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Breaking Boundaries: Jeanette’s Liberation from Maternal Oppression

Navigating Identity and Faith in *Oranges are not the Only Fruit*

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Introduction

Jeanette Winterson is a British author celebrated for her experimental writing style and who challenges traditional literary norms in novels, memoirs, and essays exploring gender, sexuality, and identity. Her works, relevant to the feminist movement, often centre on female characters navigating agency in a patriarchal world, addressing issues like domestic violence, reproductive rights, and motherhood complexities.

The mother-daughter relationship is an important and complex aspect of human development, as it often shapes one's sense of identity, self-worth, and values. In literature, the mother-daughter relationship is often used to discuss themes of self-image issues, masculine versus feminine ideals, or familial dysfunction, by both male and female authors. María Reventós relays that expectations, comparisons, and disappointment between mothers and daughters are common aspects of viewing the latter as a ‘double’, or a mother’s second chance at life (286). Expectantly, the presentation of a daughter as a double invites a multitude of conflicts: does the daughter comply, assimilate, or battle her mother’s attempts at replicating herself. Reventós argues that such conflicts, in literature, can lead to matrophobia, rejection of conventional femininity, or an internal war of the daughter’s identity (288). Furthermore, the mother’s inability to separate herself from her daughter and provide love and care could result in a subordination of the daughter within the power structure and a dissolution of their relationship (288). Within such literary relationships, religious beliefs are often a cause of contention. For example, in Stephen King’s *Carrie*, where the daughter is viewed as a physical manifestation of her mother’s sin, or in Winterson’s *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. In *Oranges*,\(^1\) Winterson explores the strained relationship between the protagonist and her mother, who is depicted as a strict and domineering figure. Through the main character of Jeanette, Winterson delves into the impact of a mother's attempts to control and suppress her

\(^1\) From here on, the novel's title, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, will be referred to as *Oranges*.
daughter's individuality, religious belonging, and sexuality. The novel highlights the oppressive nature of patriarchal norms and the need for women to resist these norms in order to achieve true autonomy and freedom. By examining the dynamics of the mother-daughter relationship, this thesis aims to gain insight into the ways in which familial relationships can both shape and constrain one's sexual and religious identity and agency. This gives space for an investigation into the circumstances related to the divergence of Jeanette and her mother’s vision for Jeanette’s future. With feminist criticism in mind, themes such as mother-daughter relationships, religion’s role in the formation of identity, and rebellions against conformity presented in the following articles are of particular interest for this thesis.

In her article “Inverted Conversions,” Amy Benson Brown analyses the relationship between religion, sexuality, and gender in *Oranges*. The author suggests that *Oranges*’ religious biblical references are significant to understanding the relationship between Jeanette and her mother, as well as the role of religion in the formation of sexual and gender identity (Benson Brown 243). Further, she suggests that the novel's depiction of Jeanette's struggles with her religious and sexual identity is representative of a larger conflict between feminist and traditional religious institutions and as such, a point of conflict between Jeanette and her patriarchal mother (Benson Brown 234). Benson Brown underscores this theme by portraying Jeanette's discovery of her adoption papers as a contrast to the belief that she is a gift from God to her mother. In addition, Jeanette's mother's alternative ending of Charlotte Brontë’s classic novel of *Jane Eyre* in which Jane rejects a conventional life and instead chooses a path of religious devotion and missionary work reflects the mother's aspirations for Jeanette to lead a similar life, which prioritises duty and obedience to authority over individual freedom and agency. However, Jeanette instead learns “that Jane actually forgoes a missionary life to return to Rochester” and as such “Jeanette no more came expressly from God than Jane went on to do missionary work” (Benson Brown 241). This highlights her mother’s dishonesty about two
major events in Jeanette’s life. Firstly, Jeanette’s origin story and secondly, the influence of Jeanette’s mother on her future.

Zaydun Al-Shara argues that Jeanette's religiously influenced mother reinforces oppressive patriarchal norms on her daughter's identity through her adherence to cultural and religious expectations. Early in the novel, the church’s pastor proclaimed, “how full of the spirit [she] was”, but later once Jeanette’s lesbian sexuality came to light how “her loyalty to the church and its members does not protect Jeanette’s dignity and emotions” (Al-Shara 239). Jeanette’s mother further reinforces this restrictive and oppressive viewpoint by suggesting “goodness and evil depend on sexual desires” (Al-Shara 239). This statement infers that the value of Jeanette’s character can be defined by one aspect of her identity and not Jeanette as a whole. Al-Shara’s article highlights the role of hypocrisy in Jeanette’s story, which is argued by this thesis to play a large role in the development of the mother-daughter relationship. Moreover, the article explores Jeanette's challenge in emancipating herself from the religious and patriarchal constraints embodied by her mother, underscoring the significance of individual self-discovery and self-definition, even in defiance of maternal expectations and societal norms.

Said norms are explored in Mónica Calvo Pascual's article, which argues that the novel challenges traditional notions of identity and subverts patriarchal power structures (Calvo Pascual 21). From a mother-daughter relationship perspective, the article analyses the power dynamics between the protagonist and her devout Christian mother, who staunchly upholds traditional values, strict gender roles, and resists any deviation from her beliefs, particularly in the realms of religion and sexuality. This deviation is highlighted when Jeanette “considers her mother's idea that, having usurped a male role by preaching in the church” having suggested to the church that in spite of her relationship with Melanie, they were both thankful to God for bringing them together (Calvo Pascual 28). Despite Jeanette's announcement to the pastor, her
mother, and the church congregation, she became excluded from the group because she refused to compromise her moral principles to conform to the beliefs of the majority. This article compares the rigid sides of belonging and exclusion within religious settings with that of the familial, which is a relevant perspective through which to view the mother-daughter relationship. Through this lens, it could be argued that the mother’s expectations mirror the community’s, and thus Jeanette’s perception of how society, as she knows it, expects conformity or practices exclusion. Emrah Atasoy, analysing *Oranges* contends that the protagonist's mother symbolises societal expectations, attempting to enforce her beliefs on Jeanette, leading to a struggle for Jeanette's identity. By Atasoy’s interpretation, the novel delves into the conflict between individual self-expression and societal conformity, particularly within the mother-daughter dynamic. Atasoy underscores the theme of autonomy, emphasising the challenge when a mother's control clashes with the daughter's quest for independence. Atasoy suggests that the mother “feels the need to repress Jeanette and does not allow her to go beyond the definitive limits of her gender roles” (Atasoy 5). Additionally, because of the limitations being put upon Jeanette, she starts to realise that “the teachings of the Church do not illustrate the reality that Jeanette is living” and that “what looks like one thing may well be another” when speaking to her friend from church, Elsie, about the fact that there is a plurality of truths and perspectives (Atasoy 6).

Another perspective of the plurality of truths is presented in Vaishali Biradar’s article that explores the mother-daughter conflict in the context of the daughter's rebellion against societal norms on homosexuality. Focused on Jeanette's resistance to her Orthodox mother's attempts to mould her according to community expectations, the study highlights the tension between individuality and conformity. Emphasising the theme of non-conformity, it delves into the challenges posed to the mother-daughter relationship, especially when one embraces traditional values while the other seeks their own path. Biradar addresses three key stages of
Jeanette's development early on in the novel. Stage one, when Jeanette “is trying to come to terms with what she herself experiences as good and that which her mother and Pastor Finch believe is virtuous”, where Jeanette has yet to have experienced any hypocrisy or lies from the church or her mother (Biradar 442). Stage two, when Jeanette states, “I wasn’t quite certain what was happening myself”, alluding to the growing sexual feelings Jeanette is developing for Melanie which eventually leads to a conflict with her mother (Biradar 442). And finally, stage three, where towards the end of the novel where she “opts for a life that embraces that feeling, leaving behind the certainties of the black-and-white world created by her mother” (Biradar 442).

From a theoretical approach, the article by Colleen Colaner and Christine Rittenour suggests that the mother-daughter relationship plays a crucial role in shaping a daughter's feminist identification and aspirations. However, the article also discusses the potential impact of a patriarchal mother on her daughter's beliefs and aspirations, which can lead to conflict in the mother-daughter relationship (Colaner and Rittenour 82). The authors highlight that if a daughter identifies as a feminist and challenges traditional gender roles, she may clash with her patriarchal mother. The mother's adherence to traditional values may feel restrictive, causing the daughter to feel invalidated, leading to tension and conflict in their relationship (Colaner and Rittenour 84). Now, while Jeanette never explicitly states that she identifies as a feminist in *Oranges*, her actions and beliefs align with feminist principles. Jeanette challenges the gender roles imposed on her by her devout Pentecostal Christian mother and religious community, particularly in the context of restricting women's opportunities and voices. In *Oranges*, she rebels against these roles, particularly in her sexuality, rejecting the pressure to conform to heteronormative standards. The article is valuable to the thesis as it explores Jeanette's resistance to patriarchal norms and the church's control over women, which is a key conflict in *Oranges* between Jeanette, her mother, and the church.
Additionally, Anne Keary explores the complex and often fraught relationships between Catholic mothers and daughters as they navigate the transition from girlhood to womanhood. The feminist movement both historically, and in contemporary times, aims to enable women to contest their subjugation and make claim to their own moral agency. Self-determination in relation to procreation, in particular, is one element where women can have a say in the construction of their own subjectivity. Whilst women are denied choice to determine control over their sexuality and bodies, for example due to the Church’s rules on sexual orientation at the time, what is conveyed is that women’s bodies do not belong to them (Keary 201). Keary’s article does not discuss mother-daughter relationships in *Oranges*, but its points of discussion are applicable to this thesis’ analysis of the central relationship and its effects on Jeanette.

These sources all encompass different aspects of feminism, homosexual identities, religious extremism, and mother-daughter relationships, but do not consider how all these aspects impact the mother-daughter dynamic in *Oranges* or how they are the cause of the dissolution of their relationship. This thesis considers that the strained relationship between Jeanette and her mother, rooted in religious and ideological differences, becomes a powerful lens through which the novel explores the complexities of identity, both in terms of personal belief systems and sexual orientation. This essay will be primarily focusing on *Oranges* through the lens of feminist theory concentrating on the mother-daughter dynamic and its impact on Jeanette’s view and experience of queerness and religion. Secondarily, aspects such as homophobia and heteronormativity, as part of Queer theory, the field of study about sexualities as part of identities, will be incorporated to further expand on the readings into the impact of the mother-daughter relationship on Jeanette’s experience. The aim is to analyse the key events throughout Jeanettes formative years to map out how and why she broke away from her mother’s chosen path to lead a life of self-determination. Thus, this thesis argues that the
mother’s religious beliefs and actions in conjunction with their opposition to the markers of Jeanette’s identity are a cause for the dissolution of their mother-daughter relationship.

A valuable resource for the application of feminist and Queer theory in this essay is Lois Tyson's *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide* which provides useful tools and themes for analysing literature through a feminist lens. Themes such as gender stereotypes, patriarchal assumptions and conflicts between women, as presented by Tyson, will be discussed in this thesis. Furthermore, aspects such as homophobia and women-identified women, discussed in Tyson’s work, will be used to support the analysis. Feminist theory seeks to uncover the ways in which gender is constructed in literature, and by examining the representation of characters such as Jeanette and her mother, it can be identified how gendered power dynamics shape their behaviour.

Jeanette's mother, for example, is a product of a small religious English town in the mid-20th century, influenced by the patriarchal values of her community. Examining her character allows readers to consider how societal expectations and gendered power structures influence individual behaviour and contribute to the marginalisation of women. Secondly, this application of theory invites an analysis of Jeanette’s Pentecostal upbringing, enforced by her deeply committed mother, which becomes a source of discrimination. The strict moral codes, including rigid gender roles, limit Jeanette’s freedom in the mother-daughter relationship where her mother’s insistence on traditional norms leads to discrimination and marginalisation. Analysing this aspect through the lens of fervent Christian beliefs and feminist theory unveils how Pentecostal beliefs can perpetuate oppressive power dynamics, particularly disadvantaging marginalised groups like women. It is important to note that Tyson does not directly analyse *Oranges*. Instead, her theory provides a theoretical lens in which to read the novel and identify the gendered power dynamics at play.
Contextualising the Mother, Early Indoctrination, and Gender Roles

According to Colaner and Rittenour, the mother-daughter relationship is one of the most important relationships between women (82). They state that this particular relationship has a profound impact on a daughter's identity, self-esteem, and relationship worldviews. This notion can be observed in the case of Jeanette and her mother. Jeanette’s mother raises Jeanette in a fanatical religious context, not allowing her to read anything other than the Bible and *Jane Eyre*. Jeanette herself is not allowed to read *Jane Eyre* as her mother revises the ending to fit her narrative, to which she hopes Jeanette will conform - that is, the life of a missionary (Winterson 72).

Throughout the novel, Jeanette aptly characterises her mother through a few key quotes and comparisons; one such quote is “[my] father liked to watch the wrestling, my mother liked to wrestle” (16). This suggests that in the privacy of their home, where there are no prying eyes, her father is characterised as the more passive or submissive of the two (Benson Brown 236). In contrast to the father’s meek demeanour the mother is portrayed as active or dominant. The father remains in the background throughout the story and rarely initiates conversation, or argument, with either the mother or Jeanette. This is in opposition to the view of Tyson, who suggests that women in literature are presented as more irrational and weaker of the two sexes; in *Oranges*, it is the mother who possesses the traditionally masculine traits and the father the more passive or submissive ones (Tyson 85). This indicates that in the relationship between Jeanette and her mother, her mother takes on the role of a patriarchal, domineering figure. Colaner and Rittenour state that, by a child observing a parent’s behaviour, gender norms are taught and passed on to future generations (82). Therefore, Jeanette, by observing the gendered behaviours of her mother acting in a masculine manner is informed of which gendered mannerisms are acceptable for her, some of which are not approved by her church. This
incongruity is an example of where what Jeanette has been told by her mother does not match her experience outside of the home.

The mother's tendency towards more traditionally masculine traits is further depicted outside of the home in her political stance; the mother puts up a photo of the conservative candidate in their front window, which suggests that the mother does not shy away from conflict that could come from her publicising her beliefs. The mother's assertiveness in this example is especially noteworthy because they live in an industrial, working-class, labour-voting town (Winterson 3). As Biradar suggests, there is nothing wrong with being a strong female role model for Jeanette. However, Biradar argues that the mother is doing a disservice to Jeanette by her treatment of men in Jeanette’s life as there are no strong men she can learn from (447). When combined, masculine and feminine characteristics can provide a “safe, secure foundation for daughters’ development of self” and as such would help Jeanette in understanding her own developing identity (Colaner and Rittenour 83). However, instead of encouraging Jeanette to develop into her own person with her own identity, Jeanette’s mother is forcing Jeanette down a strictly controlled path on which Jeanette will eventually turn mother against daughter (Atasoy 5).

Likewise, the mother's view on men in general and in her private life is that they are, in her opinion, incompetent (Benson Brown 236). She states that “[w]e had no Wise Men because she didn't believe there were any wise men, but we had sheep” (Winterson 4). The mother implies that the community at large did not have much to offer in regard to rational, strong, or decisive men, that are descriptors used to describe men in patriarchal societies, and so instead she has incorporated the traits into her own personality (Benson Brown 236). Additionally, this view of men is also seen in relation to the church. The mother tells Jeanette that she should be aware of “the smooth tongues of priests” because even they can stray from their vows and mislead their flock (Winterson 15). As a strictly devout woman of the church, priests are, by
proxy, the word of God. By telling Jeanette that they are not always to be trusted is an early indicator about her mother's inconsistencies in regard to her faith and what it teaches. Additionally, Jeanette’s mother holds inconsistent beliefs about female leaders in church, as she initially champions their role, including Jeanette’s leadership in a Bible study group, despite traditional gender roles. However, Biradar argues that this stance changes when Jeanette reveals her sexuality, and her mother then argues that the leader is a role reserved for men (446). This signifies the mother’s hypocrisy as a contrast to her previous distrust of men in such positions. Such discrepancies are a main contributor to Jeanette’s disagreements and eventual distancing from both her mother and the church.

Further, the mother's hypocritical view of the world can be seen in her feelings towards her faith in how it is practiced in opposition to those who do not believe. The mother has “never heard of mixed feelings. There were friends and there were enemies” and has gone as far as to make a list of precisely what comprises of the two (Winterson 16). Enemies were anything, or anybody that went against her views of the world or her religion, such as the Devil or sex, whereas friends were, for the most part, only God and family. This black and white view of the world that her mother holds, stemming from her religious beliefs, is vital to understand how and why Jeanette’s relationship with her mother descends into conflict, once Jeanette’s sexual orientation comes to light (Benson Brown 241).

Examples of Jeanette beginning to rebel against her mother's social programming and becoming an individual are evident early in the novel. Jeanette is home-schooled and, as such, has only heard her mother's opinion about what it would be like to go to school. Her mother suggests that school is a “Breeding Ground” (Winterson 17). That is not to say that Jeanette understood what that meant, but she knows that her mother believed it to be bad. However, upon finding out that she is legally required to attend school, Jeanette's excitement at the prospect of broadening her knowledge and understanding about the world is evident: “the
Breeding Ground at last” (18). A further example is when Jeanette is experiencing a medical condition with her hearing, and she assumes, along with her mother, that she is in a state of rapture, as did the pastor at church who spent a deal of time praising her. This is because Jeanette thought that the world is merely an extended version of the church due to the way her mother had raised her. However, as Atasoy states “the teachings of the Church do not illustrate the reality” (6). This rings true for Jeanette at this stage in the novel because when she learned that she is suffering from a medical condition with her hearing she began to think that “even the church was confused sometimes” (Winterson 27). This lends itself to the possibility that Jeanette is becoming aware of her unidirectional understanding of the world and opens up the possibility that there could be a multitude of ways to interpret the world, some of which are in conflict with her mother’s view and thus, increases her mistrust and emotional distance between them both (Biradar 444).

Furthermore, Jeanette’s first conflict between other people’s views of the world and her religion did not begin with her mother or the church but with her teachers and the school. For the first time, Jeanette is exposed to other children and adults who do not follow her strict religious upbringing and, as such, this led to some conflicts. Jeanette got in trouble for teaching the other children about “the horrors of the demon and the fate of the damned” and that it is “[b]etter to hear about Hell now then burn in it later” (Winterson 42). At this point, she is still young, and while some aspects, like her aforementioned medical condition, opened the possibility of multiple ways to understand the world, Jeanette is still firmly in the grasp of her mother’s religious indoctrination and is not yet capable of understanding that she is a part of an ideological system to which the whole world does not subscribe.

Similarly, Jeanette highlights her inexperience in emotions and youthful naivety about the true-to-life world when learning about the mathematical shape Tetrahedron. Initially, as a means to make sense of what she is being taught in school with her religious teachings from
her mother and the church, Jeanette “comforted [herself] as best [she] could by always rearranging their versions of the facts” (47). This shows that Jeanette is still in the grasp of the internalised values and norms of the patriarchal system in which her mother has brought her up, but she is becoming aware of the importance that context has on people’s interpretations (Benson Brown 234). However, Jeanette does suggest to the reader that there is an ever-growing divide between her mother’s religious education and what she is learning in school, but ultimately, she is either not yet ready or not yet capable of confronting that contradiction and instead stays true to her upbringing.

Furthermore, as a means to win a school art competition, Jeanette begins to think that there is some secret recipe that she does not understand (Winterson 45). Here the author is alluding to the difference between Jeanette’s religiously themed entry pieces and the pieces of the rest of the class. In the beginning, Jeanette only submitted religious pieces for the competitions, something which changed with time. Benson Brown suggests that Jeanette is opening herself up to the possibility of viewing the world through a different lens and, by the same token, taking another step away from her mother’s religious indoctrination (239). As a result, Jeanette still did not win the competition, but did, in the process, upset her mother, who believed that Jeanette is abandoning her faith. This argument sparked the first moment in the novel where the daughter has openly gone against her mother, which serves as foreshadowing for Jeanette’s emerging lesbian identity and the conflict it develops, later in this essay.

It is a reasonable assumption that Jeanette’s time in school has taught her a couple of precious lessons. Jeanette has firstly learned that people see the world in different ways, which is highlighted when Jeanette tells her teacher that “[j]ust because you can’t tell what it is, doesn’t mean it’s not what it is” (Winterson 43). Jeanette believes that the conflict with her teacher stems from finding “something unexpected in a usual place” (44). This can be viewed
as Jeanette challenging the prevailing ideology at her own peril, because people’s beliefs are often strongly held and when challenged can lead to conflicts.

As is presented by Jeanette, her mother, by any reasonable judgment, is a divisive character. The mother’s nature of seeing the world in terms of morally right or wrong causes young Jeanette, with some new experiences from school, to begin to question the religious programming of her mother’s Biblical interpretations and open her mind to the potential that there is more than one way understand the world. During her childhood, Jeanette's self-conception is largely shaped by her belief that she is chosen by her mother to become a missionary. She sees herself as someone who had been handpicked by both God and her mother to serve the divine. However, as Jeanette grew older and became more aware of the negative aspects of both her mother’s personality and her church, she came to realise that her relationship with her mother is not completely fulfilling (Bollinger 374). This serves as a foreshadowing for Jeanette’s eventual break with the traditional roles that her mother expects of her when Jeanette’s feelings for Melanie are made public (Biradar 444).

**Sexuality, Conflict, and Self Identification**

According to Tyson, a popular definition within Queer theory, as a means to promote solidarity between all women, is to have their relationships defined by having a majority of a person’s emotional and psychological support come from a woman rather than a definition based exclusively on a sexual relationship, which she calls a “woman-identified woman” (324). Examples of an alternative understanding of sexuality and identity being suggested to Jeanette appear early in *Oranges* and are highlighted in a couple of crucial interactions with prominent female characters in the novel. These relationships between women are vital for understanding how Jeanette’s sexuality plays a role in the dissolution of the mother-daughter relationship.

According to Tyson, fairy tales such as Cinderella have been criticised by feminists because they “equate femininity with submission, encouraging women to tolerate familial
abuse” and requiring them to be rescued by a man, in order to be married and live happily ever after (Tyson 88). In contrast to Tyson, Jeanette often finds comfort in the simplicity of stories. Jeanette believes that “[t]here is an order and a balance to be found in stories” and that “[e]veryone who tells a story tells it differently, just to remind us that everybody sees it differently” (Winterson 91, 93). This is in stark contrast with the strict perspective in which she has been raised. Jeanette’s upbringing is characterised by the religious encoding of her mother’s repressive ideology in regard to gender roles and societal norms (Atasoy 5). Tyson suggests that fairy tales, on the one hand, can be used as systems of oppression against women, or, alternatively, as a means to analyse how patriarchal systems of oppression can be illustrated and learned from, in even the most innocuous settings (89). Jeanette’s way of reinterpreting or recoding a story to fit a different narrative, setting, or meaning is as Laurel Bollinger suggests, that by presenting a negative maternal figure, fairy tales allow Jeanette to examine her growing feelings of resentment towards her own mother, while still holding onto the idealised image of the ‘good’ mother from her childhood and dreams (373).

Jeanette’s friend Elsie is the first person to propose the idea to Jeanette that there are multiple ways to perceive the world and that Jeanette's mother's societal conditioning, particularly regarding sexuality and emotions, is not the sole perspective. Elsie tells Jeanette that “[t]here’s this world,’ she banged the wall graphically, ‘and there’s this world,’ she thumped her chest. “If you want to make sense of either, you have to take notice of both”, suggesting that if she wanted to be happy in this life that she has to listen to her heart and not just what people tell her (Winterson 32). It could be interpreted that Elsie is alluding to sexuality whereas Jeanette internalises her statement to imply that this goes against the heterocentrism that Jeanette’s mother is conditioning Jeanette by, subliminally suggesting that “heterosexuality is the universal norm by which every one’s experience can be understood” (Zimmerman 452).
In contradiction to Elsie’s description of the nature of love, Jeanette’s mother reveals a relationship she once had where she felt that she had fallen in love and engaged in intercourse with a man, but it turned out that she actually had stomach ulcers. Jeanette’s mother said, “what you think is the heart might well be another organ”, suggesting that not all feelings are love (Winterson 85). Atasoy argues that this is Jeanette’s mother’s attempt to manipulate Jeanette into doing what she wanted by sticking to what she believed instead of allowing her daughter to form her own conclusions (Atasoy 5).

To that end, the first encounter that Jeanette has with lesbianism in any form comes early in the novel. Jeanette is invited to the beach with two women from the town, but her mother refuses to let Jeanette go with them. It could be argued that the mother is thus exerting her ideological control over Jeanette because of her “pathological dread of same-sex love” as Tyson describes homophobia, without explaining to her why (320). Potentially out of the fear that Jeanette may not agree with her mother’s reason by suggesting that there is something wrong with them - lesbians could be, in Tyson’s words, “sick, evil or both” (320). By telling Jeanette that they “dealt in unnatural passions” the mother denied Jeanette the opportunity to come to her own conclusions about the couple (Winterson 7). As Colaner and Rittenour suggest, a mother teaches her internalised opinions about gender, sexuality, and norms to her children, in turn, her children act out such behaviours and beliefs (82). To that end, Jeanette has the opinion that the women are bad people, forced on her by Bible teachings, without the mother actually having to tell Jeanette that they are a homosexual couple or exposing her own homophobia, thus denying Jeanette the opportunity to learn a truth about the world (Atasoy 5).

Moreover, an additional encounter involving Jeanette concerning identity and sexuality is discussed concerning a minor character's oldest daughter. Doreen, the mother of Jane, suggests that because her daughter is spending a lot of time with her female friend and not having expressed any interest in finding a boyfriend, people in the community may begin to
look at her differently. Doreen suggests that they will draw comparisons to the homosexual ladies that run the paper store that invited Jeanette to the beach. As before, Jeanette is still naive about the differences in sexual orientation among people and, as such, is confused by Doreen's comment and asks herself what difference they are alluding to (Winterson 75).

Jeanette's increasing doubts about her sexuality and sexual identity, as influenced by her mother and community, are evident in her dreams. Given her exposure to numerous capable and powerful women, as well as her mother's perspectives on men, it is logical to assume that Jeanette's perception of men may be distorted due to the societal stereotypes, described by Tyson, that uphold gender roles and oppress women (108). Jeanette dreamed that she is getting married, but when she arrived at the altar, her bridegroom to be is presented in “a number of possibilities” such as men, women, animals and finally “just a suit of clothes with nothing inside” suggesting that Jeanette is uncertain about her mother’s and churches teachings about how life should be lived and about her possible sexual orientation (Winterson 69). The groom’s uncertain identity also alludes to a possible initiation of Jeanette’s dismissal of her mother’s conservative beliefs of how a relationship or marriage is supposed to look like. Jeanette’s unconsciousness presents a figure that is so contrary to the prescriptive and traditional rules of her religious upbringing and thus, its presence could be a symbol of her questioning and doubt. As Keary puts it, “self determination in relation to procreation, in particular, is one element where women can have a say in the construction of their own subjectivity” (201). Due to all the secrecy around the relationships Jeanette has come into contact with, Jeanette is understandably confused about what a ‘normal’ relationship looks like and leaves it open to multiple perspectives (Atasoy 6). This serves as the backdrop for Jeanette’s mental state in the lead-up to her first relationship with Melanie.

To summarise Jeanette's understanding of her identity and sexual orientation, multiple factors have to be taken into consideration. Through her extreme dictation of Jeanette's path in
life, Jeanette's mother has sewn some seeds of doubt in Jeanette's mind about the ‘right’ way of love, life, and aspirations. Further, Jeanette's time at school has opened her eyes to the potential that there is more to the world than the black and white way her mother sees it; there is all the in between ways to interpret her reality (Atasoy 6). This is the basis of the story leading up to when Jeanette meets Melanie, which is the first time Jeanette has found herself attracted to another person; it is also Jeanette’s first encounter with ‘forbidden fruit’ that she has read about and been taught to fear (Biradar 446). Jeanette describes Melanie as having pretty grey eyes and soon asks, “[w]hy do I feel this way?”, which suggests that Jeanette is firstly innocently questioning herself about her feelings, but more importantly, her sexual orientation, which will later turn into a serious conflict with her mother (Winterson 78, 81). Tyson states “no ideology succeeds in fully programming all of the people all of the time” (93). Additionally, Keary suggests “a number of contesting patriarchal discourses were vying for our bodies” which is evident in Jeanette’s confused feelings by her actively asking herself why she feels this way, instead of knowing that she cannot or should not feel such things, which would perhaps be the more natural reaction growing up at the hands of her mother’s social conditioning (199). Jeanette’s journey towards self-determination in regard to her sexuality, diverging from the predetermined road of her mother, is starting to gain traction in her mind.

At their second meeting, Jeanette invites Melanie to their church, however, Melanie does not participate in the singing and instead looks as if she felt physically ill (Winterson 83). This is because of the pastor singing his homophobic praises, claiming that he had cleansed local towns of their unnatural passions, and suggesting that the deviants were sinners. By this example, one can presume that Melanie might not have the fortitude Jeanette does and might value the church’s opinions highly despite of its rejection of homosexual identities. The pastor asked the crowd to raise their hands if they had sinned, to which Melanie raised her hand, indicating that she is aware that the pastor is alluding to lesbianism and that it is the church
who determines what is and is not an appropriate relationship (Keary 201). This could suggest that Melanie has internalised homophobia and resents herself and her feelings toward women because of the strict heterosexist culture that she has grown up in that “enforces compulsory sexuality” (Tyson 320). However, in her naïve innocence, Jeanette is unaware of what the pastor meant, and so, rationalised Melanie raising her hand to mean she “knew she needed Jesus”, and not that Melanie is living in sin according to the church or the sinister implication to which the pastor alludes (Winterson 83).

Further, Jeanette is starting to discover that people's solace in faith and other pillars they use in their times of need are not always for the individual's best. Jeanette understands people find comfort in order where rules and codes are predetermined, and which undermine the need for personal decision-making (91). However, Jeanette is equally aware that “[i]t[…]kept people where they belong”, where the pastors are in a position of power and can control how people understand and act out those teachings in the real world as they teach their interpretation of the Bible to their followers (92).

As a consequence of Melanie raising her hand at church, Jeanette became her guidance counsellor, and as such, they spent more time together outside of church. One of those evenings Melanie began stroking Jeanette’s head, and in response Jeanette felt overwhelmed in her emotions; time passed, and then suddenly it was morning (86). According to Keary, “[T]he appropriate realisation of puberty in adult sexuality stresses distinctive gendered acts of heterosexuality and identity” (189). However, this is only partly the case with Jeanette. Jeanette has, through her first sexual encounter, begun forming her sexual identity in conflict with the heterosexual normativity of her mother’s wishes. After this event, the two did everything together, which suggests that Jeanette is now aiming most of her efforts and energy towards Melanie to be able to share as many enjoyable experiences
together as possible, in agreement with the “woman-identified woman”, and thus embracing her feelings (Tyson 325).

Despite this, Jeanette's understanding of what they did together is not as clear as Melanie’s. Jeanette asks Melanie if they are engaging in the unnatural passions that the pastor spoke about in church. In turn, Melanie defends what they did by saying that according to the pastor, unnatural passions are awful, and what they are doing does not feel that way (Winterson 86). Jeanette agrees with Melanie, but because she asks herself the question, we can see that growing tension manifesting in Jeanette’s mind about the dualities of her lived experience and the church’s teachings on sexual orientation. This suggests that Jeanette appears to be starting to understand that her relationship with Melanie will cause issues with her religious community (Al-Shara 239).

Despite grappling with her blossoming emotions, Jeanette musters up the courage to express her affection towards Melanie, both to Melanie herself and to her own mother. Jeanette recognises that being in Melanie's presence brings her joy, and thus she reveals the intensity of her feelings, acknowledging that they have developed rapidly and are nearly on par with her love for God (Winterson 101). Jeanette expresses that “Melanie is a gift from the Lord, and it would be ungrateful not to appreciate her” (101). By using God and religion as the backbone for her reasoning behind her feelings for Melanie, Jeanette has, in her own way, reinterpreted one of the teachings in the Bible and accepted herself as a religious and lesbian individual (Al-Shara 239). However, Jeanette's reasons for telling her mother about her feelings for Melanie were more out of necessity, because Jeanette felt dishonest with her mother due to the sneaking around to be with Melanie. Despite knowing of her mother’s feelings, Jeanette trusts her mother and could not imagine a world where her mother would not want her to be happy.

Tyson argues the idea of a “woman-identified woman”, where lesbian women’s primary source of “emotional sustenance and psychological support” are with other women
By defining Jeanette as a woman-identified woman, who relies on Melanie for her physical and emotional wellbeing, it is clear to see from where the mother-daughter conflict would soon stem. Instead of relying on her mother for emotional support, Jeanette is striding away from her mother’s chosen path and is becoming aware of the system and roles that her mother has put in place for her to follow. Consequently, their diverging views on identity and sexuality would soon constitute a problem for the ideologically possessed mother and the community. Jeanette believed that her situation with the church people “all seemed to hinge around the fact that I loved the wrong sort of people”, alluding to her sexual preference and the institutionalised discriminatory practices that the patriarchal church has (Winterson 125). In contrary to the mother’s view, Jeanette feels that the women she has loved are precisely the “[r]ight sort of people in every respect” because the love she feels for them is as strong as her faith and the fact it is a sin is up for interpretation in her estimation (125).

Tyson explains that patriarchy, as defined by feminists, is synonymous with institutionalised discrimination (320). This refers to an institution that through its cultural or customary practices leverages its power to discriminate against individuals who are homosexual (320). Such discrimination, Tyson claims, is a “collective, if sometimes unconscious, homophobia promoted by traditional American Culture”, which is foundationally patriarchal (320). When Jeanette and Melanie go to church, they are ambushed by her mother and the community. In front of the congregation, the pastor proclaims that “[t]hese children of God have fallen foul of their lusts” (Winterson 102). The pastor questions Jeanette if she has fallen in love with Melanie with the love that should be reserved for a man and woman, to which Jeanette proclaims yes and defends herself by claiming, “to the pure all things are pure” (Winterson 103). Jeanette further rebuts the pastor's accusation by proclaiming that he is the problem and not them (103). Interpretatively, along with her new point of view as a religious lesbian, she has opened one of the teachings in the Bible to a new interpretation (Al-Shara 238).
Jeanette instead suggests that the church is wrong for following the patriarchal system to discriminate against Melanie and herself.

Further, Jeanette suggests that she had never been interested in men in the same way that she is with women because, partially due to the religious community and partly due to her and her mother’s estimation that there were no men of value in the community (Atasoy 5). Following this meeting with the pastor, Jeanette is seemingly self-assured in her sexuality and her religious beliefs, despite the external pressures of the church and her mother. She becomes defensive and defiant, much like her mother, and chooses to argue for her beliefs openly, by rebelling.

These changes to Jeanette’s demeanour towards the community and her mother can be further exemplified. Jeanette’s punishment for standing up to the pastor is to endure a whole day of the community praying over her before the pastor gave her the chance to repent; Jeanette defiantly refused to do so. Jeanette felt that if she were to allow the church to take away her supposed demons, then by the same token, she would be forced to give up what she has found in Melanie (Winterson 106). Biradar argues that this choice would force her to consider her relationship an unnatural passion and not something completely natural (446). This indicates that Jeanette is happy with her choices and content with her lesbian identity and sexual orientation being out in the open for all to see. By this display, it can be interpreted that Jeanette is distancing herself from her mother’s beliefs of what is acceptable. Where the absence of her past compliance is prominent, one can assume Jeanette is stepping away, in a psychological sense at this point, from the requirements her mother has that qualifies her as a daughter of whom to be proud. In contrast to the church, Jeanette believes that good people do good, and the church, by treating her like a sinner, are no longer good people. She no longer wishes to compromise her sexuality for her religion (Al-Shara 239).
Later, Jeanette enters into a relationship with Katy in her young adult life, with whom she expresses she has found happiness. Despite knowing what would happen if a further lesbian relationship was revealed to the community, Jeanette, with her new interpretation of the religious teaching, believes as she did with her relationship with Melanie that “[t]o the pure all things are pure” (Winterson 120). As such, she is further reinforcing the belief that her now developed ideological difference between herself and her mother’s ideology is down to the interpolative nature of the religious texts and not anybody's fault (Al-Shara 239). Later, when Jeanette's relationship with Katy is revealed, Jeanette’s instinct is to resort to lying to the community about the nature of their relationship, insisting that she only used Katy as a means to keep in contact with Melanie, thus protecting Katy from the wrath of the community (Winterson 128). As Al-Shara suggests, Katy is as guilty as Jeanette, but in sticking with the values of self-sacrifice to protect those you care about, Jeanette takes the punishment for the both of them (241). Tyson argues that the need to protect the home is a trait often associated with natural instincts of men, and as such, Jeanette's internal instinct to protect Katy could be interpreted to stem from the masculine trait to protect the home, which she learnt from her patriarchal mother (109). Katy, in this relationship, could be interpreted to be Jeanette’s emotional, rather than physical, home.

Once Jeanette has developed into a young woman, we see that the understanding of her sexuality in combination with her religious faith takes on a more defiant demeanour, transgressing the boundaries and limitations in her grown environment (Atasoy 5). Jeanette states that she has accepted that the church is unwilling to accept the possibility that there could be shades of grey in interpreting the religious texts or alter its view in its discrimination against her because of her sexuality. In retribution, Jeanette begins to treat them with the same contempt they are treating her. The pastor claimed that Jeanette is possessed by a demon, to which Jeanette rebutted, “It was my own fault. My own perversity” (Winterson 129). In doing
so, Jeanette proclaims to them that she is in full control of her actions and has progressed beyond the patriarchal limitations and assumptions about gender set by the church and her mother (Calvo Pascual 28). This shows that no matter which way the church tries to control the narrative, Jeanette is unwilling to allow them to use God against her.

As a consequence of this, Jeanette’s role as a Bible study leader in the church came under scrutiny. Their specific church has always been dominated by the presence of strong women who took on leadership roles within the church because of the lack of capable men. However, upon receiving word from the church council, the council believed that women holding positions of authority or stature within the church is a bigger concern than Jeanette's sexual proclivities or orientation. This lent itself to Jeanette's suspicions that the church does not see the world as black and white as they proclaimed because they were willing to overlook her sexual orientation as long as she remained in the church, but not allow her in any position of power. This only served to further impose the patriarchal mindset as a means to perpetuate inequalities between the sexes and confirm Jeanette’s suspicions. Shockingly, Jeanette's mother agreed with the pastor suggesting that Jeanette turned to lesbianism because of this cross-contamination of traditional gender roles within the church structure. However, as Biradar suggests, Jeanette realises what her mother is trying to achieve by her “continued service to a Church that has both been exposed as corrupt” (445). In turn, she refuses her mother’s suggestion that she is committing “spiritual adultery” by going against what she herself believes (Winterson 131-132).

As punishment, Jeanette must give up preaching and leading Bible study, but instead of bowing to their discriminatory whims, Jeanette decided to leave the church instead (Biradar 449). Consequently, the pastor offered Jeanette back her Bible study, but under supervision, which highlights the ruthlessness and hypocrisy of the religious community when it benefits their narrative and when the social programming is challenged (Al-Shara 239). As a
consequence of the pastor’s attempt to pervert the governing bodies ruling on women holding positions of authority within the church, Jeanette felt vindicated in her decision to leave the church and as such, stamped out a place for her identity apart from the church to find her own place in society (Calvo Pascual 28).

Jeanette’s mother continued stating that Jeanette had “flouted God’s law and tried to do it sexually” (Winterson 131). While previously, her mother had championed the role in women in the church, not limiting them to the roles of Sunday School and the Sisterhood. She now contradicted her previous self to support her current stance on Jeanette’s sexuality in that women should not be the ones spreading the word of God (131). Jeanette’s success at speaking in the Church had ended up being her downfall and she came to the realisation that this downfall stemmed from “[my] inability to realise the limitations of my sex” (132). Which is a belief both the church and her mother enforce as they believe that the right to hold a leading position in the church is a role reserved for men (Biradar 446).

Jeanette’s mother wanted her to move out because while the church forgave her supposed slip into evil, her mother remained unwilling to excuse her daughter. Her mother believes that “you made people and yourself what you wanted” and, as such, Jeanette made an active decision to sell her soul to the devil and rebuke her faith (Winterson 126). However, this is not the case. In the beginning, Jeanette accidentally fell in love with Melanie, Jeanette explains: “[t]hat accident had forced me to think more carefully about my own instincts and others’ attitudes” (126). Jeanette understood that she is different from the others because of her love for God and the church in combination with her private sexual proclivities. While she had this understanding of her differences, she did not wish to compromise her faith or sexuality but instead chose to find methods of rationalising the two situations as being able to coexist (Calvo Pascual 25).
Over her formative years, Jeanette has developed from a young, naive girl into a formidable, strong woman because of the trials set before her by her mother, religious community, and her emerging identity and sexual orientation. To make sense of her changing world, Jeanette stays loyal to God and he to her. Jeanette concluded: "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” (Winterson 164-165). One could interpret Jeanette to display a certain disappointment in her mother as she chose not to support Jeanette in her sexual identity and presentation of her beliefs, but by her mother being ‘a servant’, she has acknowledged that she must let go of these feelings. Jeanette’s lived experience enabled her to form a strong and independent identity. It is through the divergence from her community, but more importantly her mother that Jeanette was able to accept herself, her beliefs, as well as keep her faith while still being comfortable and honest with her sexuality (Benson Brown 235).

Conclusion
This thesis has aimed to examine the mother-daughter relationship between Jeanette and her mother to gain insight into how it impacted Jeanette’s divergence from the traditions and expectations imposed on her. Furthermore, this thesis has investigated the effects of traditional Christian beliefs on womanhood and queerness through an application of feminist critical theory.

Jeanette's journey in conflict with her mother during her adolescent years highlights the intense struggles and challenges that can arise within familial relationships. In the beginning of her childhood, Jeanette’s identity, religious affiliation, and view of other women were largely impacted by her mother’s influence. As Jeanette grows and begins to assert her independence, she finds herself at odds with her mother's traditional beliefs and expectations. Jeanette's desire to explore her identity and pursue her passions clashes with her mother's belief that she should conform to societal norms and expectations that are predominant in her
religious beliefs. The two struggle to find common ground and their relationship becomes increasingly fraught and arguments and misunderstandings become a regular occurrence. In agreement with Benson Brown, Al-Shara and Calvo Pascual, this thesis presents Jeanette’s struggles with her sexual and religious identity as in conflict with traditions, however, it further highlights the impact of her mother’s active participation in her internal conflict, under the guise of religion. As Keary presented, religious power structures take several shapes, where, in mother-daughter relationships, the mother can uphold injustices and unjust power over the daughter. In turn, conflicts are likely to arise between mothers and daughters with contrary principles, as argued by Colaner and Rittenour, and distinctly represented by Jeanette’s relationship with her mother.

This thesis has presented how Jeanette’s mother systematically uses her religious beliefs to justify prejudice and intolerance towards those who do not conform to traditional norms, which extends to Jeanette and her relationships with other women. This continuous behaviour and patriarchal social programming, in line with Tyson’s claims of opposing beliefs, highlights a key reason for the breakdown of their mother-daughter relationship. It is further argued that their relationship has reached its breaking point when Jeanette, instead of adapting herself to her mother’s ever-changing qualifications for acceptance, cannot choose to change her ways to suit her mother’s wants as they pertain to her features and not her choices. Her mother justifies her rejection of her daughter by hypocritical notions that only men belong in leadership positions and that sexuality is a choice. Jeanette knows that by her exclusion based on such inherent parts of her identity that she is no longer bound by heteronormative or patriarchal gender roles imposed on her by her mother. Instead, she accepts the dissolution of their mother-daughter relationship and is thus granted the agency to reclaim her sexual and religious identity.
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