible to recover unambiguously" (Paulson, in Porush 78). This structure, argues Pascual, allows Winterson to subvert the patriarchal discourses of historical and Biblical narratives. It also allows Winterson to refute the gender binaries inherent in these dominant discourses. Winterson succeeds in expressing "female desire and subjectivity while making lesbian feminist claims and essentialist views on feminine writing and sexuality compatible with postmodernist tenets and formal experimentation" (30) throughout the text.

Pascual suggests that

> Jeanette Winterson adopts women's sexuality and writing in women's terms - beyond phallocentric dictatorship and influence - as the solid foundations for the construction of a new sense of identity free from patriarchal definitions in binary terms. As our reading of the novel shows, this achievement eventually enables women - especially lesbian women - to erect themselves as the speaking subjects of their own stories. (31)

Oranges, as told from Jeanette's perspective and in her retrospective voice, is a text in which Jeanette can construct a new identity and 'erect herself as a speaking subject of her own story'. That this story is told within the framework of the first eight books of the Bible, is both very powerful and deeply ironic. Grice and Woods examine Winterson's "use of Biblical books for an

organising framework in her text: never shy of appropriating high cultural references [she] uses a supremely patriarchal text to organise her own story" (6). By using the first eight books of the Bible as the titles for the eight chapters of her own text, Winterson guides the reader through Jeanette's story and uses the narrative to subvert Biblical discourse by rewriting herself and her history into this Biblical framework. Al-Shara explains that Winterson

> [...] chooses to use the eight Biblical Chapters in order to name the different stages of her major character's life. According to Peter Childs (2005), the eight Biblical Chapters that comprise *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985) mirror Jeanette's life from the beginning in Genesis to the story conclusion on Christmas Day (266). *Apparently, the author is responsible for naming these chapters and not the narrator.* This means that the story of the major character is separated in space and time from the Biblical context. In other words, Jeanette, the character, and the narrator, is unaware of the implications of these Biblical names. (242 my emphasis)

Winterson, as the author, takes on the task of subverting Biblical discourses rather than leaving this to Jeanette, the novel's protagonist. Thus, the author's narratorial purpose is not merely to document her own story but also to create a challenge to the Biblical boundaries presented in these Bible stories, together with the norms and traditions enforced by the religious community in the book as well as in reality. While Jeanette as the protagonist merely relates her experience, Winterson as the author provides the text with a purpose much larger than autobiographical narration, and imbues the text with a supreme challenge to Biblical boundaries.

Winterson's deliberate construction of the Bible as an overarching framework for Jeanette's narrative mimics the Bible's claim to truth. Winterson's self-posed question to herself and to her readers in the introduction of *Oranges*: "[i]s *Oranges* an autobiographical novel?" (*Oranges* 53) can also be read as a question about the 'verifiable truth' of the Bible, which the narrative of *Oranges* and then later *Boating* seeks to complicate. *Oranges* should be read as a postmodern text due to Winterson's concerns with truth and the capacity of stories to be both truth and fiction. Scult affirms this very power of storytelling to create 'truth':

> Story telling itself is used to undermine the very will to power which drives it. Rather than abandoning the form, the narrative tradition is turned on itself in order to reach a truth that lies beyond storytelling. The reader is induced to join the [B]iblical author in his attempt to use the story to break out of the circle of his own manipulations and arrive at a point of more authentic speaking. At those moments of authenticity, when the author appears to reach beyond his own

> capacity to invent, the force of the author's hermeneutical performance becomes visible in the text and gives the text the power to ring true. (347/8)

Jeanette's narration in *Oranges* functions to destabilise Biblical discourses which are often, if not overtly referred to in the text, carefully implied. Onega insists that "[t]he realism of Jeanette's autobiographical narration is further undermined by the novel's division into eight chapters [...]: 'Genesis', 'Exodus', 'Leviticus', 'Numbers', 'Deuteronomy', 'Joshua', 'Judges' and 'Ruth'" (21).

This is the most obvious aspect of Winterson's appropriation of the Bible in her text. The chapters in *Oranges*, named after Biblical books, specify not only the Christian environment in which Jeanette grows up, but also the development of her story through the history of Israel in the Bible. Winterson thus illustrates the laws of the Bible as the laws which dominate Jeanette's world. Jeanette's mother takes on the role of the Biblical 'father' and the head of the home. She is the enforcer of Biblical law in their family. By framing Jeanette's story within the macrocosm of the history of the Israelites, Winterson associates Jeanette's individual private history, with the public history of a religious group, relaying her belief that history and Biblical discourses are socially constructed.

The Biblical framework of *Oranges* begins from the opening chapters of the book, which are named after the first eight books of the Bible. The first five books of the Bible are considered to be the books of the law (also known as the Pentateuch[16]. These books dictate the law of God. Genesis is the beginning and tells the story of the 'original sin' and Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden. In *Oranges*, Genesis describes Jeanette's 'beginnings'. It outlines her family life and contains much religious imagery, such as the star which leads Mrs Winterson to find and adopt Jeanette, illustrating Jeanette to be a 'Jesus' figure. Exodus tells the story of Israel's bondage in Egypt and the Ten Commandments given to Moses by God. In this chapter of *Oranges* Jeanette tells the story of her own bondage in her home and her exodus to school after she is forced to attend school. Leviticus is the book of the law which explains how daily life should be lived in holiness before God. In *Oranges*, the chapter of Leviticus, like the Biblical book, focuses on some of the laws which Jeanette's mother lives by. The opening sequence

[16] The Pentateuch in Christianity refers to the first five books of the Bible. In Hebrew, these five books are known as the Torah. The term 'Torah' refers to the law of God as revealed to Moses and recorded in the first five books of the Hebrew scriptures (the Pentateuch).

concerning fornication by the neighbours illustrates Mrs Winterson's disdain for sin, particularly of a sexual nature. Numbers is the fourth book of the Bible and narrates the story of the Israelites wandering in the desert as they travel to the Promised Land. On the journey, many of the Israelites are destroyed by God for their 'murmuring' of unhappiness at the conditions they face in the desert. In *Oranges*, this chapter develops the themes of romance and sexuality. In this chapter, Jeanette meets and falls in love with Melanie. She also learns about Mrs Winterson's old relationships and her ideas about love and heterosexuality begin to change.

The Biblical book of Deuteronomy is the final book of the law, also known as the second law. In this book of the Bible, Moses delivers three sermons to the Israelites before they enter the Promised Land. In these speeches, Moses recapitulates the forty years wandering in the wilderness and reminds them to observe the law. In the second sermon, Moses reminds the Israelites that their possession of the Promised Land is dependent on their obedience of the Law. Finally, the third sermon reminds the Israelites that if they are unfaithful they should repent and can receive forgiveness. In *Oranges*, the book of Deuteronomy (The Last Book of The Law) is the shortest chapter of the book. In this chapter, Jeanette addresses the reader directly, and speaks about the ability of time to change the past. She addresses the constructed nature of history and the manner in which people like to tell stories, which are separate from fact. Unlike the Biblical book of the law, in which Moses encourages the Israelites to obey the law of God, in this chapter of *Oranges* Jeanette questions the very nature of history and the law. Jeanette questions whether simple adherence to the law is appropriate, since all of history is made up of stories which are often manipulated by people and time. The book of Joshua tells the story of the campaigns of the Israelites in Canaan, the destruction of their enemies, and the division of the land among the twelve tribes. The most well-known story of Joshua is that of a warrior named Joshua, who is chosen by God to take possession of the Promised Land. He does so by commanding an army to march around the walls of Jericho once a day for seven days. On the seventh day, the Israelite army marched seven times around the walls, the priests blew horns, shouted, and the walls of the city fell, leading to the conquering of Jericho by the Israelites. In *Oranges*, the chapter of Joshua is the climax of the novel. In this chapter, Jeanette and Melanie's love affair is discovered, leading to a church sermon in which Jeanette and Melanie are accused of practising 'unnatural passions' and having fallen under a spell by Satan. Jeanette is isolated and starved for two days. During this time, Jeanette becomes delirious and she frequently has dreams and visions about a

city surrounded by stone walls. Jeanette imagines Humpty Dumpty sitting on the wall and falling off. She believes that one must choose a side, rather than sit on wall like Humpty Dumpty. Like the story of Jericho in the Bible, Jeanette must overcome her community in this chapter. She is forced to fight many battles regarding her sexuality. The book of Judges in the Bible is the story of the rule of the Israelites by several different leaders (or judges). These judges do not always successfully run Israel and their lack of leadership leads to sin and disobedience. During this rule, there is a cycle of disobedience to God, after which God delivers the Israelites to their enemies. When the Israelites repent, they are delivered once again. In *Oranges,* this chapter introduces the many judges in Jeanette's community. Jeanette's mother has kicked her out of the house and Jeanette and Katy stay in a guesthouse where they are discovered and asked to leave. This chapter shows that there are many judges who rule over Jeanette's life and this results in Jeanette's life becoming more and more fragmented. The book of Ruth tells the story of a non-Israelite, who accepts the God of the Israelites as her God and the Israelite people as her own. Ruth exemplifies female loyalty and courage in her commitment to Naomi, her Israelite mother-in-law, even after her Hebrew husband has died. In *Oranges*, the chapter of Ruth is dominated by the myth of Winnet Stonejar and the myth of Sir Perceval whose stories run parallel to Jeanette's story. The chapter and book end with a sense of reconciliation between Jeanette and Mrs Winterson, which recalls the Biblical theme of the connection between Ruth and Naomi. Mrs Winterson and Jeanette have, to an extent, bridged their gap, although not entirely.

The eight chapters of *Oranges* certainly do not exactly mirror the books of the Bible, but, rather, share similar themes and events and at times share structural significance and stories which are only recognisable as Biblical folk-lore to those who are familiar with the Bible. This narrative technique suggests to the reader that the structure of the text will reflect the content of the Biblical chapters, which then serve to "intensify the reader's sense of irony because Winterson replaces macrocosmic issues within a microcosmic experience" (Al-Shara 242). These chapters juxtapose Jeanette's quest for social, sexual and spiritual maturation with God's creation of the world and the laws for living as presented to the Israelites. The effect of this juxtaposition is highly ironic, since it forces the reader to read Jeanette's story of coming to terms with her homosexuality within the framework of Biblical law. The first eight books of the Bible deal for the most part with the law, suggestive of the Biblical boundaries within which Christians are expected to live. Those who, like Jeanette, choose to defy these boundaries, face

several painful and terrible consequences as dictated in the Biblical books. Winterson, however, subverts these consequences in *Oranges* by narrating an alternative experience, thus suggesting that the Bible is not 'true' and should not be used as a handbook for living. In so doing, *Oranges* uncovers a concern with "historically privileged discourses on heterosexuality and gender dichotomy, discourses that inappropriately constrain desire and the fluid expression of identity" (French 232). Jeanette's aversion to repressive authoritative discourses is demonstrated early in the narrative. In what can be read as a humorous exchange between herself and pastor Finch, she rewrites the end of the story of Daniel in the lion's den with 'fuzzy felt', in which Daniel, rather than escaping the den, is being eaten by the lions (Winterson *Oranges* 13). This exchange serves to highlight the incongruous beliefs held by Jeanette and those held by her community. These incompatible beliefs persist throughout the text to the climax when Jeanette and Melanie meet. Jeanette is thankful to God for her relationship with Melanie, suggestive of the fact that she is not aware that her relationship with Melanie is considered a sin. Rather, she believes that 'to the pure, all things are pure', considering her relationship with Melanie to be a blessing from God. She is confused and betrayed when her community turns against her. Winterson highlights the hypocrisy of her community through the narrative and emphasises the danger of using the Bible as a book of rules to be followed as 'truth'. Her desire to rewrite traditional Biblical tales from a young age suggests that she is already uncomfortable with the prescribed rules for living which these stories endorse and seeks to create alternative stories. Hutchinson remarks on Winterson's concern with storytelling:

> Winterson has a preoccupation with telling stories. And while this is to be expected of a fiction novelist, characteristic of her nine novels is that they present the reader with a world of seemingly endless narrative: stories within stories within stories. Her explicit storytelling challenges dominant representations and questions the ability to understand the world as it may first seem. Often combining history with fantasy and established patterns of knowledge with myth, *Winterson's stories have the effect of blurring the distinctions between fact and fiction, between what is real and what is not*. (352/353, emphasis added)

Winterson's ability to write stories which blend fact and fiction suggests that she is attempting to achieve a subversive task in *Oranges*. Her text deliberately subverts the genre of autobiography and the genre of the novel, by 'blurring the distinctions between fact and fiction' and offering a mix of fact and fiction which transcends the boundaries of 'history' and 'truth', key elements in

the genre of autobiography. Similarly, in *Oranges*, Winterson highlights the 'constructed' nature of history and the Bible by narrating her story from a Biblical framework. Both Winterson and Jeanette resist Biblical discourse and seek to re-create dominant patriarchal discourses into alternative models for living. Jeanette's journey of self-discovery occurs when she realises that she is not the problem, but rather the problem is the patriarchal society in which she lives. By framing Jeanette's story in the first eight chapters of the Bible and then later re-visioning the Biblical narrative of Noah and the Flood in *Boating*, Winterson highlights an important postmodern concern with the concept of 'truth'. Winterson's subversion of the genre of autobiography to create autobiographical fiction, gives *Oranges* the power of being both a fictional text as well as a form of autobiography, while it also simultaneously addresses other postmodernist concerns with fact and fiction, reality and fantasy and history and fairy-tale within *Oranges*.

Chapter Three: *Boating for Beginners*: Rewriting the Flood Myth

Boating's 'Serious' Postmodern Techniques

Winterson's second novel, *Boating,* was also published in 1985 shortly after *Oranges.* Winterson classifies *Boating* on her website as a "comic book with pictures" (Winterson para 2) a "bit of flotsam written for money" (Onega 35) while she worked on a much more 'serious' text (*The Passion)* and waited for *Oranges* to be published (Onega 35). Winterson also explains on her website that the text simply "isn't that important to [her]. It's fun but it doesn't matter" (Winterson para 8). Perhaps because of Winterson's own attempt to sweep the text under the rug, the reception of *Boating* has been varied. Critics who were anticipating a text similar in literary intricacies to *Oranges* were dismayed by *Boating* and labelled it "comic fantasy", which can develop a "fatal affinity with whimsy and cuteness" (Anne Borton quoted in Wright, 78). However, one scholar who was outspoken about the significance of the text was David Lodge (1988), who found the text enjoyable and considered it to be a radical break from realism. Lodge appreciated *Boating's* blasphemous comedy about the Book of Genesis (Lodge quoted in Wright, 78). Lodge's reading of the text is apt; it is much more than a funny book. Mark Wormald (2005) points out that the playfulness and humour of *Boating* "allows [the text] to be something much more serious than merely a funny book; in its more schematic way, it is an equally challenging questioning of fundamentalist claims within a postmodern world" (54). The use of humour in the text functions as a postmodern narrative technique to undermine Biblical discourse. Onega regards *Boating* "as ideologically charged as Winterson's other novels" (35) and raises several "ethical questions about how we ought to live, about individual responsibility and the future of humanity" (35). Winterson develops these themes and concerns in *Oranges* and readdresses these issues from a different perspective in *Boating.* Onega notes that *Boating* "displays the same bent for artistic experimentation, the same preoccupation for linguistic exactness and […] the same concern with totalitarian ideology and the excesses of religious fundamentalism that informs *Oranges*" (35). Winterson's subversion of patriarchal and Biblical discourses is displayed in various forms in the two texts through the use of various postmodern techniques.

Boating is a sustained satirical re-writing of the Biblical story of Noah and the Flood as told in Genesis. The novel offers the reader an "'alternative' account of Noah's relationship with God, of the making of the ark and of the Flood […]" (Onega 36) and narrates the story which is

left 'between the lines' in the Bible. Winterson writes the story through an external narrator, Gloria, who can enter the minds of the characters to narrate what each character is doing. The novel is set in the city of Nineveh, now Palestine, and is described both as the historical setting of the book of Genesis "Ur of the Chaldees" (Winterson *Boating* 15), as well as a "contemporary metropolis, with all the advantages and short-comings of a twentieth-century capitalist Western society" (Onega 37). Winterson uses this combination of settings to criticise modern society and the effects of Biblical discourse on modern society. The playfulness of *Boating* stems from the humorous recreation of the Biblical story of Noah and the Flood, comprising many postmodern themes and concerns. In the story, God makes his presence known to Noah, who runs a pleasure boating company on the Euphrates called 'Boating for Beginners'. According to Doan (2007) Winterson's novel, *Boating,* rejects notions of realism and constructs a "narrative by exploiting the techniques of postmodern historiographic metafiction [...] as well as its ideology [...] in order to challenge and subvert patriarchal and heterosexist discourses and, ultimately, to facilitate a forceful and positive oppositional critique" (Doan quoted in Andermahr 5, 6). *Boating*, in particular, demonstrates this 'mocking parody'. While her first novel still receives much more attention, this thesis aims to examine *Boating* in relation to her first novel, *Oranges,* and suggest that *Boating* functions in an equally important, subversive way. Makinen argues that *Boating* is "a comic novel that has received little critical attention, though to the few who do analyse it, it is often one of their favourites. Like *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, it involves an intertextual rewriting of the *Bible*, though this time focussing on Noah and the Flood" (1). In *Boating*, Winterson highlights an important postmodern concern with the concept of 'truth', while simultaneously addressing other postmodernist concerns such as fact and fiction, reality and fantasy, and masculinity and femininity.

Boating, like *Oranges*, can be considered deeply postmodern in its styles and concerns. Knickerbocker & Brueggeman (2008) argue that the failure of modernism to create a better world has resulted in a postmodern attitude of distrust and disbelief (66). They argue that "[t]hese attitudes are often reflected in reluctance to accept the 'official' version of what is true or the 'rules' for how things must be" (Knickerbocker & Brueggeman 66). Thus, postmodern literature contains many stylistic characteristics, which can be defined as postmodern literary techniques. Some of these techniques include humour, satire, intertextuality and irony. In *Boating* the various intertextual layers in the text are obvious and reveal a narrative which

presents itself as much more than a 'comic' book. Humour, irony, and satire are used as narrative techniques to subvert the Biblical story of Noah and the Flood. Winterson uses these techniques to create a 'distrust' of the Bible's 'official version of history'. Winterson's use of postmodern narrative techniques allows her to do several things with the narrative: the contrasting elements in the text produce both serious and comical elements in the text which

> [...] cannot be seen as anything other than a work that subverts its surface appearance of belonging to a reconstituted [B]iblical time, place and mythology. The surface appearance is important for the humor, that is, for its parodic and ironic elements, to function, and can be upheld only with difficulty, by simultaneously trying to remember and forget any [B]iblical knowledge one may think one has. (Sönmez and Kılıç, 106)

Linda Hutcheon in her book, *The Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988), helped to establish an understanding of humour and irony as a postmodern technique by advocating the "subversive potential of irony, parody, and humour in contesting the universalizing pretensions of 'serious' art" (19). Wilson Kaiser (2003) argues that Hutcheon has spearheaded our understanding of the connection between

> the [...] ludic wordplay of postmodern literature [and] the concept of distanced irony [.] [Y]et her work clearly evinces a tension between this comic dimension of postmodern irony and the broader, 'serious' critical aims of postmodernism to debunk cultural myths. (31)

Hutcheon claims that irony allows intertextual references to be more than merely authorial academic playfulness. Rather, the often humorous and parodic elements innate in postmodern literature call attention to representational structures (*Politics of Postmodernism* 95). Thus, Hutcheon's classification of postmodern techniques involved in postmodern literature is that of work which is ludic but involves a foundationally important ironic critique of authority and authorial control based on a uniquely humorous style. *Boating* utilises this very ludic writing. It is playfully comic, ironic and satirical. By satorising a text such as the Bible, Winterson relies on a text which is vaguely familiar to most people in the Western world. Winterson's narrative retains enough elements from Genesis for the reader to recognise what it is she is satirically challenging; however, the narrative also radically diverges from the plot of Genesis, allowing the reader to understand that *Boating* is a playful *alternative* to the original story, rather than merely a different version of the same tale. The story of Genesis is widely considered to be 'truth', a

discourse which purports to tell the tale of the beginning of the world. *Boating,* however, subverts this text, suggesting that we can never know the 'truth' of the world and that texts which claim to do this should not be trusted.

Thus, through Noah's re-writing of God's autobiography, the extra-textual question of the Bible's credibility is raised, subversively challenging the notion of inspired truth. Wright believes that *Boating* "[…] for all its playfulness dramatises those elements in the Biblical narrative which someone in Frye's third phase of language development is bound to find rather primitive" (82). This re-telling provides an alternative account of the Flood, which encourages the reader to question the authenticity of the Bible and its claim to 'divine truth'. *Boating's* epilogue concludes with an ironic twist after Soames finds a message in a bottle. The message reads "'[h]ey girls, I made it' signed 'love D'" (Winterson *Boating* 156). Soames, however, dismisses the find as a "cheap hoax" (156), thus undermining an opportunity for 'truth' to be found. The irony, which is only available to the readers, signals a subversive shift in power, from Noah and Yahweh to the reader, who is privy to the 'truth'. This ironic conclusion of the epilogue highlights the serious task of the postmodern narrative techniques (humour, irony and satire) in *Boating*.

The Bible, the All-Powerful Ice-Cream Cone and the Author as God

Winterson's satiric engagement with the Biblical story of Noah and the Flood in *Boating* begins with the thoughts of the protagonist, Gloria, musing comically on her future career as either a secretary or a prostitute. Gloria dreams of living in the city and seeking a fun-filled life, where she will meet and fall in love with the 'perfect' man. Initially, Gloria represents a female character trope found in typical romance novels. Gloria is, however, later re-born into a subversive heroine who resists the typical feminine heroine. Gloria lives with her mother, Mrs. Munde. While feeding her pet elephant one-night Gloria sinks "into a daydream of what life would be like in the city […]" (Winterson *Boating* 7) and Gloria's fantastical narration begins. Gloria begin the tale about Noah, a "bored and fat" (Winterson *Boating* 7) owner of a thriving pleasure boat company called 'Boating for Beginners'. The story, explains Gloria, is one the reader will have read "in the Bible and other popular textbooks, but there's *so much more between the lines*" (Winterson *Boating* 7, my emphasis). Winterson's most obvious satirical

element of *Boating* is revealed as her critical engagement with the Bible and what she deems is hidden 'between the lines' in the Bible. One-day Noah receives a sign from heaven, in the form of a hand from the sky, holding a pamphlet. The pamphlet reads "I AM THAT I AM, YAHWEH THE UNPRONOUNCEABLE" (Winterson *Boating* 8). The names used in the text are a mix between modern names and names found in the Bible, which, like the mix of ancient and modern society, serves to humorously depict the way in which the Bible, as an ancient text, is applied to modern times. Noah calls a press conference in which he tells the people of Nineveh that he and the "One True God" (Winterson *Boating* 8) are working on a manuscript that "would be a kind of global history from the beginnings of time showing how the Lord had always been there, always would be there and what a good thing this was" (Winterson *Boating* 8). Here, Winterson begins her critique of history as depicted in the Bible and which functions as a political dominant discourse, suggesting that history is clearly constructed by men. Winterson highlights the construction of the Bible as a political text and, as a result, the construction of history in *Boating*. Yahweh and Noah decide to release the book in instalments, beginning with "*Genesis,* or *How I Did It*" (14) and the second volume, "*Exodus,* or *Your Way Lies There*" (Winterson *Boating* 14). The text satirises contemporary culture's self-help books, a genre which Winterson believes is just as dangerous as the Bible because some of these books prescribe a certain kind of femininity for women. Winterson's illustration of Noah's capitalist nature allows her to satirise modern culture's need to obtain success, wealth, and fame. Both instalments of Noah and Yahweh's books are a great success, allowing Noah and Yahweh to begin work on "something a bit more philosophical about the role of priests and things" (Winterson *Boating* 15), which, the reader can assume relates to the book of Leviticus because Leviticus addresses the people of Israel and some passages specifically address priests, outlining how the people and the priests are to conduct themselves while in the tabernacle. The pair also intend to work on a '*Good Food Guide*' (presumably relating to Numbers and Deuteronomy), thus completing the Pentateuch (Wright 80). Winterson makes similar use of the Pentateuch in *Oranges*, framing the story of Jeanette by chapters named after the first eight books of the Bible.

Noah and God, after the success of their books, decide to dramatise the first two volumes to create "a touring stage epic about the world and how the Unpronounceable had made it" (Winterson *Boating* 20). Winterson thus emphasises and satirises modern culture's obsession with celebrities and mass media, especially Christian 'celebrity' preachers. During this project,

Gloria, her mother and various other characters such as Bunny Mix, are enlisted to take part in the production, which is also to be filmed by a film crew who wish to capture a documentary of the behind-the-scenes drama, alluding to the fictional audience's desire for the 'truth'. Noah's sons and his daughters-in-law, Sheila, Desi, and Rita, are enlisted to play the main characters in the film. During this production, Yahweh decides, on a whim, to "change the script to include the Flood, and to transform the show into a real event" (Onega 42). This unexpected turn of events grants Noah the opportunity to "re-write Genesis and make it look like God did it all from the beginning. […] [and] say that God made the world, the air, the sea, and that it became so corrupt he had to flood it and start again" (Winterson *Boating* 110). When Gloria, Desi, Doris and Marlene learn of this plan, they promise to stick together and try to survive. The flood provides Noah with the opportunity "to erase from the collective memory the knowledge of the cyclical nature of events and to impose on them a teleological myth of origins, with its prescribed beginning, middle and end" (Onega 42). Thus, Winterson provides in *Boating,* a bizarre alternative to the story offered in the Bible, which seeks to desacralize and destabilise the original Biblical tale. The character of the orange demon, which also makes an appearance in *Oranges,* reappears in *Boating.* The demon tells Gloria that the truth or fictionality of this account is immaterial: "[t]he vital thing is to have an alternative so that people will realise that there's no such thing as a true story" (Winterson *Boating* 124). This is Winterson's postmodern task: to highlight the impossibility of historical and Biblical discourse ever being wholly true and the importance of allowing 'alternative' stories to be heard and told. Winterson is also interested in narrating the experiences of 'alternative' characters in order to challenge and subvert dominant patriarchal discourses that dictate a lifestyle that frequently subjugates women and homosexuality.

In Winterson's 'alternative' to the Biblical Flood story in Genesis, Yahweh, is still considered the "One True God" (Winterson *Boating* 13); however, he is not the creator of the world as depicted in the Bible. Rather, the world was made prior to even his creation, having been "mystically created" (Winterson *Boating* 50). The God of *Boating* is also not the omnipotent God of the Bible; instead, Yahweh is described as having been created by chance by Noah in an accident involving a toaster and a frozen piece of cake. Nonetheless, Yahweh is still portrayed as a transcendental God who lives in the clouds with the angels (Winterson *Boating* 85). Thus, ironically, Noah is the creator of God. rather than the other way around. Winterson's

project is to show that history is a form of fiction which is created and written by man and should thus be treated with suspicion. The Yahweh of the text is an anthropomorphised character at first illustrated as a despotic godhead, who is more interested in power than in love (Winterson *Boating* 14). Thus, Winterson provides an ironic commentary on the God of the Bible who, on a whim, decides to wipe out the entire world. She satirises this God in *Boating*, thereby desacralising the God of the Bible by rendering the character of God comical and dangerous. Winterson mixes serious and comic narration to create a subversive effect in *Boating*. God, in this text, is described as being "about six feet high and proportionally large" (Winterson *Boating* 84). The size of Yahweh is immediately both comic and threatening. His size and menacing power are subverted by Winterson in the description of Yahweh as having a long white beard and being unable to use cutlery properly, immediately characterising him as ridiculous. Similarly, Yahweh's dependence on Noah, whom he refers to as 'mother', is an element of satiric comedy: "'Hello, mother. How are you?' (At this greeting the angels snickered, knowing how Yahweh talked about Noah behind his back)" (Winterson *Boating* 89). The God-figure is frequently derided by nicknames such as "YAHWEH THE UNPRONOUNCEABLE", "the all-powerful ice-cream cone" (Winterson *Boating* 115) and "the chocolate sundae in the sky" (Winterson *Boating* 127). The references to food suggest that Yahweh as a God is harmless, child-like and disposable, subverting the reason why the God of the Bible chose to flood the world in Genesis. The Biblical story of the Flood states that God decided to flood the earth because, "it was corrupt" (Genesis 6:12), despite the fact that in the beginning of Genesis God declares that all of creation "was very good" (Genesis 1:31). In *Boating*, it is Noah and Yahweh who are shown to be corrupt. Their books and touring stage epic are built on lies and deception. Thus, Winterson subverts the story by arguing that, unlike in the Biblical story, it is Noah and God who are corrupt.

The God-figure in *Boating* has been connected to Frankenstein,[17] which suggests that Noah is the creator of a monster and signals a shift in power from the God-figure to *man*. This reversal of the creator role in *Boating* is Winterson's subtle referral to Ludwig Feuerbach, German philosopher

[17] "[…] In a quotation from *Time Out* cited in an advertisement for the Vintage Edition of *Boating,* Noah is described as 'Howard Hughes crossed with Frankenstein - an eccentric overseer of capitalism who makes 'God' by accident out of a piece of gateau and a giant electric toaster" (Onega 38).

and anthropologist's radical assertion in a famous paper: 'The Essence of Christianity' (1873), that "the idea of God was created by man to express the divine within himself, and that the beginning, middle and end of religion is *man*" (Onega 39). Essential to Feuerbach's complex work is the notion that humans project their desires onto an imagined God-head. Winterson employs Feuerbach's theory in *Boating* by having Noah create the God-figure and use the God-figure to his own advantage. In the text, Noah and Yahweh create a set of rules for living which they ironically call "Fundamental Religion" (Winterson *Boating* 85). Noah and Yahweh come to an agreement that it is Yahweh who has "made the world and everything on it, and [Noah goes] along with that as [God's] chosen spokesman" (Winterson *Boating* 85). Thus, Noah takes on a role as a priest and media spokesperson for Yahweh and becomes wealthy from the combined power and his capitalistic endeavours as Yahweh's spokesperson. Ironically, this is exactly what happens in modern society and Winterson thus subtly refers to the modern evangelical preacher, who is both wealthy and famous. The effect of this reversal of roles with man as the creator of God, rather than vice-versa, undermines the Biblical story in Genesis which illustrates God as the creator of the universe and of the Bible as being divinely inspired by God and written by his 'priestly writers'. In *Boating*, Winterson subverts this notion, demonstrating humans to be the authors of God as well as the authors of both Biblical and historical discourse. *Boating*, in a somewhat blasphemous tone, satirises the process of Biblical writing by suggesting that the book was written by a misogynistic capitalist with the enlisted help of a romance novelist, Bunny Mix. Thus, by bringing the role of the author to the fore in *Boating,* Winterson emphasises the role of the author in the *creation* of a text. The effect of this emphasis is to draw attention to the way in which the author is able to construe the text however she pleases. And undermines the supposed 'divine truth' of the Bible.

The power of the author is frequently demonstrated through Noah, Yahweh and Bunny Mix's process of re-writing Genesis. The three authors constantly lie, distort, and hide the 'truth' while they write their book, suggesting to the reader that this is perhaps what the authors of the Bible did. Noah, in fact, frequently rewrites God's so-called biographical book, which leads the reader to question the notion of dominant discourses, believed to be written by man, though inspired by God. This casts doubt on the veracity of Biblical texts and stories such as the story of the Flood. In *Boating*, Winterson highlights the human element involved in the 'inspiration' of

the Bible and emphasises her postmodern attitude to texts based on the belief that all history is a "*discursive* reality" (Hutcheon 24 original emphasis) of the past. According to Hutcheon, postmodernism

> contest[s] the very possibility of our ever being able to *know* the "ultimate objects" of the past. It teaches and enacts the recognition of the fact that the social, historical, and existential "reality" of the past is *discursive* reality when it is used as the referent of art, and so the only "genuine historicity" becomes that which would openly acknowledge its own discursive, contingent identity. The past as referent is not bracketed or effaced, [...] it is incorporated and modified, given new and different life and meaning. (24)

Winterson subverts Biblical discourse by drawing attention to the role of the author in the Bible, as well as in her own text. She belies the notion of divine inspiration and instead suggests that all history is created by humans, rather than a divine being. This notion alludes to the theories of Feuerbach and is suggestive that Winterson believes that at the heart of human religion is *man*, not an all-powerful and omnipotent God.

Northrop Frye's *Great Code* and the Construction of History as 'Truth'

Another distinguished author that Winterson's text makes frequent reference to and whose theories she uses to subvert Biblical discourse is Northrop Frye. Frye is a literary critic and theorist whose ideas shaped much of the modern religious theories of the twentieth century. Wright agrees that "[t]he most obvious satirical element of [*Boating*] is fundamentalism, the literal reading of the Bible, mocked by Northrop Frye who is referred to several times in the novel [...]" (78). Similar to Feuerbach, Frye's theories of the stages of language as outlined in his book *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (1982) point to the notion that the Bible should be read as a poetic story, rather than read and understood literally. However, unlike Feuerbach, Frye does not attempt to discredit the Bible. Rather, as Richard Kearney (1983) notes,

> Frye does not reduce religion to human imagining [...]. Nor does he wish to suggest that the Bible is merely a work of literature. What he does propose, however, is that a literary study of the Bible is not only legitimate but necessary for a deeper understanding of both the Bible itself and the history of Western literature [...]. (190)

Frye states that his book "[…] attempts a study of the Bible from the point of view of a literary critic" (158). Thus, similar to Winterson herself, Frye urges his readers that his book "[…] is not a book of Biblical scholarship, much less of theology: it expresses only [his] own personal encounter with the Bible and at no point does it speak with the authority of a scholarly consensus" (158). Gloria, *Boating's* protagonist, becomes an enthusiastic fan of Frye's theories. After discovering his book one day, she takes his theories quite literally and begins to chart her personal progress through his stages of language: the metaphoric, the didactic and the prosaic (Winterson *Boating* 60). This somewhat comic implementation of Frye's theories allows Winterson both to critique and revere Frye's theory as a means for reading and responding to the Bible. Frye hoped through his book to provide the "[…] possibility of human enlightenment and freedom through a radical new understanding of the *symbolic* language of the Bible" (Frye 1, my emphasis). Frye usefully applies Vico's[18] "division of language into the poetic (metaphor), the hieratic (analogy) and the demotic (descriptive prose), in order to trace the ways in which man's linguistic response to the Word of Revelation developed over the centuries" (Kearney 191). Frye believes that "[p]eople who read the Bible literally […] misunderstand its use of language, applying third-phase thinking to first-phase writing" (Wright 79). He argues that the first-phase involves the poetic conception of language in which the 'literal' meaning or 'truth' of the Bible can only be derived if we read the Bible as we read poetry (Frye 79), by accepting that the interconnection of words allows for a metaphorical meaning (Frye 79). Thus, "[t]here are various secondary meanings […] that may take the form of concepts, predictions […] or a sequence of historical or biological events, and that are always subordinate to the metaphorical meaning (Frye 79). Frye's understanding of language provides a useful way of looking at the language of the Bible and how to interpret a Biblical text.

In the second phase of language God becomes monotheistic, conceptual and abstract and acts as a 'transcendent reality' behind all objects (Wright 79). Frye believes that in the second phase of language the concept of 'God' "moves into the centre of the order of words" (33). In the third phase (the descriptive phase), "beginning with the onset of modernity in the sixteenth century, language is seen as pointing directly to things" (Wright 79). According to Frye, in this

[18] Frye's theory is derived from the Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico's major work *The New Science* published in 1725.

phase, "the word 'God' becomes linguistically unfunctional" (33) because mythological thinking gave way to scientific thinking which "helped push the conception of 'God' out of the world of time and space" (Frye 33). The root of Frye's text is to argue that it is only metaphorical language (like poetry or literature) that can use the concept of 'God' as "a verb, a dynamic process, not a thing" (Wright 79). Frye argues that "[t]he degree to which the Bible does record actual events can perhaps never be exactly ascertained" (61) because "[…] for the historian of the Biblical period, the primary historical authority, is not the Bible but what […] archaeology can still dig up in the way of acceptable evidence" (Frye 61). Thus, for Frye, the Bible only succeeds at 'truth' in so far as it is a metaphorical story, to be read as poetry, not a narrative of historical veracity. Thus, Winterson's inclusion of Frye in *Boating* provides a signpost of what to 'read between the lines' of the text and suggests that people who read the Bible too literally "misunderstand its use of language" (Wright 79) and apply third-phase thinking to first-phase language resulting in a misconnection of theories. Terry Wright (2007) suggests that Noah and Yahweh's two-volume epic is based on an adaptation of both the original story in the Bible, as well as a text known as the *Enuma Elish.* This text was discovered in Nineveh, written on seven clay tablets, and was later published by George Smith in 1876. The text is a Babylonian creation epic where the God or original 'creator' is Marduk, who "defeats Tiamat the sea-monster" (Graves cited in Wright 80). In this epic, Marduk is also responsible for a flood, which re-starts the world. Rob Pope (2005) believes that "Marduk's claims to divinity is his commissioning of dams and waterways that seek to control the meeting of 'Father Freshwater' and 'Mother Ocean' at flood-time" (Pope 164). Marduk's power is thus deeply related to his power to create the flood.

Frequently the *Enuma Elish* is used interchangeably with the Bible in *Boating*. Gloria tries to remember "[…] what she [knows] about the book of Genesis" (Winterson *Boating* 50) later in the text and recalls "[t]here was an explanation on the pagan gods […] then a blood scene where everyone went to war" (Winterson *Boating* 50). In this recollection, Gloria is, in fact, remembering the *Enuma Elish,* rather than the Bible. Wright, therefore, believes that *Boating* demonstrates "[…] a clear awareness on Winterson's part of the textual history of the Book of Genesis, its origins in a world full of dramatic epics about creation, all very much in Frye's first phase of language" (80). Winterson is indeed aware of the palimpsestic nature of the Bible – that it is derived from many different myths. It is, therefore, relevant that Winterson has chosen this

alternative tale as an 'interchangeable' epic to that of the Biblical story of Genesis. This alternative once again removes the Biblical story from the position of authority, providing many different interpretations of the story of the Flood, rather than just one dominant discourse. Pope agrees that "[…] like any other narrative, Noah's flood can be read 'against or across the grain': in terms of what is absent or in the background rather than present and at the centre" (164). Thus, the *Enuma Elish* and the intertextual layer of Frye's *The Great Code* are important elements in Winterson's subversion of the Bible. Winterson's dramatisation of the textual layers involved in the production of a text provides a parodic insight into the complex textual history of the Bible.

Boating's Subversive Female Characters and the Orange Demon

Winterson's characters are more often than not unusual characters: homosexual, large, anti-feminine and obstinate. Her characters defy the boundaries of usual hero and heroines. The characters of Winterson's books are the opposite of the characters depicted in Bunny Mix's books. These books are all the same story varying only slightly in plot and character. Bunny Mix's heroines are objectified women. Bunny herself, as well as the characters in her books, represent the unattainable perfection which women are expected to aspire to in modern society. She owns a health spa called 'Bees of Paradise' (Winterson *Boating* 74) where women can go to have their dreams of being beautiful come true (Winterson *Boating* 77). Gloria, the heroine of *Boating,* is like so many other women in the text, obsessed with Bunny Mix and her Romance Show where women find 'love'. Gloria is described as a purblind eighteen-year-old girl whose "recent experiment with ash-blond tint had left her threadbare" (Winterson *Boating* 9). Her comic musing on her future occupation and her decision that "there's no such thing as a bald prostitute" (Winterson *Boating* 9) is the first clue that Winterson's preferred heroines do not subscribe to modern patriarchal society's expectation of female heroines. Gloria befriends a group of women, Rita, Sheila and Desi, who are Noah's daughters-in-law. The women, with Noah's eye for business, own a clinic for "[…] people who have problems, personal problems, with their bodies and themselves" (Winterson *Boating* 27). This clinic specialises in psychological therapy for people "[…] who can't come to terms with either their sexuality or their chosen expression of it […]" (Winterson *Boating* 33). The women appear to Gloria, who is in an extremely emotional state (Winterson *Boating* 26), which Onega attributes to "[…] emotionalism fostered by [Noah's form of] Fundamental Religion" (42) and enlist Gloria as a

helper in their clinic which initiates Gloria's maturation process. Rita, Sheila and Desi, as well as Doris, Noah's cleaner, and Marlene, a transsexual from the clinic, teach Gloria that she is capable of separating what she feels and what she thinks (Winterson *Boating* 44) and that women can have orgasms without men (Winterson *Boating* 45) after which she no longer only dreams of "fall[ing] in love with the right man" and starring in the "Bunny Mix Romance Show" (Winterson *Boating* 45). Rather, Gloria now dreams of charting her progress through Northrop Frye's three stages of language - a journey into maturation which she thinks will help her to escape from the way of life her mother hopes she will follow. She desperately wishes to reach the third phase where her "understanding of the world will be as fluent and fluid as that of 'Continuous Prose'" (Onega 45).

It is deeply ironic that, as Gloria begins to focus on "reason" and the "loss of wonder" and reach into the "empty place in her heart" (Winterson *Boating* 71) as a means of reaching Frye's third phase of language, she begins to experience hallucinatory dreams and visions in which she meets an orange demon. The orange demon is an incarnation of Gloria's imagination, which Gloria and her friends can all see. Onega argues that this is suggestive of a "collective female identity" (45), one which was certainly not available for Jeanette in *Oranges*. The demon, importantly, also appears in *Oranges* in order to encourage Jeanette to stay true to herself, despite her persecution. Similarly, the demon tells Gloria that it is there to teach her "to be poetic while she teaches herself to be analytic" (Winterson *Boating* 71) reminding the reader of the purpose of *Boating*: that without a 'poetic' understanding of a text the 'analytic' aspects of the text will not make sense. This, too, is exactly what Winterson is saying about the Bible. Those who read the text too analytically are missing the point.

While the orange demon intervenes in the plot frequently to provide insight for the characters, Doris complains about its presence, arguing that it is spoiling her moment of fame, to which it responds, "[t]his may be my one appearance in print. I may never occur in another novel" (Winterson *Boating* 71). Gloria remarks that the demon turns up everywhere "as a demon, a sprite, omnipotent author, flashes of insight. [...] Whenever something other than the plot drops in, it is really the orange demon adding an extra dimension" (Winterson *Boating* 71/2). Thus, Winterson provides a clue to the recurrence of the orange demon: to provide an 'extra dimension' and imbue the text with insight that may not be available to the characters. The

orange demon makes its entrance into the narrative of *Boating* and helps Gloria and her friends to disrupt Noah's tyrannical attempt to re-write the whole world (Winterson *Boating* 124). The demon remarks that they must do this, so that they will be able to tell an alternative story about what happened for future generations (Winterson *Boating* 23-4). The orange demon wisely reminds Gloria why Biblical stories and myths which become known as 'fact' and 'truth' are dangerous: "[w]hat seems outrageous to one generation becomes commonplace to the next. You think this can't happen; but later, when it's history no one will be surprised" (Winterson *Boating* 69). The orange demon thus alludes to the manner in which fiction often comes to be perceived as historical fact. Onega suggests that the orange demon is "superior to Gloria and her friends", (46) similar to the way in which Yahweh becomes more powerful than his creator, Noah. The creations eventually surpass their creators. The orange demon is also self-consciously aware of the 'plot' of the novel and reminds Gloria and her friends that "[u]nlike the rest of you, I'm not bound by the vagaries of this plot. I can move backwards and forwards and I can tell you [the future]" (Winterson *Boating* 123). Onega argues that Gloria is in diametrical opposition to Noah, in that she is given the task of imagining an alternative version of the events being told by Noah.

> As is suggested by Gloria's comparison of the stages in her maturation process with the three stages in the development of language postulated by Northrop Frye, the heroine's own identity is wholly fictional, a possibility that occurs to Gloria herself when [...] she finds herself "wondering for a moment who was feeding her lines" (BB 99/100). The heroine's imaginative capacity to create the orange demon points to Gloria's paradoxical nature, both as a fictional character existing in the fictional world of *Boating* and as a fully visionary poet/prophet with the power to create selves and worlds within the realm of language. (Onega 46-47)

As Onega points out, Winterson's heroine in *Boating* is endowed with the power to imagine that she is a fictional character. Gloria is also the only character to oppose the version of events which Noah would have the reader believe is the 'truth'. Similarly, the orange demon also functions as a disruption to Noah's plans. The enormous task given to Gloria and her friends by the orange demon is to survive the flood in order to create an alternative to the story which Noah and Bunny Mix will tell, so that people "[...] will realise that there's no such thing as a true story" (Winterson *Boating* 124). *Boating* questions the veracity of not only Biblical texts but also historical and scientific discourses and their claims to divine or absolute truth. Gregory J. Rubinson (2005) argues that the orange demon's suggestion that the girls create an alternative story is Winterson's self-reflexive comment on "her own project in *Boating*, to provide an

alternative so obviously fabulated that it calls into question the veracity of all authoritative stories, especially those of the Bible" (124) and of itself.

That Winterson chooses these unusual characters to survive the Flood is also suggestive of her postmodern feminist task. The women are feminists who are determined to challenge the male-dominated story that Noah tells. Rubinson argues that their "act of solidarity and defiance symbolically asserts women's rights to choose to live and even reproduce without men and the heterosexual social order represented by all those pairs of animals on Noah's ark" (125). Similar to Jeanette in *Oranges*, the women in the text decide to forge their own paths and create alternative stories to those told in dominant discourses and social conventions. Gloria and her group of friends gather together survival equipment and wait in the attic of a high hotel for the flood to arrive, deciding steadfastly that "no [F]lood myth would destroy them" (Winterson *Boating* 146). Yet, although their story survives, Winterson alludes to the fact that, to be understood, the story needs to be read by someone with an open mind. Otherwise, like the message left by Doris in a bottle and discovered by Soames, it will simply be dismissed.

The epilogue of *Boating*, in which Soames discovers Doris' message in the bottle, serves to highlight the fact that people are more likely to believe stories that are in line with their social and political discourses and anything else is merely a "damn good story" (Winterson *Boating* 158). These political discourses frequently oppress people based on their gender, sexualities, and beliefs. Thus, Winterson highlights the fact that "the autonomy of women has been limited by androcentric ideologies perpetuated in scripture, romances, fairy-tales, gothic fiction and other genres" (Rubinson, 125). Winterson satirically reveals these androcentric ideologies by showing how, in Noah's rewriting of the Bible, he secretly makes sure that the world will be well aware that women are to blame for all of the world's problems (Winterson *Boating* 117). While Noah appears to promote a religion full of "a return to real values" (Winterson *Boating* 14-15), his religion ironically advocates a rejection of what are typically seen as humanitarian beliefs: feminism, altruism and vegetarianism are now seen as banes of Noah's society and he seeks to eliminate them. Thus, Winterson ironically portrays these values in the novel, suggesting that often the 'real values' as advocated in dominant discourses are seen as the *only values*, thereby "implying that others are unreal or less valid than those which have been presented to us as 'natural' in scripture" (Rubinson, 118). Rubinson argues that throughout Winterson's fiction she

is frequently concerned with these supposed 'real values' which she believes perpetuate and encourage "capitalism, patriarchy and compulsory heterosexuality" (118). Winterson's task in *Boating* is, therefore, to illustrate that the Bible and the Flood myth make "good box office material" (Winterson *Boating* 50), suggesting that the Bible and the stories told in the Bible are fiction stories and should not be treated as 'truth'. The Flood myth as 'good box office material' also highlights the sheer outrageousness of the story: "the idea of a Divine Being who has created humanity only to utterly destroy it when it appears unruly is both absurd and malevolent" (Rubinson 118). This too, is how Winterson subverts Yahweh's character: from the all-powerful, omnipotent, despotic God of the Bible, she reimagines him as a character who is both petty, vindictive and childish in *Boating*. The myth of the Flood, she suggests, is a method of instilling fear in order to maintain the dominant social order and enforce the obedience of religious discourse. The dramatisation of the Flood story in *Boating* allows her to desacralise the story in the Bible by drawing attention to the various genres which make up the story: history, adventure, fantasy and myth and showing that there are alternatives to this story. Winterson "views [the Bible] (and invites her readers to view [the Bible]) as a convenient way of making sense of the world without really confronting the complexities of the world" (Rubinson, 119). The Bible, suggests Winterson, is a set of myths, written by men, in order to enforce and maintain the power of patriarchal society. These myths have "for centuries legitimised a social structure in which women have had little or no economic, sexual and intellectual freedoms" (Rubinson, 119). Thus, the core of Winterson's subversion of patriarchal Biblical discourses stems from her belief that the Bible is a profoundly misogynistic and patriarchal text which, when read literally, is shown to be very dangerous. By re-writing the Flood myth, Winterson subverts the Biblical tale and reveals the fictitious elements of Biblical discourse. Her texts thus urge women to create alternative stories so that people will realise that history is a construction and is made up of multiple voices and stories and to allow previously marginalises voices to be heard.

Chapter Four: *Oranges* and *Boating*: Reading Differing Textual Counterparts

Intertexualising the Bible in *Oranges* and *Boating*

Both *Oranges* and *Boating* intertextually refer to the Bible and Biblical parables. Thus, *Oranges* and *Boating* can be read as postmodern reactions to Biblical discourse, which function in different, yet equally effective ways. *Boating,* which has not been as highly regarded as Winterson's first novel, *Oranges*, seeks to subvert and undermine Biblical discourse in the same way as *Oranges* does. In *Oranges*, Winterson's narration involves a focus on the personal effect of dominant discourses by narrating the 'semi-autobiographical' story of Jeanette, while *Boating's* narrative focuses on the dangers of dominant Biblical discourse on society as a whole, narrating what might have gone on behind the scenes. This chapter will examine both the similarities and the distinct differences between the two texts, which have received very different reactions from the public. Both *Oranges* and *Boating* rely on Winterson's use of postmodern narrative strategies in order effectively to challenge and subvert dominant Biblical discourse; however, these narrative strategies are used in different ways in the texts. This chapter will examine intertextuality in both texts, as well as lesbian and anti-feminine power, which are illustrated in *Oranges* and *Boating* by drawing on Russo's concept of the 'female grotesque'. This chapter also includes an investigation into feminist laughter and humour in *Oranges* and *Boating*, as well as the role of the author and authorship in both texts. Ultimately, this chapter seeks to demonstrate that *Boating* is just as 'serious' and subversive a text as *Oranges,* despite its many unfavourable reviews.

Both *Oranges* and *Boating* make use of various Bible stories, fairy-tales, and modern literary intertexts within their narratives. The novels also make subtle intertextual reference to one another, suggestive of the fact that the two texts can be read as counterparts, despite their radically different narrative forms. While the texts share similar themes and concerns, their intertextual use of the Bible, which is the most obvious intertext in both novels, is vastly different. *Oranges* follows the structure of the Bible, framing the narrative with the first eight books of the Bible, but the chapters subvert the overall theme of each Biblical chapter by foregrounding Jeanette's struggles with 'coming out'. *Oranges* infuses the Biblical intertext with lesbian authority, thereby subverting each Biblical chapter by allowing the chapters to become sites upon which lesbian authority is articulated. *Boating* also subverts the Bible and infuses the

story of the Flood with feminist authority by placing anti-feminine female characters at the forefront of a story originally about a *man*. Marie Holdsworth notes that "*Boating for Beginners* […] subverts the traditional construal of God by means of a postmodern game on the textual aspects of Genesis so as to reinforce the status and power of authors" (173-4). The intertextual use of the Bible in *Oranges* and *Boating* serves to highlight the power of female authors who create and narrate alternative stories. The power of female authors will be examined in closer detail later in this chapter. Intertextuality is seen in this dissertation as a 'postmodern narrative technique'; however, the process of intertextuality and re-telling in stories is not a strictly 'modern' process. Northrop Frye observes that the writing of old texts into new works is an integral part of the history of writing and literature. In *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology* (1963) Frye speaks of the shared awareness of re-telling in stories and explains that,

> [w]e know, vaguely, that the story of Cinderella has been retold hundreds of thousands of times in middle-class fiction, and that nearly every thriller we see is a variant of Bluebeard […]. Shakespeare put a folk-tale motif into nearly every comedy he wrote [… and] some of the most intellectualised fiction of our day, such as the later works of Thomas Mann, are based on them. (29)

Frye argues that the process of re-telling and infusing texts with multiple layers of narrative is an age-old technique and highlights that many of the tales that readers easily recognise are versions of dominant discourses. Winterson's intertextual use of the Bible and other popular literary tales foregrounds her concern with the telling of stories, authorship and the veracity of historical discourses. Jenna Collett (2011) notes that: "not all texts which borrow from other works are doing so for the same aims as re-visionary fiction" (4). Intertextual fictions which draw on dominant Biblical discourses for inspiration are not the same as fiction which calls the dominant discourse into question in order to challenge, subvert and revise it, as re-visionary fiction does. This is what makes *Oranges* and *Boating subversive* feminist fictions as opposed to fictions which simply refer intertextually to the Bible. Subversive feminist fiction, such as Winterson's fiction, is different to texts which merely re-appropriate existing texts for inspiration. Wright suggests that *Boating* and its many layers of intertext are Winterson's attempt to challenge and question the way in which historical texts are written and understood:

> Winterson continues to find [Biblical] stories powerful and suggestive, while no longer able to accept the assumptions behind them […]. Her stories as we have seen, often have their own origins in the book of Genesis. *By the time they have*

> *finished, however, they have assumed their own very different meanings, most of which run counter to those imposed on the 'original' stories as redacted by the Priestly Writer in the interests of an authoritarian male-dominated institution.* (84, my emphasis)

Similarly, Widdowson notes that, in order for a text to be successful in its subversion of the intertext, the reader should be "forced at all points to recall how the pre-text [was written] and how the revision re-inflects this" (502). Both *Oranges* and *Boating* succeed in recalling the Bible and how the Bible was constructed in their fictions. Wright argues that, by re-writing Biblical stories, the author is able to "bring to the original stories' horizons of understanding vastly different from those pertaining when the stories were first told" (x). Both *Oranges* and *Boating* unveil the dangerous aspects of fundamental religion through the stories told in their narratives. Consequently, the intertextual reference to the Bible and Biblical discourse in *Boating* also draws attention to the story originally told in the Bible. Widdowson refers to the process of writing a text with an overt pretext as "active intertextualising". A text with an overt pretext is characterised by the interweaving of existing narratives with alternate perspectives, which allows the author of subversive fiction to "produce a different, autonomous new work by rewriting the original [and] to denaturalise that original *by exposing the discourses in it*" which appear natural (Widdowson 503, my emphasis). The tone and format of *Oranges* evokes Biblical register, actively invoking the Bible as an intertext, in order to subvert it by enabling Winterson to tell the story of Jeanette's lesbianism through a Biblical framework, which serves to denaturalise the Bible. The plot of *Boating* makes use of the Biblical story of the Flood and humorously subverts the story. *Boating* also makes use of the process of active intertextualising in order to subvert the Bible and comically satirize the problematic discourses inherent in this text. Both texts make intertextual use of the Bible in order to foreground feminist themes and concerns. *Oranges* and *Boating* seek to expose the discourses in the Bible through their subversive narratives and the implementation of various postmodern narrative strategies.

Evoking the Female Grotesque in *Boating* and *Oranges*: Anti-Feminine Characters

Winterson foregrounds the stories and struggles of women in both *Oranges* and *Boating*. These female characters are subversions of traditional feminine heroines and they are often characters who are seen as 'other' in traditional patriarchal society. According to the Bible, a feminine

woman is one who is "self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands […]" (Titus 2:5). A feminine woman, according to Biblical standards, "[…] should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works" (1 Timothy 2:9-10). The Bible also describes a feminine woman as being "quiet" and having a "gentle spirit" (1 Peter 3:3-4) and frequently reminds women that they should not tempt men by being outwardly beautiful. Their femininity "[…] should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. [4] Rather, it should be that of [her] inner self […]" (1 Peter 3:3-4). The Biblical standards of femininity require obedience, silence and submission to *men*, character traits which Winterson's characters reject and rebel against. The notion of Biblical femininity is dependent on the approval of men in the church, the father figure or the husband. Jeanette in *Oranges* is a strong, intellectual lesbian teenager, while Gloria in *Boating* is an intellectual, half-bald, purblind young woman. These female characters are anti-feminine by Biblical standards. They are a form of Russo's theory of the female grotesque. The female grotesque is a concept elaborated by Mary J Russo (1994) in her text, *The Female Grotesque*. Russo's concept of the female grotesque and women's foregrounding of the vulgar and un-aesthetic aspects of their bodies is a rejection of the notion of the 'feminine mystique'.[19] The traditional concept of femininity has become a form of repression for women, since the female body in a patriarchal society has for the most part been represented by men. The female body is subject to the scrutiny of the male gaze and, as a result, women are required to look and behave in a manner which is acceptable to *men*. The female form has frequently been depicted as merely an entity of male fantasy, a form to be gazed at and desired (if not 'owned'). The female grotesque challenges the notion of patriarchal femininity and traditional expectations of femininity. As Russo notes:

> [t]he grotesque body is the open, protruding, extended, secreting body, *the body of becoming, process and change*. The grotesque body is opposed to the classical body, which is monumental, static, closed and sleek, corresponding to the aspirations of bourgeois individualism; the grotesque body is connected to the rest of the world. (62, my emphasis)

[19] *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) was written by Betty Friedan which is widely credited with sparking the beginning of second-wave feminism in the United States (second-wave feminism broadened the feminist debate to issues of sexuality, family, the workplace, reproductive rights, and official legal inequalities).

In her first text, as well as in *Boating,* Winterson begins to develop her ideas relating to the grotesque female body, which comes to fruition in *Sexing the Cherry* in the character of the Dog Woman. In *Oranges* and *Boating,* (though particularly in *Boating*) the concept of the female grotesque is illustrated as a rejection of the patriarchal illustrations of the female body. While in *Oranges* and *Boating* the concept of the female grotesque is not fully developed, the characters can certainly be read as *anti-feminine* in their rejections of typical feminine identities, behaviours and appearances. The anti-feminine can be defined as a rejection of feminine characteristics and behaviours because these ideals have been traditionally enforced by *men*. The anti-feminine characters in Winterson's fiction subvert the feminine heroine trope in traditional romance novels, tropes which are demonstrated and mocked by Winterson in Bunny Mix's romance novels. The female characters of *Oranges* and *Boating* are powerfully and deliberately anti-feminine and subvert male-dominated notions of female identity and gender. This chapter argues that the anti-feminine in Winterson's texts is a challenge to patriarchal notions of femininity and serves to subvert the desirability of the female body as defined by Biblical discourse in favour of a female body which is autonomous.

In *Boating* Gloria and her friends make a deliberate choice to reject the story being created by Noah and Yahweh and choose to survive without the help of male authority. Gloria initially finds solace in female magazines, particularly in the 'problem pages' where there are supposed 'solutions' to grotesque problems, suggestive of the fact that she should aspire to traditional notions of femininity. Gloria looks through the magazines which purport to have solutions to problems like "acne, period pains, unwanted body hair, fat husbands, ugly wives" and she beings to feel a "wave of relief. At least some people were still vile, obscure and blotchy" (Winterson *Boating* 6). Gloria is shown to be uniquely aware of her own body and the fact that her body is not one which relates to traditional notions of beauty. Gloria and the other women in *Boating* are anti-feminine (they are bald, transsexual, sexual, in the midst of process and change, or they are lesbian). The women represent Winterson's subversion of traditional feminine characters represented in the traditional male 'quest story'. Gloria, the novel's heroine and narrator, is the 'zookeeper' who selects animals for transportation in Noah's ark. This task is one which is certainly seen as a male task and in the Bible the task was originally given to Noah. Winterson subverts this role, illustrating that women are equally capable of doing a job reserved for men in the Bible. The women described in the text are all eccentric, untraditional, strange

characters. They are deliberately anti-feminine as a response to patriarchal feminine norms which are considered desirable in Noah's community. Gloria is described as being half bald; Rita and Desi are kitsch, loud, abrasive women; Mrs. Munde is armless; Doris, the cleaner, claims to be in touch with 'Gross Reality' (a suggestion that she accepts her body as it is: a reality which is considered 'gross' in patriarchal society) and Marlene, who is described as the most grotesque character, is a "bat-like creation" with "wings" (Winterson *Boating* 75). Marlene is also described as a transsexual (Winterson *Boating* 96) woman who has had breasts added and a penis removed.

Jeanette, the protagonist in *Oranges,* unlike the description of the grotesque, anti-feminine bodies and personalities of Gloria and her friends in *Boating*, is given very little physical description. This too is a deliberate narrative strategy employed by Winterson. By having almost no physical description of the protagonist, the reader is forced to understand the character merely through her first-person narration rather than formulating an opinion based on the character's appearance. This is later developed in Winterson's text *Written on the Body* (1993), in which the reader does not know the gender of the narrator, removing sex and gender from the issue of love altogether. Jeanette is a young character who, when her sexuality is exposed within a Pentecostal community, is seen as grotesque. Irina Bocianu (2012) argues that

> [i]n the novel, Jeanette is considered to be a "monster" as she is different in a sense that she tries to resist the community religious beliefs, values, and morale. She is exorcised in order to take the "monster" out of her body and mind. In the community's eyes, Jeanette has the "monster" inside of herself so she needs to be exorcised, an exorcism which is performed by Pastor Spratt and where her mother is both a witness and participant. (6)

The exorcism which Jeanette is forced to undergo alludes to the concept of the grotesque and the monstrous because Jeanette is considered to be 'evil' and her sexuality is seen as monstrous because it does not conform to her community's standards. Jeanette is an alternative character, she is a *lesbian*, an adopted young woman with an usual family. She is not, however, given the physically grotesque attributes that Winterson gives the characters in *Boating* but, as Russo's theory states, she is in the process of change. As a character who is lesbian, she does not conform to patriarchal norms of femininity and is immediately regarded as being 'other' in her religious community. Jeanette is *anti-feminine*, alternative and 'other' in a community which considers her

sexuality to be outside of the Biblical boundaries of their society. Winterson's anti-feminine characters are forms of the female grotesque. They subvert traditional patriarchal norms and challenge Biblical boundaries by rejecting male-dominated expectations of femininity.

The Power of Feminist Laughter

Both *Oranges* and *Boating* subvert Biblical and patriarchal discourses by placing men in positions of ridicule and mockery. Willett, Willet and Sherman (2012) note that "feminists have often been the targets of a venomous conservative ridicule […]" (221). Winterson seeks to subvert the tradition of women being the subject of mockery and subjugation by making *men* the subjects of mockery and ridicule in her texts. In *Boating* and *Oranges* Winterson deliberately mocks the male characters and illustrates them to be either pointless (such as Jeanette's father in *Oranges*), or supremely ridiculous (such as Noah in *Boating*). She also satirises male evangelical preachers, such as the character of Noah in *Boating* and Pastor Finch and Pastor Spratt in *Oranges*. In both texts the male voice is intermittent and what men *do* voice in the texts is rendered ridiculous or dangerous. In *Boating*, the male characters Noah, Yahweh and Noah's sons, while willing to rescue women, plan to bring their wives onto the ark by force rather than out of love. The men in *Oranges* are virtually invisible. Jeanette comically describes men as "[…] something you [have] around the place, not particularly interesting, but quite harmless" (Winterson *Oranges* 164). The men in *Oranges* are 'harmless' or useless, while in *Boating* men are shown to be supremely powerful and dangerous. Noah is responsible for making sure that people in the future will view women as being the cause of the world's problems. Winterson alludes to the writing of misogynistic narratives which are implicit in the Bible and Biblical discourses through the humorous elements in the narratives of both *Oranges* and *Boating*.

The laughter produced in *Boating* and *Oranges* is a feminist laughter which mocks men and serves to undermine patriarchal discourses which are implicit in the Bible. This begins in Genesis where it is shown that women are being created *for man* (1 Corinthians 11.9). Similar to the way in which the stories of women are foregrounded in *Boating*, so in *Oranges* male power is undermined by highlighting the story of Jeanette and her rejection of prescribed heterosexuality. Similarly, in *Boating*, the forced heterosexuality of the patriarchal community is seen through Gloria's initial dreams of finding a perfect man and becoming the 'ideal woman' as illustrated in Bunny Mix's romance novels. These traditional romance novels are also the subject of

Winterson's ridicule. Humorously she argues that these novels are merely the same story told over and over again, alluding perhaps to modern *Mills and Boon* romance novels. Bunny is described as having written more than one thousand novels, all of which "[…] had the same plot, but she was clever enough to rotate the colour of the heroine's hair and the hero's occupation so that you never felt you were reading the same book twice in a row" (Winterson *Boating* 16). These satirical elements in the novel imbue the text with humour and laughter which is a powerful tool for subverting Biblical discourses. "Revising Biblical discourse from a contemporary vantage point, [Winterson] uses *subversive female laughter* as a revolutionary weapon against authority, as she 'replays tragedy as farce' and makes 'what is sacred ... a joke' (Winterson *Boating* 29)" (Williams-Wanquet 401, my emphasis). This is key to Winterson's use of the Bible in *Boating* and *Oranges*: her engagement with the text is satirical, humorous and parodic. This results in what Williams-Wanquet suggests is a 'revolutionary weapon against authority'. The laughter produced by the text is a subversive feminist laughter which is directed at men and Biblical discourse, making what was sacred a subject of laughter.

Winterson notes in the foreword to *Oranges* that the text is a "threatening novel" because it

> exposes the sanctity of family life as something of a sham; it illustrates by example that what the church calls love is actually psychosis and it dares to suggest that what makes life difficult for homosexuals is not their perversity but other people's. Worse, it does these things with such humour and lightness that those disposed not to agree find that they do. (Winterson *Oranges* xiii)

Both *Oranges* and *Boating* make use of humour as a postmodern narrative technique. The wry humour of *Oranges* plays a powerful role in generating laughter, which aligns the reader with Jeanette. As Makinen notes, this laughter aligns the reader with a lesbian viewpoint because the reader is laughing with Jeanette, the author's protagonist. This is a key aspect of *Oranges*: that the reader is able to see Jeanette's point of view, allows for the reader to sympathise with her and her situation. The reader is aligned with Jeanette against her unfair treatment by her community and her mother. Alternatively, the overt playful humour of *Boating* serves to generate laughter, which destabilises the position of the Bible and highlights that we will never be able to know the absolute 'truth' of the Bible, therefore bringing about suspicion of the veracity of historical discourse. The humour in *Oranges*, unlike in *Boating*, is subtle and stems largely from the younger Jeanette's innocent, retrospective narration of her community and

personal thoughts as well as conversations with her mother. As the author, Winterson infuses the text with this retrospective humour, which highlights the innocence of the young Jeanette and her ironic observations about various aspects of the fundamentalalist religious community in which she lives and learns to survive. In a humorous exchange, Jeanette notes: "[o]ne of my earliest memories is me sitting on a sheep at Easter while [my mother] told me the story of the Sacrificial Lamb. We had it on Sundays with potato" (Winterson *Oranges* 6). This is an example of the simple, wry humour used in the text. While serving to lighten a narrative, the humour also provides a subversive comment on the hypocrisy of her mother's faith and the hypocrisy of the community as a whole. Various aspects of the Bible are mocked in *Boating,* most notably the whimsical decision by a male God-figure to flood the earth and begin again. Winterson focusses her attention on the creation story of Genesis in a slap-stick comedic way. Similarly, in *Oranges* the humour of the text dissociates the reader from the hypocrisy of the fundamental religious society in which Jeanette struggles to come to terms with her sexuality. According to Makinen,

> Winterson in this text … uses humour to create a distance between the persons represented and the audience; to the extent that as we, as readers, laugh about the foibles of the community we can dissociate ourselves from it which, in turn, helps us to accept Jeanette's need to dissociate herself from it. (9)

This alignment with Winterson's lesbian viewpoint is a powerful means of challenging Biblical discourses, similar to the way in which mocking feminist laughter serves to undermine the 'sacred' in *Boating*. Humour functions in a similar way in the narrative of *Boating* by highlighting the elements of hypocrisy and ridiculousness of the Christian faith as a whole. The reader of *Boating* laughs at the ridiculous re-telling of the story of the Flood; which is rendered as an obvious and blasphemous mockery of the Biblical story represented in the Bible. The humour in both texts serves to highlight various problems with religious doctrine and discourses. Makinen argues that the humour implicit in the narrative of *Oranges* is part of what makes the text such a successful one. She argues that the

> […] character is forced, in order to preserve her integrity, to mock the sacred. From its publication, some critics have seen the narrative strategy of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* as one of including the reader within its lesbian viewpoint, and have seen the humour as one of its most effective ways of achieving this. (5)

The mockery of the sacred in *Oranges* begins with Winterson's ability to align the reader with a lesbian viewpoint, *against* the Christian community in the text. Winterson is clearly well-versed in Biblical discourse. She does not make fun of the Bible in *Oranges* in the same way that she does through the narration of *Boating*.

The mockery of the sacred in *Boating* is obvious and boldly blasphemous. *Boating* uses Biblical characters and a well-known Biblical story, and infuses the story with feminist anti-feminine power by aligning the reader with the protagonist *against* Noah. Winterson's humour in *Oranges* is referred to by Makinen as being "rich in malicious strategy" (5) which allows her to "[satirise] her detractors [...] [thereby], [...] juxtaposing a textual aggression alongside its humor" (5). The malicious textual 'aggression' seen in *Oranges* is certainly also evident in *Boating* through the slap-stick humour. The slap-stick comedy of *Boating* has been described as 'Monty Pythonesque' humour, with tongue firmly in cheek. Noah is described as a cross-dresser and a misogynistic modern business man. His characterization is humorously familiar to the modern reader. The text mocks the fundamentalist society which is carefully and intricately demonstrated in *Oranges*. *Boating* has been described by Winterson herself as a book which is 'full of silly things'. Although the reception of the book has been mixed, several scholars stated that they enjoyed the book and its subversive humour. The humour of *Boating* is a form of humour that "[...] uses surprise and laughter to deconstruct the bedrock of civilization that has privileged the masculine over the years. The way that history is written, the notions of reality and of the self, are alike challenged" (Williams-Wanquet 403). Thus, the humour of both *Boating* and *Oranges* performs a powerful subversive task which seeks to challenge the veracity of historical texts such as the Bible.

The Author and Authorship in *Oranges* and *Boating*: Female Authors and Narrators

Both *Oranges* and *Boating* are texts which assert the position of the female author and the postmodern process of questioning the veracity of historical texts. Both texts seek to reinforce the status of female authors as gods in their own right. They are creators of their own stories, rather than having their story told by men - such as in the Bible. *Oranges* too reinforces the power of the author in the manner that the text is written to blur the distinction between autobiography and fiction. This asserts the role of the female author as being both the author and

narrator of her own story. This is a powerful aspect of the subversion of Biblical discourse in *Oranges*. Typically, the expectation of women in the church is that they should remain 'silent'. 1 Timothy 2:12 reminds readers that God does not "permit a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence". Women are often powerless and are not always as respected as men in Christian society. While Jeanette resists this, and becomes a powerful teacher in her community, her mother supports this aspect of Biblical tradition: "[m]y mother stood up and said she believed this was right: that women had specific circumstances for their ministry, that the Sunday School was one of them, the Sisterhood another, *but the message belonged to the men*" (*Oranges* 131, my emphasis). That *Oranges'* chapters are named after Biblical books serves to intensify the subversive power of the female author by reinstating and infusing the Biblical books with lesbian authority. Similarly, in *Boating*, Gloria and her friends refuse to have their stories silenced by Noah's misogynistic grand narrative and choose to instead write their own history. Both texts seek to disrupt the concept of a fictional, male, God-figure who inspired the events narrated in the Bible, by instead giving power to female authors through the process of writing and telling alternative stories. Winterson seeks to challenge and undermine the traditional concept of a Biblical God in order to show that female authors are the 'gods' (and therefore the creators) of their own stories. She suggests through her narratives that women who take control of their own 'creation' stories by narrating their own experiences, rather than allowing their stories to be told through the voices and perspectives of *men*, are thereby powerfully subverting and undermining the power of dominant discourses. Winterson's characters narrate their own 'Genesis' stories and desacralise the creation story as narrated in the Bible. Her texts stand in stark contrast to Biblical stories and are obvious contrasts to the Bible, which was purported to be divinely inspired by God and written by men. The text is notably void of female voices or perspectives: it contains no books written by women and no chapters in the Bible are narrated by women. All stories about women in the Bible are notably, *told by men*. In contrast, *Oranges* and *Boating* are texts which assert the power of the female author who can tell *her story* from her own perspective. Winterson creates the Biblical framework of her stories, subverting the male-dominated Biblical stories to create alternative, female stories.

In *Oranges*, Jeanette is the narrator of her own story and chooses, with the help of the orange demon, to forge her own path to maturation. The authors in *Boating* are Noah and Bunny Mix, who are given the power to re-write the story of Genesis. Bunny Mix and Noah, unlike

Jeanette in *Oranges,* illustrate the dangerous aspects inherent in the writing of the Bible, because their story becomes known as the 'overarching truth', despite the fact that the reader knows it is not the truth. The fact that Noah and Bunny are placed in the role of authors who write a history for the future generations is contrasted with Gloria and her friends, who must seek to create an alternative to this story to be read in the future, so that future generations will know that there is an alternative. An author who appears in both *Oranges* and *Boating* is the figure of the orange demon who is described by Winterson as the "omnipotent author" in all novels "everywhere" (Winterson *Boating* 71). In both *Oranges* and *Boating,* the orange demon arrives at times of crisis in the narratives in order to provide 'flashes of insight' to the protagonists. Onega contends that the orange demon is the "'implied author', the flesh-and-blood author's fictional persona leaving its ideological imprint on the text" (46). The orange demon in both texts stands for Winterson, who inserts herself into the narratives of *Oranges* and *Boating* in order to provide moments of clarity to the characters. The orange demon, Winterson's fictional alter-ego, like the God of the Bible, plays the role of an omnipotent 'God-figure' who provides wisdom and clarity to his people. However, this God-figure is subverted in Winterson's texts by being represented as a *demon,* which in traditional Biblical discourse is considered to be an evil apparition which must be 'driven out'. The orange demon functions as Winterson's authorial voice in the texts. It tells Jeanette in *Oranges* that it is there to "[…] keep you in one piece, if you ignore [me] you're likely to end up in two pieces, or lots of pieces […]" (Winterson *Oranges* 109). Likewise, the orange demon tells Gloria in *Boating* that she and her friends need to survive the Flood in order to tell an alternative story to the story that Noah is trying to create. The demon warns them that "[u]nless you do your best to stay alive there won't be anyone left to spread the word about what really happened. It doesn't even matter if you forget what really happened; if you need to, *invent something else"* (Winterson *Boating* 123-4 my emphasis). Indeed, this is exactly what Winterson aims to do through the narrative of *Boating* and *Oranges* - to tell a different story in order to provide an alternative tale to the dominant discourse of the Bible. The orange demon in *Oranges* and *Boating* functions as the omnipotent God-figure of the Bible, which was absent from Jeanette in *Oranges*. In turn, the orange demon represents Winterson herself as the writer of the story, suggesting that there is no 'Biblical God-figure' as written about in the Bible. Rather, as authors of their own stories, women have the ability to forge their own paths and tell their own stories. Winterson's texts challenge the male authors of the Bible by writing texts which assert

the power of the female voice and the female author. Female authors write stories which are relevant to *women* and seek to challenge aspects of Biblical and historical discourses which are responsible for the subjugation of women.

In both novels, Winterson foregrounds the stories of women, because she believes that the history of men and women are different: "[w]omen's history is not an easily traceable straight line" she says, "[f]ollowing us is to watch for the hidden signs, to look in the gaps, and be prepared for strange zig-zags" (Winterson, qtd in Front 177). The reference to 'strange zig-zags' is a reminder of the way in which both *Oranges* and *Boating* should be read, suggesting that their meanings can never be tied down to one singular interpretive symbol but rather are the 'stories which are in the gaps'. By alluding to 'gaps and hidden signs' in her texts, Winterson suggests that stories told from a female perspective provide an alternative to the patriarchal, male-dominated stories represented in history and that these stories cannot be read or understood in only *one* way. Thus, her novels seek to tell the stories of women, whose voices throughout history have been silenced by dominant religious discourses such as the Bible. In *Oranges*, Winterson highlights exactly how women's voices have been silenced through Biblical discourse by narrating a story which can be read as a form of autobiography. Jeanette narrates her story and her decision to reject Biblical discourse and break free of Biblical boundaries. By rejecting Biblical boundaries, Winterson subtly subverts Biblical discourse by suggesting that there are alternative stories to be read and told, and infuses Biblical discourse with lesbian and female authority. Winterson suggests that these stories may be difficult to understand and cannot be read in a linear way, but that they should nonetheless be sought out the same way that Gardener and Soames in the epigraph of *Boating* are seeking evidence for the stories they have read. *Boating* and *Oranges* alike certainly succeed in their subversion of Biblical discourse and foregrounding of an anti-feminine narrative in the text.

Both *Oranges* and *Boating* make intertextual reference to Genesis (and the Bible), however, these texts create their own meanings which are able to powerfully subvert and challenge the Bible by undermining it in the novel in order to delegitimise the 'original' intertext or story. *Boating* is a profoundly subversive novel which is as intellectually charged as *Oranges*. The texts, which use many of the same narrative techniques and deal with many of the same issues, can and should be read as textual counterparts.

Conclusion: The Keeper of Society's Conscience

There are various debates surrounding the success of Winterson's later novels in relation to the indisputable success of *Oranges*. Many critics argue that *Oranges* was Winterson's best novel and that "it has been downhill all the way since then" (154 Makinen). Makinen refers particularly to Maya Jaggi's profile of Jeanette Winterson, which appeared in *The Guardian* in 2004. Here Jaggi quotes author Michèle Roberts' suggestion that during Winterson's "middle period, the texts became self-indulgently 'about art for art's sake, language for language's sake', she became suspicious of storytelling" (Makinen 154). Both *Oranges* and *Boating* foreground many of the themes which Winterson sets out to deal with in her later novels. Winterson's texts highlight the bias inherent in all storytelling (especially historical and Biblical discourse) and suggests that no one story can ever be entirely *true*. Her texts play with various themes and genres and often defy being categorised as one thing or another.

While Winterson's texts are open to numerous interpretations and understandings, she is fond of signalling to the reader how her books can be read and interpreted. For instance, Winterson recommends that *Oranges* be read in spirals because as humans we do not read in a linear fashion. She claims that "the spiral is fluid and allows infinite movement" (Winterson, xiii). Winterson asserts that the narrative of *Oranges*

> offers a complicated narrative structure, disguised as a simple one, it employs a very large vocabulary and a beguilingly straightforward syntax. This means you can read it in spirals. As a shape, the spiral is fluid and allows infinite movement. But is it movement forwards or backward? (Introduction *Oranges* xiii)

Winterson is aware of the narrative games she is playing in *Oranges*, alluding to the fact that *Oranges* 'masquerades' as a simple narrative structure. Similarly, the narrative form of *Boating* appears to be a simple straightforward story. The narrative of *Boating* which appears deceptively simple performs a powerful subversive task. *Boating's* narrative mimics Biblical tone and register while simultaneously challenging the Bible through humour and satire. The 'spiral narrative' which Winterson suggests should inform the reading of *Oranges* allows her to avoid the polemical trap of her writing becoming a debate about the autobiographical *versus* the fictional or the political *versus* the aesthetic. Winterson does not wish her writing to be pigeon-holed into one narrative genre. She recommends reading in spirals because the spiral is the diametrical opposite of linearity. Winterson refuses to allow her writing to be read as one linear

story with one overarching truth or meaning. That both *Oranges* and *Boating* are texts which refuse one singular interpretation is a clear contrast to political and patriarchal discourses which are often interpreted as having one fundamental meaning, as an overarching truth. The spiral narrative of Winterson's texts emphasises that reality is subjective and therefore cannot be objectively described or captured. *Oranges* and *Boating* should both be read as powerfully subversive stories which jump between the past and present and defy one singular interpretive reading or meaning. *Oranges* and *Boating* are texts which together achieve a singular subversive task. The texts deliberately seek to challenge and subvert the Bible by illustrating that it is a deeply patriarchal text which serves to subjugate women and perpetuate gender norms.

The study of *Oranges* and *Boating* reveals a critical debate with a "long shelf-life; *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, for example, is still being discussed almost 30 years after its publication" (Makinen 154). The reviews of Winterson's texts, similar to the reception of *Boating*, have almost all been mixed, with some being highly critical of her texts and others immensely enthusiastic about the same text. This certainly points to the power of Winterson's writing. Her texts are still able to evoke new critical reviews as well as fresh ways of reading and interpreting novels which were written thirty years ago. That Winterson's texts are still relevant, highlights the issues inherent in modern culture, many of which are perpetuated by Biblical discourse. Thus, the relevance of Winterson's texts is in the manner in which her texts highlight patriarchal discourse, such as the Bible, which is responsible for perpetuating gender stereotypes and formulating rules for 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' behaviours, sexualities and beliefs. Winterson overtly argues that the Bible and the stories told in the Bible have the power to affect and construct boundaries within society. In *Boating* the orange demon provides a telling remark:

> [e]very believer is an anarchist at heart. True believers would rather see governments topple and *history re-written* than scuff the cover of their faith. For them, all things are possible. They are poets, insomuch as poetry expands, whereas prose defines. Believers are dangerous and mad and may even destroy the world in a different deluge if they deem it necessary to keep the faith. (Winterson *Boating* 66 my emphasis)

Winterson is aware of the power of the Bible as a patriarchal and historical text to define the world and the people who are willing to continue to believe this text in order to maintain the order of things. Her texts seek to undermine the Bible and delegitimise patriarchal discourses by

telling alternative stories, stories narrated by anti-feminine, feminist women who seek to disrupt the status quo.

Oranges and *Boating*, as the first two texts in her oeuvre, are the pioneers for these issues and illustrate the concerns which Winterson then develops over the years in her later texts, although her later texts have also received mixed reactions. Many readers and scholars alike have enjoyed Winterson's later texts such as *Sexing the Cherry* (1989), remarking on the brilliant evocation of the female grotesque in the Dog-Woman. On the contrary, others have not taken to some of her other novels, such as *Gut Symmetries* (1997), a text in which Winterson combines themes of human relationships and the grand unified theories of quantum physics and cosmology. However, as has been demonstrated in this thesis, despite mixed reviews of almost all of her texts, Winterson's novels have the ability to transcend fiction and genre and her texts function as subversive challenges to dominant patriarchal discourses. Her texts deserve much more study and examination than is permitted in the space of this dissertation. Winterson's task in *Oranges* and *Boating,* to delegitimise and challenge patriarchal dominant discourses, highlights the power of female authors and her desire to subvert dominant patriarchal and problematic texts such as the Bible and fairy-tales. The orange demon tells Gloria in *Boating* that "[…] artists have visions and dream dreams. *They are the keepers of society's conscience*, the guiding light in a rough and stormy way" (Winterson *Boating* 59, my emphasis). As an artist, Winterson is a 'keeper of society's conscience', someone who seeks to tell alternative stories. Winterson is aware of the burden she has placed on herself as the keeper of society's conscience and she seeks to write stories which are full of alternative ways of viewing the world and of viewing women in order challenge Biblical boundaries.

Bibliography

Abrams, M.H. and G.G. Harpham, eds. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 9th ed. Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009.

Adam, Timothy Dow. "Introduction: Life Writing and Light Writing; Autobiography and Photography." *Modern Fiction Studies*, 40 (1994): 459-491.

Al-Shara, Zaydun. "Deconstructing Religion in Jeanette Winterson's 'Oranges Are not the Only Fruit': A Metacritical Study." *Advances in Language and Literary Studies* 6.1 (2015): 238- 243.

Amador, J.D.H. "Feminist Biblical Hermeneutics: A Failure of Theoretical Nerve." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 66.1 (1998): 39-57.

Armstrong, Nancy. *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel.* New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987. 300.

Barthes, Roland. The Death of the Author. Trans, Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang, 1974.

Bilger, Audrey. "Interview with Jeanette Winterson: The Art of Fiction." *Paris Review* 39 (1997/8): 68-112.

Blowers, Tonya. *Locating the Self: Re-reading Autobiography as Theory and Practice, with Particular Reference to the Writings of Janet Frame*. Britain: British Library, British Thesis Service, 1998.

Bocianu, Irina. "Feminine M(other) Nature in Jeanette Winterson's Oranges are not the Only Fruit." *University of Bucharest Review* II.2 (2012): 5-12.

Brown, Benson. Amy. "Inverted Conversions: Reading the Bible and Writing the Lesbian Subject in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit." Journal of Homosexuality* 33 (2008):233-252.

Burns, L. Christy. "Jeanette Winterson's Recovery of the Postmodern Word." *Contemporary Literature* 27.2 (1996): 278–306.

Bush, Catherine and Jeanette Winterson. "Jeanette Winterson Interview." *BOMB Magazine* 43 (1993): 54-58.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and The Subversion of Identity.* United States: Routledge, 1990.

Collett, Jenna. "'I want to tell the story again': Re-telling in Selected Novels by Jeanette Winterson and Alan Warner." *Rhodes University*, (2011):145.

Doan, Laura. "Jeanette Winterson's Sexing the Postmodern." *The Lesbian Postmodern.* ed. Laura Doan. New York (1994):137-155.

Douglas, Kate. "'Blurbing' Biographical: Authorship and Autobiography." *Biography* 24. 4 (2001):806-826.

Freeman, Mark. "Rethinking the Fictive, Reclaiming the Real: Autobiography, Narrative Time, and the Burden of Truth", in Fireman: Ed G.D. McVay Jr., T.E. and Flanagan, O.J. "Narrative, Consciousness, Literature, Psychology, and the Brain." Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003. 115–128.

French L. Jana. "'I'm telling you stories.... Trust me": Gender, Desire, and Identity in Jeanette Winterson's Historical Fantasies." *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 10. 3 (1999): 231-252.

Front, Sonia. *Transgressing Boundaries in Jeanette Winterson's Fiction.* Frankfurt: Peter Lang (2009).

Frye, Northrop. *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature.* Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1982, reprinted, 2006.

Grice, Helena and Woods, Tim. *'I'm Telling You Stories': Jeanette Winterson and the Politics of Reading.* Netherlands: Rodopi, (1998).

Pykett, Lynn. *A New Way with Words? Jeanette Winterson's Post-Modernism.* In Grice and Woods (eds): Netherlands: Rodopi, (1998).

Heckman, J. Susan. *Gender and Knowledge: Elements of Postmodern Feminism*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990.

Holdsworth, Marie. "A Transgressive Story of the Flood." *English Text Construction* 2:2 (2009): 173–184.

Hutchinson, Emma. 2010) "Unsettling Stories: Jeanette Winterson and the Cultivation of Political Contingency." *Global Society*. 24.3 (2010): 351- 368.

Hutcheon, Linda. *The Politics of Postmodernism*. London: Routledge, 1989.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 1988.

Jacobs, M. Maretha. "Feminist Scholarship, Biblical Scholarship and The Bible. *Neotestamentica* 35.1/2 (2001):81-94.

Kaiser, Wilson. "Humor after Postmodernism: David Foster Wallace and Proximal Irony". *Studies in American Humor*. 3.28 (2013): 31-44.

Knickerbocker, Joan L. and Brueggeman, Martha A. "Making Room on the Shelf: The Place of Postmodern Young Adult Novels in the Curriculum" *American Secondary Education*. 37.1 (2008): 65-79.

Lejeune, Philippe. "The Autobiographical Pact". In *On Autobiography*, ed Paul John Eakin. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989, 3-30.

Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984.

Kearney, Richard. "Review of the Great Code." *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 72. 286 (1983) 190-192.

Makinen, Merja. *The Novels of Jeanette Winterson: A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism*. New York: Palgrave, 2005.

Morrison, Jago. "'Who Cares About Gender at a Time Like This?' Love, Sex and the Problem of Jeanette Winterson." *Journal of Gender Studies*. 15.2 (2006): 169-180.

Morera, Lucía. "The Lesbian Bildungsroman: The Process of Self-Discovery in Jeanette Winterson's Oranges are not the Only Fruit." *Revista de Estudios de las Mujeres* -2 (2014):256-270.

Nicholson, Linda J. *Feminism/Postmodernism.* New York: Routledge, 1990.

Noakes, Jonathan and Reynolds, Margaret. *Jeanette Winterson: The Essential Guide.* UK: Random House, 2012.

Neumeier, Beate. *Engendering Realism and Postmodernism: Contemporary Women Writers in Britain.* New York: Rodopi, 2001.

Olney, James. *Autobiography: Essay's Theoretical and Critical*. United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, 1980.

Onega, Susana. "British Historiographic Metafiction in the 1980s." *British Postmodern Fiction.* Ed. Theo D'haen and Hans Bertens. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993. 47–61.

Onega, Susana. "The Mythical Impulse in British Historiographic Metafiction." *European Journal of English Studies* 1.2 (1997): 184–204. *Academic Search Premier*.

Pascual, Mónica Calvo. "A Feminine Subject in Postmodernist Chaos: Janette Winterson's Political Manifestó in Oranges are not the only Fruit." *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses* 13 (2000): 21-34.

Plate, Liedeke. "Remembering the Future; or, Whatever Happened to Re-Vision?" *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture in Society* 33.2 (2008): 389–411.

Pope, Rob. *Creativity: Theory, History, Practice.* London and New York: Routledge, 2005.

Reisman, Mara. "Fantasy and Reality in Jeanette Winterson's 'Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit.'" *Rocky Mountain Review* 65.1 (2011):11-35.

Rich, Adrienne. "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision." *College English: Women, Writing and Teaching* 34.1 (1972): 18–30.

Rubinson, Gregory J. *The Fiction of Rushdie, Barnes, Winterson and Carter: Breaking Cultural and Literary Boundaries in the Work of Four Postmodernists.* London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2005.

Rusk, Lauren. *The Life Writing of Otherness: Woolf, Baldwin, Kingston, and Winterson.* New York: Routledge, 2002. 197.

Scult, Allen. "The Limits of Narrative: Truth Aspiring Discourse in the Bible." *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 10. 4 (1992):345-365.

Smith, Sidonie A. and Julia Watson. "Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives." Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. (2001).

Spicer, Jakki. "The Author Is Dead, Long Live the Author: Autobiography and the Fantasy of the Individual." *Criticism* 47. 3 (2005): 387-403.

Sweetman, Brendan. "Lyotard, Postmodernism, and Religion." *Philosophia Christi* 7.1 (2005):139-151.

Swirski, Peter. *Literature, Analytically Speaking: Explorations in the Theory of Interpretation, Analytic Aesthetics, and Evolution.* Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010.

Widdowson, Peter. "'Writing Back': Contemporary Re-visionary Fiction." Textual Practice 20.3 (2006): 491–507. Academic Search Premier. 14 July 2010.

Williams- Wanquet, Eileen. Jeanette Winterson's Boating for Beginners: Both New Baroque and Ethics. *Études britanninques contemporaines* 23 (2002)**:** 99-117.

Willett, Cynthia. Willett, Julie. and Sherman Yael D. "The Seriously Erotic Politics of Feminist Laughter". *Social Research* 79.1 (2012): 217.