Florida Atlantic University

Prophet Instead of a Priest: The Transition from Oppressive Religious Upbringing to Liberating Spiritual Possibility in Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*

Jessenia Hernandez

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Dr. Hagood

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Abstract

In Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, Jeanette's radically religious mother, Louie, is characterized by an uncompromising personality and religious beliefs which heavily shape her daughter's views of religion. This influence, coupled with Biblical connections and Louie's own suggestions that she has a divine knowledge of God and His will, causes Jeanette to view her mother as a God-figure throughout her childhood. Despite Louie's steadfast religious beliefs, she increasingly contradicts not only what the Bible itself preaches—concepts like love, acceptance, and forgiveness—but also what Jeanette believes to be morally correct. While Jeanette sees her mother and all religious ideas as inseparable in her childhood, her adolescent discovery of her lesbian desires and her mother's harsh rejection of those desires force Jeanette to question the blurred lines between Louie and God. In doing so, Jeanette learns that the oppressive and judgmental views of her mother and the congregation do not necessarily equate to a hateful and unaccepting God. The ending of the novel suggests that Jeanette will not completely abandon her beliefs, but instead will adapt them to the lifestyle that fulfills her. Winterson criticizes the institution of religion and its use of the Bible as an absolute weapon. She identifies these as the vehicles through which religious oppression is exacted, represented by Louie and accepted by Jeanette when she knows nothing else. In emphasizing the potential harmful effects of a fundamentalist Pentecostal Christian upbringing, Winterson implicates a dynamic and flexible relationship with God and spirituality as a healthy medium through which those claiming queer identities, like Jeanette, can flourish and accept themselves without totally rejecting their faith. The novel therefore forwards its own queering of theology by rejecting the necessity to choose between faith and queer identity and instead promoting the notion of spiritual possibility for queer people.

Table of Contents

Abstract……... ii

Table of Contents…… iii

Epigraph……..... iv

Introduction……. 1

Religion, Spirituality, and Queer Theology…… 4

A Religious Childhood- Viewing Mother as God Figure..... 9

Adolescent Questionings- Severance of Mother and God….. 15

Young Adulthood- Spirituality and Possibility……... 21

Conclusion……... 28

Walls protect and walls limit. It is in the nature of walls that they should fall.

That walls should fall is the consequence of blowing your own trumpet.

—Jeanette Winterson, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*

Introduction

Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* follows the adolescent development of Jeanette, a semi-autobiographical character who struggles with navigating her growing attraction to women while growing up with a mother who heavily revolves their lives around her strong Christian beliefs. Jeanette's mother, Louie, adopts Jeanette and devotes her life to raising her child as a servant of God that would change the world with her missionary efforts. Being raised and sheltered within a heavily religious community, Jeanette does not question her mother's beliefs nor the religious work that she is called upon to do. In fact, she fervently loves God and the church and, though she is ostracized in school for her fixation on the Bible, she is greeted with praise and rewards from her mother for doing the Lord's work. Jeanette's only experience with religion is through her mother's strict religious teachings and interpretations of the Bible, and she knows God in no other way except through the lens her mother has provided for her; therefore, Jeanette tends to conflate her mother with the religious and God Himself. The specifically Pentecostal teachings and practices she grows up with contribute even more to this melding of the human and the divine—a central belief of Pentecostalism is the direct experience of the Holy Spirit residing within each baptized Christian, leading individuals to serve the Lord through gifts like prophecy and divine healing ("Pentecostalism" [*New World Encyclopedia*]). Louie and God, therefore, become melded in Jeanette's mind, and questioning her mother becomes akin to questioning the word of the Lord Himself. As Jeanette ventures into her adolescent years, however, she begins to notice the discrepancies between Louie's actions and her beliefs, causing her to question the divinity she once saw in her mother and the connections she has made between Louie and God.

Experiencing her first attraction to another girl, Melanie, causes Jeanette to question more than just the church's teaching on "Unnatural Passions"—she also questions her mother's credibility and sanity as Louie reacts violently to Jeanette's lesbianism as if it were the result of a demon possession. For the first time in her life, Jeanette begins to distinguish between a divine God and the God that she once saw through her mother, and their relationship consequently deteriorates. When Jeanette finds herself unable to denounce her sexuality in the way her mother wishes her to, she is exiled from her home and church family and forced to set out on her own. Jeanette finds her young adulthood characterized by the turmoil of feeling as if she has lost both God and her mother and wondering whether she can reconcile her identity and her faith. Jeanette's internal conflict is found mostly in the heavily metaphorical fairytale of Winnet Stonejar, whose story is interspersed throughout the final chapter of the novel and contains many parallels and insights into Jeanette's own experiences and feelings during this time. Winnet's story also influences how one might interpret Jeanette's decision at the end of the novel, when she returns home to her mother despite being disowned and feeling farther from religion and the church than ever before. Although Jeanette once considered her mother to be a God-figure with divine knowledge, ability, and irrefutable religious authority, she eventually separates her mother and God and begins seeking her own way of practicing her faith. I argue that Jeanette's return home even after this divide suggests the possibility of a new kind of relationship between her and God as opposed to the restrictive concept of God forwarded by her mother, signaling a transition from a commitment to the institution of religion to the possibility of a spiritual relationship with God. *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* thus challenges the traditional constraints of religion and shows a widened perspective on the possible relationship between queer people and spirituality.

Whereas the dominant narrative seems to suggest that a harmonious relationship with God is close to impossible for a queer person, Winterson's lesbian protagonist complicates this generalization; she suggests that God, spirituality, and faith can be completely different to each person, challenging the heteronormative commitment to a binary system of sexuality which determines whether or not one can have a relationship with God. Jeanette's upbringing offered a radical and regimented religion that suggested that devoutly following scripture acts as the condition for a connection with God, making religion feel like a prison as her church deemed her homosexual desire evil. Yet she maintains an inevitable connection with and faith in God that has been sowed in her since childhood, and though she disowns her religion in the end, God is still heavily ingrained in her life. Jeanette has an uncomfortable and unconventional ending in terms of how she sees religion—she abandons the image of God that her mother has taught her, but she is steeped in the spiritual and searching to keep God in her life, which I argue is exemplified by her return to her mother and the accompanying story of Winnet. Jeanette has not compromised her identity in the end nor given up on trying to find reconciliation with God.

Religion, Spirituality, and Queer Theology

As Jeanette recognizes the faults in her religion, she moves toward a spiritual relationship with God without the repression of her sexuality. To argue this transition from religious to spiritual, it seems appropriate to examine these terms more closely as used throughout this thesis. Scholars who explore these concepts find that there is no clear definition of each, and instead they present differing opinions across the field or attempt to make their own definition, though most are only foundational and encourage further research on the subject. In "Conceptualizing Religion and Sexuality: Points of Commonality, Points of Departure," Peter C. Hill suggests that "to argue that spirituality is good and religion is bad (or vice-versa) is to deny a substantial body of research demonstrating that both religion and spirituality can be manifested in healthy as well as unhealthy ways" (64). While Jeanette's strict Pentecostal community is ultimately damaging and unaccepting of her, this is not to say that all individuals practicing this, or any other denomination of Christianity, will have negative experiences of religion. Instead of deeming religion as "bad" and spirituality as "good," Winterson's text suggests that one way queer people who struggle to find belonging within religious communities can still maintain and practice their faith in God is through a spiritual connection. In Jeanette's story, spirituality is related to a different mode of being through which she departs from religiosity without denouncing her faith in God.

Many scholars attempt to differentiate between religion and spirituality, some creating working definitions of each and others concluding that the terms are inseparable. For young queer people like Jeanette who find themselves in oppressive religious communities, it is often a more personal relationship with God that they turn to, maintaining their faith through spiritual

modes when they feel unwelcome by religious institutions. Hill references a study in which a diverse population was asked to give their own definitions of religion and spirituality:

> Definitions of religiousness included both personal beliefs, such as a belief in God or a higher power, and institutional beliefs and practices such as church membership, church attendance, and commitment to the belief system of a church or organized religion. In contrast, spirituality was most often described in personal or experiential terms, such as belief in (or having a relationship with) God or a higher power. . . (62)

These differentiations are in keeping with Jeanette's own journey from religious to spiritual, as the former part of her life is characterized by a belief in God as well as a devotion to the church, while the latter is characterized by a more personal belief in and transformation of God's role in her life. For Jeanette, this transition is necessary as she learns that her religious community cannot accept her sexuality. In an essay on the impact of institutionalized religion on lesbians, Deana Morrow states that "Institutional religion has long been a mechanism for heterosexist intolerance and oppression of those who are same-sex identified in their intimate lives" (111). Jeanette's mother ultimately acts as a conduit of this heterosexist intolerance, disowning and exiling her daughter from her home. It is only through a separation from the church that Jeanette can consider spiritual possibility beyond institutionalized religion.

Leanne Luis Newman's essay "Faith, Spirituality, and Religion: A Model for Understanding the Differences," differentiates between faith, religion, and spirituality by labeling them respectively as a state of knowing, a state of doing, and a state of being. "Spirituality and religion are a *function* of faith. Both religion and spirituality require faith as a foundation," Newman writes, and "while faith is grounded within an individual, spirituality and

religion are dynamic" (106-108). Jeanette turns away from her religion, in which extremely regimented and specific ways of doing are forced upon her by her mother and the congregation. Specifically, in the Pentecostal tradition, faith is believed to be "powerfully experiential, and not something found merely through ritual or thinking" ("Pentecostalism" [*BBC*]). In turning to the spiritual, however, she begins practicing more of a state of being, built from a faith in God that remains instilled in her. Jeanette's faith may be a product of her religious upbringing, but by building such a strong foundation of faith and knowing, she is able to let go of the religion that rejected her and move toward a spiritual connection with God. In another essay on the fundamental differences between these terms, brimadevi van Niekerk argues that "Religion. . . becomes more narrowly conceived, while spirituality is seen to relate to the sacred aspects of life and the universe, freed from the constraints of compulsory practice and physical location" (6-7). This succinctly helps to describe Jeanette's own transformation—though the "compulsory practice" of the church community causes them to denounce Jeanette, she is ultimately able to find freedom through faith in the sacred nature of God instead of faith in her mother's and the church's regimented teachings.

Aside from studies attempting to hone a definition of these complex terms, other scholarship deals with the growing field of queer theology, an important area of study underlying this discussion of Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. Scholars in this field, such as Peter Cheng, deny that "queer" and "theology" are "an oxymoron or an inherent contradiction in terms," providing support for the endeavor of putting sexuality and religion in conversation with each other (Cheng 2). In his introductory text on queer theology, Cheng posits that queer theology is "queer talk about God," and in more detail he explains that the term "queer" in this

context is used as an umbrella term for the LGBTQIA+ community, as a transgression of societal norms surrounding gender and sexuality, and as a tool to erase binary boundaries around gender and sexuality (3-6). The language of queer theology, therefore, is the language that deals most closely with the intersections between queer and religious or spiritual life. Queer theologians point to the possibility of queer individuals thriving both within and outside of organized religion, further showing that religion is not solely or always harmful for these communities. In the context of Jeanette's specific church community, however, she finds that separation from her church is imperative. The Pentecostal denomination sticks steadfastly to the notion of Biblical inerrancy, and homosexuality is especially demonized within this text (Kiprop). Embarking on her own spiritual journey, therefore, seems the only option for Jeanette's continued relationship with God. In an essay on queer Christian voices in young adult literature, Robert Bittner further describes the aim of queer theology:

> Queer Theology seeks to deconstruct historical and heteropatriarchal assumptions in previously hetero-exclusive theologies. By breaking down assumptions and expanding current notions of what theology is—or should be—queer theology is able to find ways of understanding identity in relation to God that are not limited to heteronormative conjecture. (7)

I argue that the closing pages of Winterson's novel suggest Jeanette's own possible queering of theology—she refuses to give up her sexuality or her steadfast faith, and instead she considers a transgressive path to the one expected of her by her patriarchal church. On this transgressive path, Jeanette challenges the church's judgement of her "Unnatural Passions" and instead views her sexuality as pure and God as an accepting entity apart from the church. Notions like these

forwarded in queer theology support Winterson's own suggestions in her novel, as both consider the complexities of religious and spiritual life and show that despite the existence of heteronormative religious institutions and theologies, there is still religious and/or spiritual possibility to be found for queer people.

A Religious Childhood- Viewing Mother as God Figure

The telling of Jeanette's adoption holds many and obvious connections to the Christian story of Jesus Christ's conception, and Louie seems akin to God as she both wills Jeanette's creation into existence and adopts her as God adopts His "children" into His kingdom. Louie was indoctrinated into the Pentecostal denomination of Christianity when she was a young woman, stumbling into Pastor Spratt's Glory Crusade and discovering her love for God and missionary work in the weeks following. When given the opportunity to adopt a child, she instils in Jeanette this same passion for service to God. Describing the night her mother took her in, Jeanette says, "My mother, out walking that night, dreamed a dream and sustained it in daylight. She would get a child, train it, build it, dedicate it to the Lord: a missionary child, a servant of God, a blessing" (Winterson 9). The text goes on to say that Louie "took the child away and for seven days and seven nights the child cried out, for fear and not knowing" (9). This line alludes to the seven days and seven nights of creation described in the Bible's Genesis chapter, which is also the name of the first chapter of *Oranges*. Biradar speaks to this connection when she says, "That is how, in this 'female Genesis,' it is a woman, Jeanette's mother, who does the act of 'begetting' and is therefore responsible for the act of creation" (443). As narrator, Jeanette recounts her adoption presumably from a story her mother originally told her. Reading the story from Jeanette's child-like perspective shows readers how she perceives her mother—as a God-like figure with the prophetic power to "dream" Jeanette into existence. Furthermore, biblical references to creation and God's divine abilities would be familiar to Jeanette given her mother's strict expectation that she know the Bible down to its smallest details, exemplified by Louie's daily routine of asking her random Bible quiz questions to test her knowledge (3). As a young and impressionable child,

Jeanette would be likely to see the connections between the biblical God and her own mother, causing her to gradually conflate the two in her mind the more her mother relates herself to the Lord.

Further cementing Louie's God-like role in Jeanette's life is how she likens Jeanette to Christ. Not only does she adopt Jeanette with the aim of producing "a missionary child, a servant of God, [and] a blessing," but she also holds Jeanette to Christ-like standards. When Jeanette tells her mother it would be too difficult to make the Tower of Babel out of origami for a school project, Louie responds with "The Lord walked on water"; she expects that anything below or to this standard should be attainable for Jeanette (51). She also tells her as a young child, "This is a world of sin . . . You can change the world" (10). Given the way her mother raises her to view herself, Jeanette too holds herself to these standards. Furthermore, Jeanette feels her responsibilities are God's desire just as much as they are her mother's. Bollinger posits that "Jeanette's image of herself as specially chosen dominates her self-definition during her childhood; her mother chose her to be a missionary, and so she expected to be a missionary. She believes herself selected by both God and her mother for service to God" (374). By giving Jeanette a sense of self-importance and duty that might be likened to Jesus Christ's, Louie simultaneously inhabits a God-like presence in her daughter's mind. Given no reason yet to doubt her mother, Jeanette accepts Louie's heavy-handed and unobstructed religious influence without question. Jeanette's relationship with and understanding of God, therefore, becomes inseparable from her relationship with and understanding of her mother.

Aside from connections between Jeanette and Christ, there are further parallels between the story of the biblical Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden and Jeanette's own upbringing.

Like God commanding Adam and Eve to abstain from eating fruit from the tree of knowledge, Louie holds that “Oranges are the only fruit” and urges Jeanette to abstain from all others (Winterson 29). Louie’s insistence that oranges are the only fruit warrants Jeanette’s further connections between her mother and God, as the metaphor of the holy fruit versus the forbidden fruit is reminiscent of God’s rules for Adam and Eve set out in Genesis. Oranges become a prevailing image throughout Winterson’s text and take on multiple metaphorical meanings. In an article on narrative reconstruction in Winterson’s *Oranges*, Bailey states that “Mother virtually forces oranges upon Jeanette, just as she force-feeds her child religious fundamentalism and outlaws any non-religious activity” (64). Oranges, therefore, act as a symbol of the uncompromising religious standards that Louie forces upon her daughter. After Louie finds out about Jeanette’s relationship with Melanie, for example, she burns all of their letters and cards, and in the days following the only interaction she has with Jeanette is when she wakes her from her sleep to give her “a bowl of oranges” (Winterson 114). This is seemingly Louie’s way of reminding Jeanette that oranges are still the only fruit—religion is still the only way—despite Jeanette’s attempt to indulge in others (Melanie is literally given her name because she “looked like a melon” when she was born) (86). On the other hand, oranges seem to be a comfort to Jeanette, just as the religion she has grown up with is comfortable to her. And just as God promises blindness from evil and sin if Adam and Eve abstain from the forbidden fruit, so does Louie instill the belief that religion (oranges) will keep Jeanette safe and pure. Biradar argues that “When Jeanette feels uncertain about something her mother always gives her oranges. In this way, oranges become a symbol of heterosexuality and the only possible way to live life according to her mother" (446). As a child yet unconcerned with sexuality, Jeanette takes

oranges and the religious refuge they represent as a way to ease her uncertainties, so that in pre-forbidden fruit Adam and Eve fashion, she need not concern herself with evil and sin. Louie, in the meantime, offers the safety of the holy fruit and remains akin to God in Jeanette's mind.

Jeanette also blurs the lines between Louie and God as she experiences her mother acting as an all-knowing and vengeful figure. She judges who and what is holy or unholy and claims to know when God is working. Jeanette describes her mother's tendency to sulk "when the appropriate destruction didn't materialize" after praying about someone's evil deeds. Jeanette then says "Quite often it did. Her will or the Lord's, I can't say" (Winterson 2-3). Unsure of whether seemingly divine punishment comes from the sheer will of her mother or from God's power, Jeanette struggles to separate the two—both Louie and God appear as powerful religious forces with the power to strike down their enemies. Jeanette also witnesses Louie's tendency to judge people and circumstances as if she were tapped into God's knowledge, causing Jeanette to accept that the Lord is working when her mother says he is, as if God's doings exist primarily through Louie's acknowledgement of them. When Jeanette goes temporarily deaf from an ear infection at the age of seven, her mother assumes her to be in a state of rapture, and Jeanette assumes the same. When people ask why Jeanette cannot hear anything, Louie replies "'It's the Lord… Working in mysterious ways'" (21). Jeanette even states that "sometimes my mother invented theology" (4). The theology Jeanette absorbs throughout her childhood is the theology filtered through her mother's teachings, so that she does not question what her mother tells her about God's doings. When presenting a school report about what she did over her summer holiday, Jeanette brings up her Auntie Betty who almost died from sunstroke, but "'. . .got better, thanks to my mother who stayed up all night struggling mightily.'" The teacher asks if her

mother is a nurse, and Jeanette replies "'No, she just heals the sick'" (39). Pentecostalism is "a holistic faith where adherents believe that Christ is the Healer," and "that prayer is central in acquiring healing" (Kiprop). Jeanette, however, has taken her belief one step further, claiming that her mother heals the sick as if her mother has the abilities of God Himself. Jeanette blurs the lines between her mother and God to the point where she is unsure which has produced the theological teachings and holy miracles she experiences.

As an extremely active member of her church, Louie holds a position of great power and influence which she carries with her even into her home, causing much of Jeanette's religious influence to come directly from her mother's word. Jeanette's father is mentioned only a handful of times throughout the text and is mostly pushed to the background; in her article on the classic coming out novel, Lies Xhonneux states that "While men are crucial in the Bible (think of Joseph or the Magi), Winterson playfully removes them from 'Genesis': Jeanette's 'meek father' is barely present and not much more essential" (109). This near erasure of Jeanette's father leaves Louie to be the dominant parental figure in Jeanette's life. With no father figure and mostly women making up her church's congregation, Jeanette learns to virtually disregard men and even to see them as lowly. Biradar discusses a passage from *Oranges* in which Jeanette asks her aunt why men are beasts: ". . . her Uncle Bill came to her and said, 'You wouldn't love us any other way' and he rubbed his spiky chin against her face. She hated it and him (Winterson, 1987, p. 71). This expression shows her hatred for the male and how uncomfortable she feels when a man touches her" (447). With a general distrust and disapproval of men, Jeanette does not have a male figure that she might relate to the heavenly Father. While some see Louie as representative of the Virgin Mary and Jeanette's mostly absent father as Joseph, I propose a

different interpretation. Pushing Jeanette's father to the background eliminates the male presence and any possibility that a man would influence Jeanette's conception of God. It follows that Louie becomes the figure that inhabits this position, leaving Jeanette to experience a religious God solely through her mother and her equally strict church.

Because Jeanette's childhood is devoid of male influence while religious power and knowledge comes directly from women, the traditionally patriarchal view of a male God does not disrupt her tendency to conflate her mother and God. Growing up surrounded by not only the dominant influence of her mother, but several other independent women in the church, Jeanette does not question the notion that her mother would have God-like qualities and knowledge. Not only is Jeanette's mother the dominant parental figure and religious authority while her father is mostly absent, but Louie was also able to have Jeanette without any help from a man, guided by seemingly divine means to a crib containing Jeanette (Winterson 9). Seeing her mother as the site of her religious emergence and growing up in a church populated by powerful women, Jeanette inevitably comes to see the female figure as more akin to and in tune with God than the male. It also follows that Jeanette's attraction to women does not feel unnatural, as her life thus far has contained overwhelming female influence and power and little to no suggestion that she would need a man in her life. She says to her first love, Melanie, "'I love you almost as much as I love the Lord'" and considers her "a gift from the Lord" (104). The pure and divine nature that Jeanette sees in woman causes her to believe that God would take no issue with her budding attraction to them. That is why, when Louie's religious views suggest that her love for Melanie is sinful, Jeanette begins to question the God-like status she had once attributed to her mother.

Adolescent Questionings- Severance of Mother and God

As Jeanette grows older and experiences her first romantic and sexual attraction to another female, she also recognizes the dissonance between the joy these feelings bring her and the strong disapproval from her mother, who views homosexual desire as "Unnatural Passion" (6). For the first time in Jeanette's life there is a significant point of contention between her and her mother, which causes Jeanette to begin questioning the many contradictions apparent in her mother's beliefs and behavior. For example, Louie rejects lesbian desire and desire in general, yet there are suggestions that she may have once had romantic relations with a woman. Louie shows Jeanette a page titled "Old Flames" in an old photo album, and amongst pictures of multiple men she dated before finding God, there is a picture of a woman who she claims to be the sister of one of her Old Flames. The next time she pulls out the album, the photograph is gone (37). This suggestion is furthered after Jeanette is confronted about her sexuality in church; she talks with Miss Jewsbury, a member of the church who turns out to be a lesbian as well, who tells her that Louie is "'a woman of the world, even though she'd never admit it to me. She knows about feelings, especially women's feelings'" (106). Knowing that her mother might have felt these "Unnatural Passions" once in her life, yet so harshly judges her for feeling the same, Jeanette recognizes Louie's hypocrisy and strays away from seeing her mother as the divine figure she once did. Likewise, she does not feel that this same harsh judgment would come from God. Al-Shara emphasizes the differences in how Louie and Jeanette judge good and evil: "According to Jeanette's mother, goodness and evil depend on sexual desires (p. 3), in contrast with Jeanette who believes that decency, kindness, modesty and authentic faith determine goodness" (239). Because Jeanette sees only goodness in her relationship with Melanie, she does

not believe God would deem her desire evil as her mother does. Al-Shara also states that "It is true that desire has led her to be considered an outsider in her own community, but she does not seem to regret sexual identity or even resist it" (242). Right before the church publicly condemns Jeanette's relationship with Melanie, she thinks to herself "'Melanie is a gift from the Lord, and it would be ungrateful not to appreciate her'" (Winterson 104). And when Pastor Spratt accuses them of falling under Satan's spell, Jeanette defensively shouts a Bible verse: "'To the pure all things are pure'" (105). She clearly does not feel that God would take issue with her love for Melanie but would rather see its purity. Louie's denouncement of her sexuality, therefore, creates a clear disconnect in Jeanette's mind between her mother and what she believes to be a more loving and accepting God.

Despite Jeanette's convictions in church, she is soon forced to undergo an exorcism to expel the demon her mother and the congregation believe her to be possessed by, and in these hours Jeanette meets the orange demon, a hallucination which claims to be there to help her decide what she wants (109). Jeanette continues to draw distinctions between her mother and God, religious construction and divine being, as she questions whether her desires are truly evil as her mother and the congregation claim they are—she wonders, "Can love really belong to the demon?" (108). Jeanette posits that everybody has a demon of their own, her own being the orange demon, who appears in this passage and challenges the primary symbolism of the color orange thus far in the text. Oranges acting as the symbol of religious rigidity, their color now appears in the form of a demon, the supposed embodiment of evil; however, when Jeanette asks "'Demons are evil, aren't they?" the orange demon responds with "'Not quite, they're just different, and difficult'" (109). Here, the orange demon acts as a symbol of the multifaceted and

equivocal, disputing Louie's insistence that oranges are the only fruit and religion is the only correct path. Jeanette considers that accepting her "demons"—her sexuality—does not mean she is evil, but simply that her existence will be different, more complicated than it has been. This possibility makes her also question the strict religious black-and-white world her mother has constructed for her, as well as the way Louie has interpreted and preached passages of the Bible. When Jeanette argues that in the Bible the demon keeps getting driven out, the orange demon replies with another piece of wisdom: "'Don't believe all you read'" (109). This stands in direct contradiction with Louie's unwavering devotion to the Bible, characteristic of Pentecostals who tend to "observe the Bible's inerrancy" (Kiprop). With the orange demon's perspective, however, Jeanette considers that perhaps her mother and the church have given in to what Bailey calls "the dangers of single-minded misinterpretation or arbitrarily privileged texts" (67). Perhaps the Bible, good and evil, even God Himself, are more complicated than the single-minded church has decided they are. Given these radically new ideas to ponder, Jeanette is put into a position to question all she has ever known—if demons are not evil and being gay might not mean eternal damnation, then perhaps God is different, more difficult to understand than Jeanette's mother has suggested. This passage, therefore, is pivotal to Jeanette's separation of the religion and God she saw in and through her mother, and the God she seeks out for herself later in life.

Jeanette increasingly sees her mother as untrustworthy and unstable as the novel progresses, and she no longer views her mother's actions as representative of God's will. One reason for this is that Louie's behavior fails to adhere to the doctrine she preaches— "Though Christianity puts forward the emotions of love, care and forgiveness, Jeanette's mother and her friends are devoid of these qualities" (Biradar 448). As a Pentecostal Christian, Louie breaks her

supposed devotion to the Bible by ignoring its many passages about loving and forgiving one's neighbor. Jeanette understands this clearly when her mother retaliates violently after her affair with Melanie, burning all their cards and letters to each other in the backyard despite Jeanette repenting for her "Unnatural Passions." The pastor believes the Lord will forgive her, but Jeanette thinks otherwise: "Perhaps the Lord does, but my mother didn't . . . She burnt a lot more than the letters that night in the backyard. I don't think she knew. In her head she was still queen, but not my queen any more, not the White Queen any more" (Winterson 113). Louie's betrayal causes Jeanette to completely lose confidence in her, her view of her mother as God-like disintegrating along with the cards and letters. Another instance of this divide occurs in another unexpected betrayal from her mother. When Jeanette is suspected of having an affair with another woman from the church, Katy, she protects her lover by claiming that Katy had only been helping her get in contact with her old lover, Melanie. Unsure how to deal with this demonic rekindling of lesbian desire, the pastor of Jeanette's church consults with the council and returns with the consensus that the issue has stemmed from "allowing women power in the church" (136). Louie stands from the pews and readily gives a speech of agreement, claiming that Jeanette's sexual deviancy is a result of being given too much power in the church:

> Until this moment my life had still made some kind of sense. Now it was making no sense at all. My mother droned on about the importance of missionary work for a woman, that I was clearly such a woman, but had spurned my call in order to wield power on the home front, where it was inappropriate. She ended by saying that having taken on a man's world in other ways I had flouted God's law and tried to do it sexually. (136)

Jeanette feels betrayed in this moment, as her mother has raised her to be a missionary and has always praised her for being active in the church; now, however, Louie claims that this very participation has given Jeanette too much masculine power and ignited the sin of her lesbian desires. Seeing her mother's convoluted and fickle way of viewing religious doctrine, Jeanette recognizes her mother's actions as a human betrayal rather than an act of divine will. Worried about the consequences the church will face given the plan to reduce women's power, she states, "I knew my mother hoped I would blame myself, but I didn't. I knew now where the blame lay. If there's such a thing as spiritual adultery, my mother was a whore" (Winterson 136). Jeanette once saw her mother as powerful, God-like and tapped into a higher knowledge, but now Louie has become a symbol of betrayal and close-mindedness, contradicting a lifetime of preaching the importance of Jeanette's role in the church when she disagrees with her sexuality.

Jeanette increasingly finds herself at odds with Louie and her beliefs, to the point where she sees her mother as completely severed from the Lord. This occurs first through instances in which her mother refuses to offer forgiveness, which Jeanette feels she would not require from the Lord in the first place because, as she has stated, "to the pure all things are pure." Still, Louie completely disowns Jeanette, claiming in front of the entire congregation, "She's no daughter of mine" (160). Forsaken by her mother, Jeanette feels as if she must separate herself from God because she does not know how to have a relationship with Him after so many years of only knowing a distorted, restricted version of Him through her mother. Though feeling far from Him, Jeanette still holds that God was never her enemy; she states "I miss God. I miss the company of someone utterly loyal. I still don't think of God as my betrayer. The servants of God, yes, but servants by their very nature betray. I miss God who was my friend" (175). These lines show

how Jeanette has once and for all separated her notion of God and her notion of her mother, who once appeared as such a perfect servant of God that she was almost one with Him, but who she now realizes only used God to justify what she believed to be His will. Al-Shara states that "Winterson considers religion a form of illusion that deludes people in the same way magic does." (243). For Louie, this illusion lies in her belief that she is the perfect Christian, although her actions consistently suggest otherwise. Now, Jeanette recognizes that what once appeared as perfection came from being raised to believe a perfect narrative which her mother had constructed: that religion is the only way and that there is no need to question a flawless system. "'Perfection,'" Jeanette recalls a pastor preaching to the church, "'is flawlessness'" (62). In a fairytale Winterson imbeds within the text soon after, however, a woman tells a prince unsuccessfully searching for perfection that perfection is not, in fact, flawlessness, but is balance and harmony. Losing faith in the perfection of her mother, Jeanette also loses faith in the church and the entire institution of her religion, filled with servants who may mean well but "by their very nature betray" (175). Jeanette does not deny God's existence after this realization, but rather sees Him as a lost friend, a casualty of her mother's betrayals. She must now navigate what it is like to be without Him and, as she ventures into a life without religion, the possibilities of finding the balance and harmony which might allow her to reconcile with God without abandoning her identity.

Young Adulthood- Spirituality and Possibility

Finally breaking the mental ties she had made in her childhood between her mother and God, Jeanette now sees Louie as representative of the religion and uncompromising church which oppressed her and tried to stifle her identity; God, contrarily, is now a site of possibility in Jeanette's mind, a flexible and multifaceted being which she may rebuild her relationship with outside of the church and work into the life she has chosen for herself. She learns that it is not necessary to reject pieces of herself to be accepted by God, as those who truly expected her to reject her sexuality were Louie and the church—God's servants who she now knows were her true betrayers. Still, Winterson suggests that Jeanette may find ways of embracing both her faith and her sexuality, a possibility which she metaphorically weaves into the final chapter through the fairytale short story of Winnet Stonejar. Winterson uses several fairytale stories like this to break up Jeanette's main narrative, "tales that fragment and re-shape her personal experiences within a mythological paradigm," thus emphasizing certain conflicts and lessons that appear in Jeanette's own life (Carter 21). Winnet is found in the woods by a sorcerer who tricks her into being his apprentice. She forgets her life before, coming to believe she is the sorcerer's daughter, and learns all about magic, just as Jeanette is adopted by Louie and learns all about religion. Winnet eventually falls for a boy the sorcerer does not approve of, and he exiles her from his castle, reminiscent of Jeanette's love affairs bringing Louie to kick her out of her home. Before Winnet leaves, a raven living in the castle comes to her and says "'You won't lose your power you know, you'll use it differently, that's all.'" He goes on to say, "'Sorcerers can't take their gifts back, ever, it says so in the book'" (149). These lines relate to Jeanette's story—though she navigates life without her mother and the church, she does not lose the "gift" of God and her

faith that her upbringing gave her, just as Winnet will not lose the gift of her magic after leaving the sorcerer. There is, however, one difference apparent in Jeanette's and Winnet's stories. Winnet becomes ashamed of her magic because the outside world fears it, so her story ends with her sailing toward a mythical city where no one toils, leaving behind both the sorcerer and the outsiders who feared the gifts he gave her (156). Jeanette, on the other hand, returns home to her mother at the end of her story. Bailey argues that "Ironically, Jeanette has learned the lessons of Christianity that Mother has not: love, acceptance, forgiveness" (75). Indeed, Jeanette holds to the values of Christianity that she believes God would offer her, offering the same to her mother. Winnet, however, goes from losing one seeming ideal to longing for another, in search of what Winterson's novel has already established as unattainable perfection. Winnet has lost any chance of reconciling her past and the possibilities of her future, whereas Jeanette's return to her mother signals that though she does not agree with the way Louie used religion against her in the past, she still seeks to uphold the values of what she perceives to be a forgiving God.

I argue that Jeanette's return is not in the interest of rejoining the church that condemned her, but is a return home in a spiritual sense; this was where she first encountered and grew in her relationship with God, and though that relationship is now uncertain, returning home symbolizes Jeanette's desire to reconnect with a God that she knows was always her friend. Bollinger argues that Jeanette's choice to return home and continue her relationship with her mother suggests that "maturity consists in the continuation, not the elimination, of mother-daughter relations" (364). While Bollinger makes a valid point, speaking to the maturity Jeanette has gained while her mother struggles to grow at all, I argue that this maturity also makes Jeanette open to a possible coexistence between the beliefs she still holds from her religious past and her sexuality; perhaps

growing up does not have to come with the abandonment of either of these integral parts of her identity. Though her religious community does not accept her, Jeanette believes that it is up to her to decide her own beliefs and values by using the pieces of her religious upbringing that she always had faith in. In the chapter titled “Deuteronomy: The last book of the law,” Jeanette explains how she interprets history and stories:

> Perhaps the event has an unassailable truth. God saw it. God knows. But I am not God. And so when someone tells me what they heard or saw, I believe them, and I believe their friend who also saw, but not in the same way, and I can put these accounts together and I will not have a seamless wonder but a sandwich laced with mustard of my own. (Winterson 97)

This metaphor shows Jeanette’s ability to take what her mother and the church have taught her and rework and reimagine it to make it her own, creating something new by mixing what she has been given with the things she is learning for herself. This sets her apart from Louie, because instead of taking the Bible as explicit fact and claiming to have indisputable knowledge akin to God’s, Jeanette depends on herself to interpret the world and what God means to her and her alone. Bittner discusses the path of reconciliation for some queer Christian characters in YA fiction: “More often than not, a personal spirituality is formed, in which pieces of theology from a religious background are kept and then molded into a workable belief system that allows for a more liberal understanding and acceptance of queer sexuality" (5). For Jeanette, these pieces of theology are the values of forgiveness, acceptance, and love that she continues to practice and believe God to hold. Disagreeing with the intolerance and malicious judgement from her mother

and the church, Jeanette shapes her belief system to accommodate a spiritual belief in God and positive Christian values, as well as love and acceptance for herself and her sexuality.

While Jeanette is steadfast in her values, choosing to accept and forgive her mother, she still struggles with feeling uncertainty, a theme throughout the novel that Jeanette is first sickened by but eventually welcomes as a consequence of choosing her own path. As a child, she believed that "Uncertainty was what the Heathen felt, and I was chosen by God" (Winterson 99). Now, she understands the convoluted way her religious upbringing caused her to view herself and her emotions, and she steps into an uncertain stage of her life as she rejects those teachings. Biradar states that "At the end of the novel, she opts for a life that embraces [uncertainty], leaving behind the certainties of the black-and-white world created by her mother" (442). The theme of uncertainty is significant in the novel because it shows the real struggle of being forced to leave everything one has ever known and then trying to put the pieces back together. Jeanette's queer identity puts her in a precarious position, uncertain about the future but willing to step out of the comfort of her religious community. Uncertainty comes with figuring out how she might maintain her faith though she has kept her "demon," which represents that which cannot be confined to a binary system but is more complex—in short, she has chosen to challenge rather than submit to religion. And as the orange demon suggests, it amounts to a "difficult, different time" for Jeanette as she navigates unknown terrain. When someone asks her what would have happened is she had stayed with her mother and the church, Jeanette thinks to herself:

> I could have been a priest instead of a prophet. The priest has a book with the words set out. Old words, known words, words of power. Words that are always on the surface.

> Words for every occasion. The words work. They do what they're supposed to do; comfort and discipline. The prophet has no book. The prophet is a voice that cries in the wilderness, full of sounds that do not always set into meaning. The prophets cry out because they are troubled by demons. (Winterson 164)

This quote speaks to Jeanette's separation from the institution of religion and many of its teachings, as well as from the comfort of that religion, though it was ultimately used against her. As a "prophet," however, Jeanette has given up that comfort; she knows the Bible can be used in harmful ways so she must search for her own meanings, which do not always come so easily. Her demon stays with her, though not through possession, but rather as a reminder that her spiritual journey apart from the church will be difficult. Queer theologist Althaus-Reid suggests that "Queering theology requires courage . . . we face here the challenge of renouncing beloved sexual ideologies, systems of belief that even if built upon injustice, have become dear to us especially if associated with the will of God" (305). Jeanette's future may feel uncertain to her, but she is courageous in her willingness to leave the church and seek to rediscover God in a new light. Winterson's novel has proven that there is hope for her yet, and that while learning to balance these parts of her identity may not be easy, it will certainly be possible.

The closing of Winterson's novel suggests that a spiritual connection with God shows itself to be possible in several ways. Interestingly, one suggestion of this comes from the words of Louie in the last line of the novel as she broadcasts herself over the radio to connect with other Christians: "'This is Kindly Light calling Manchester, come in Manchester, this is Kindly Light'" (Winterson 182). While Louie clearly picked her broadcast name as a homage to the Lord, I argue that this closing line is also a spiritual call to Jeanette who stands in the room, as if

to suggest that God is just as open to Jeanette as she is willing to reconcile with Him. Furthermore, Louie's radio broadcasts are significant because she "regularly spoke to Christians all over England" (178); this shows that Christianity expands far outside of the small Pentecostal community Jeanette was raised in, and that it is possible that she might find individuals or communities that are more open-minded and share her willingness to acknowledge the complexities of God and faith. As Jeanette works on reconciling the faith grown during her childhood with the identity she has chosen to take pride in, the Kindly Light calling out is a symbol that she can still reconnect with God. The Kindly Light is continuing to call her home, which she now recognizes is a spiritual connection rather than a physical place. While some argue that the Kindly Light represents Louie who has had a change of heart, I find that she remains steadfast in her beliefs and attitudes toward her daughter. There has up until this point been no suggestion that Louie would suddenly open her heart to her daughter just as she is, especially seeing as Jeanette is the one who decides to visit her mother in the end and tries to have somewhat of a relationship with her. One point of support made for Louie's change is when she says the unexpected line, "'After all, . . . oranges are not the only fruit'" (177); this statement, however, comes after telling a story about "the town's first mission for coloured people," during which Louie "emptied her War Cupboard of tinned pineapple, because she thought that's what they ate" (177). These lines do not show that Louie is suddenly becoming more open-minded, but that she is simply placing another group into a box, judging and stereotyping them without making any effort to better understand them. Likewise, Bailey argues that Louie's comment that oranges are not the only fruit is her way of "trying to cover up a faux pas, to vindicate herself and her usual stereotypical thinking . . . There seems to be no room for

Jeanette in Mother's life; having stepped into the margins of the text Mother sees as reality, Jeanette may or may not exist. To Mother, she is irrelevant" (77). Indeed, Louie behaves as if the traumatic exchanges between her and her daughter never occurred, ignoring her daughter's sexuality as opposed to facing it, much less accepting it. The broadcast of Kindly Light, therefore, does not signal a change in Louie, but instead symbolizes possibility, a bright horizon in which Jeanette may find a spiritual connection with God and others who accept her as she is.

Conclusion

Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* provocatively challenges religion and highlights the harm it can cause to those that its followers do not deem worthy of God's grace. The character of Jeanette stands in for a community of queer people who grow up in radically religious households and must hide their queer identities, abandon parts of themselves to please the church, or risk being abandoned and exiled. Queer individuals may feel trapped by the religious teachings with which they are brought up and may struggle to consider that they can have any relationship with God outside of the confines of a religious institution. Bittner argues that in some queer Christian narratives the character ends up conforming to heteronormative expectations, expressing to queer readers "that they must conform to particular mainstream expectations around gender/sexual expression in order to succeed or find acceptance. In addition, the homophobic rhetoric and pushback from society within the narratives may lead to a sense of inevitability for queer readers" (9). Jeanette's own upbringing and the close ties established between her mother and God made questioning her religion difficult and confusing, and even in the end of the novel she has not completely found her footing again. For some, difficulties like these may cause them to become spiteful and feel that they have no option but to reject their faith. For others, asking them to reject their faith can be as difficult as asking them to reject their queer identities. Jeanette ultimately refuses to conform like the characters Bittner discusses, her defiance presenting an alternate narrative which emphasizes possibility for queer readers rather than inevitability. Winterson shows that Jeanette is capable of reworking what she has learned and making her faith her own for the first time in her life, suggesting that it is through questioning, experiencing, and leaving their comfort zone that queer people can recognize the

fluidity of a relationship with God. Though Jeanette has denied parts of scripture and turned away from the teachings and practices that her mother once forced upon her, she still sees God as an accepting and forgiving ally and turns toward spirituality as a tool and guide in her life.

Winterson's text advocates for queer individuals of religious backgrounds by rejecting the idea that faith and nonheteronormative identities cannot coexist. She demonstrates that leaning into spirituality can be an alternative to adhering to oppressive religion doctrines, which can be severely restricting and uncompromising. In his book on the emergence of contemporary spirituality, David Tacey argues that a shift toward spirituality allows individuals "to reduce our egoic tension and to shed hostilities associated with being a victim or an alienated self. In other words, it allows us to love rather than to hate. Spirituality is about personal empowerment, but it is not 'private' because from this transformation will flow political and social transformations" (64). Jeanette's return to her mother shows that she has done just what Tacey suggests, and instead of being a victim and choosing to hate, she chooses to love. By exemplifying this spiritual empowerment through her text, Winterson can incite "political and social transformations" in religious and queer communities, challenging heteronormative expectations for both. Both Winterson and her protagonist—the former through the act of writing the text and the latter through her shift from the religious to the spiritual—also take part in "queering" theology, which Cheng states is "to turn convention and authority on its head" (6); they disrupt the status quo and unapologetically advocate for lifestyles which their religious upbringings aimed to suppress for most of their lives. Ultimately, the story of Jeanette's growth and shift to spiritualty is a largely untold one, and it proposes that queer individuals can maintain a relationship with God, even when the church says otherwise.

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