4-23-2010

Who Writes the Family History, Anyway? A Look At Adoption Within Wise Children And Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit

Mariann Leigh Grantham
Florida State University

THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

WHO WRITES THE FAMILY HISTORY, ANYWAY? A LOOK AT ADOPTION WITHIN *WISE CHILDREN* AND *ORANGES ARE NOT THE ONLY FRUIT*

By

MARIANN GRANTHAM

A Thesis submitted to the
Department of English
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Degree Awarded:
Summer Semester, 2010

The members of the committee approve the thesis of Mariann Grantham defended on April 23, 2010.

_____
Barry Faulk
Professor Directing Thesis

_____
Maxine Montgomery
Committee Member

_____
Eric Walker
Committee Member

Approved:

_____
Kathleen Yancey, Chair, Department of English

The Graduate School has verified and approved the above-named committee members.

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Grant and Al Grantham.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the following individuals for all of their help and assistance, without which this thesis would not be possible: Amber Coady, Katheryn Wright, and Professor Barry Faulk.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

This thesis shows the different ways the tension between the societal ideal of the family (something that is in and of itself a construct) and the constructed family plays out in two 20th century British novels, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* and *Wise Children*. This tension is brought into focus in part by the form the novel itself takes, that of historiographic metafiction, a sort of self-aware fiction that explores historical personages or the definition of what history really is. The different ways in which the novels play with history (the documented means by which events, which have no meaning, turn into fact, which is ascribed a meaning) is explored as a way of examining adoption within these two novels.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

British society as a whole is preoccupied with blood relations. The monarchy still operates there, and that is an entire system of power based on blood relations. British literature has featured numerous orphans and adoptees who stumble upon their "real" family, from Perdita to Oliver Twist. Adoption was legally recognized in the U.S. by 1850; the first adoption law that accorded adopted children full rights was not enacted in England until1926, as noted by Patricia Morgan (40). Anonymous sperm donation became illegal in Britain in 2005 (Carlson). Even after the adoption law was changed and adoptees (adopted children) had the full rights granted to biological children, adoption rates were very low, under 4,000 a year, until World War II (Morgan 40). Adoption was still viewed as being a "dubious" practice until after World War II, when the welfare of the child was considered more important than matching an adoptee with a family who had similar physical characteristics. Yet there is still a preoccupation with biological family roots.

Society, especially British society, has a certain ideal family in mind—a notion that Jeffrey Roessner describes as a married couple raising children that they have produced biologically (7). This very idea is a construct, but the ideal itself argues that the biological family is natural. This idea leaves little room for adoptive family members. There are a number of concepts associated very strongly with this ideal family; physical and emotional resemblances between family members is significant, as Charlotte Witt writes.

Two British novels published in the 20th century focus on the tension between the idea of the family as a natural, biological phenomenon and the family as a societal construct: *Wise Children* (1991) by Angela Carter and *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985) by Jeanette Winterson. The way that they bring this tension into focus is key: the narrators of the novels make the audience aware of them (metafiction) and they also play around in history (which gives us a different flavor of metafiction, historiographic metafiction).

Wise Children seemingly gives equal weight to adoptive and biological family members alike, but actually reinforces the idea that the biological family is the most significant. Jeanette Winterson takes a different tack in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit.* Even in her fantasies, the narrator, Jeanette, forgets she was adopted. But even in her fantasies, her adoptive mother gets to

decide what family means, too. Both of these characters are at the mercy of what others define as family for them no matter how much they try and write their way out of it.

Wise Children is about an adoptee and her identity issues. The narrator of the novel, Dora Chance, keeps referring to the family history she's writing as part of her autobiography. She was adopted by a woman named Mrs. Chance, who insists on being called "Grandmother" vs. mother. Dora's uncle, Peregrine, makes it very clear he considers himself to only be her uncle. Dora tries to express all this to the audience; she cites this famous person from way back when and that famous person; she writes about how somebody else wrote about her and got it all wrong. She writes that she's writing the truth of what happened, and she keeps writing and writing and writing about how her apparent biological father, Melchior Hazard, never really admitted he was her father. She can't stop trying to *write herself* in the family; her autobiography quickly becomes a family history. A big problem for her is the fact that her closest family members, Grandma Chance and her uncle Peregrine, have unverifiable histories. Dora associates her own past with the past of her relatives—and the ones she is closest to either tell her absolutely nothing about their personal past, as with Grandma Chance, or they tell her lots of charming but possibly false tales (such as when Peregrine tells her he was good friends with Ambrose Bierce, but he merely has a personalized copy of *The Devil's Dictionary* to support this claim). The lack of history among her closest relatives drives Dora to want to know more about her biological father, Melchior, who is the head of a generations-long theatrical dynasty and whose many exploits are documented in the newspaper and television. Dora is ultimately happiest when she feels she is accepted by her biological family—something that happens after Melchior admits he is her father, after 75 years of denying it.

A brief description of historical metafiction and how it applies to these texts follows. Linda Hutcheon argues that texts that refer to themselves and discuss history can be called historical metafiction. Hutcheon argues that an event (something without meaning in and of itself) becomes a fact (something we give meaning to). Adoption is an event, and the two texts interpret it as a fact in different ways. *Wise Children* sees the event of the adoption as having meaning, but not as much meaning as the biological event of having a biological parent. *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* gives the adoption a meaning—but the narrator's adoptive mother, Louie, defines that meaning, and she defines it in terms of religious significance. Louis Althusser theorizes that that the family and the church operate in a very specific way to keep their belief

systems going—they use ideology as a framework for people to understand their actions and their place within the society, and these systems are known as ideological state apparatuses. Louie has built her family around the church—Jeanette's adoption, she claims, was divinely inspired, and the church was built with Jeanette in mind. Furthermore, Jeanette is groomed by Louie to become a missionary—a choice Louie made for her.

Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit takes an entirely different approach to the ideal family as being biological: it focuses solely on the adoptive family. The second chapter of the thesis looks at how Louie, Jeanette's adoptive mother, is very controlling of Jeanette's personal history. While Jeanette questions how "history" is written as a whole—putting the "historiographic" in "historiographic metafiction", she has very little to say about the history of her adoption. Louie decides the significance of that for her.

The third chapter deals with a slightly different aspect of this tension between the biological family as the ideal—again, an idea that is a construct itself—and the family as something that is entirely a construct, that has no room for biological roots. It discusses the idea of the family itself as a narrative, a story about how the family came into being and operates in daily life. Jeanette has numerous fantasy sequences in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, and the birth mother is present in none of them. The character in one of the fantasies forgets utterly that she is adopted (though she does mention the adoption itself—in the same breath she mentions she forgets it happens). The fantasies in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* help Jeanette at least try to figure out a family narrative, but it is one in which the biological family has absolutely no room.

In different ways in each book, the societal ideal of the family as a biological creation is examined. It is helpful to look at this ideal through historiographic metafiction; it helps the reader understand how the event of the adoption is turned into fact, and what different meanings the narrators give that event.

CHAPTER 2: “IF I ONLY HAD A FATHER”

Wise Children, the1991 British novel by Angela Carter, has a plot that is almost as tempestuous as the winds that blow through London on the day the overarching story takes place. The reader is introduced to one Dora Chance. Dora informs us that she and her twin sister, Nora, were song and dance girls, and illegitimate to boot. Dora is, she tells us, in the process of writing her own autobiography, and thus has begun to chronicle the Hazard family—which contains her biological father, Melchior, who refuses to acknowledge his status as such; her uncle, Peregrine, who refuses to count himself as anything more than her uncle; her adoptive parent, Grandma Chance, who makes a point of making sure Dora knows Melchior is her father; her biological father’s ex-wife, the Lady Atlanta Hazard, née Lynde, and her twin daughters, Saskia and Imogen, “legally daughters of Melchior Hazard, biological daughters of Peregrine Hazard” (Carter 253–254); and the descendants of another young girl Grandma Chance adopted at Peregrine’s behest, a girl simply named Our Cyn, who is mother to Brenda, who is mother to Tiffany, Dora and Nora’s godchild, among various other people (Carter 253–254).

Dora recounts her whole life over the course of the novel, and, oh, what things have happened in it: she discusses how she came to be adopted, how she came to be conceived; the entire Hazard clan and all its “dirt” are flashed onto the page. As Dora writes, ““Sometimes I think if I look hard enough, I can see back into the past…I am at present working on my memoirs and researching family history—see the word processor, the filing cabinet, the card indexes, right hand, left hand, right side, left side, all the dirt on everybody” (3). Dora has the potential to comb back through the past, to make it real again, to see it again, to see it for herself, through these physical objects, but it’s not enough.

The very fact that Dora’s autobiography has become a sort of family history of the Hazards, when she never really felt herself to be a part of the Hazard family, is significant. Dora is struggling to resolve the tension between the societal ideal of the family (something that in and of itself argues that the family is a purely biological entity) and the idea of the family as a social construct. The societal ideal of the family holds at its core that the family is biological; this idea, in and of itself, is constructed; it is the favored viewpoint in the novel. Dora can find room for adoptive relationships, but not nearly as much room as she can for the biological trimmings of what she feels is at the heart of family: everything from physical appearances to career ambitions

to financial benefits that, she claims, really spring from a person's biological background. To attempt to help resolve this tension between the adoptive family and the biological family, the very form of the book comes into play: it is a form of historiographic metafiction.

To be more specific about what that term means, let us look at Linda Hutcheon's definition: novels that refer to themselves (putting the "meta" in "metafiction") and "self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs" (which gives us the "historiographic") (5). *Wise Children* fits this definition: Dora refers to actual historic events and personages throughout the novel, ranging from World Wars I and II to dancing with Prince Charles, and she cheekily addresses the audience directly on several occasions, making us aware that her story isn't word perfect and is just a story at that[1]. She also talks about how history can get it all wrong—she is often mixed up with her sister Nora in footnotes and newspaper articles; she had a lover immortalize her in his memoirs—as a heartbreaking harlot. [2] She is aware that families can be "invented" (Carter 35) and yet, a large part of the novel deals with her efforts to document what happened to the various Hazard family members. Dora thinks that by investigating and writing about *them*—ranging from the temperament and hair color of her biological grandmother to documenting her biological father's career in the theatre (and the bedroom)—she will find out something about *herself*, as she states at the beginning of the novel: "But the urge has come upon me before I drop to seek out an answer to the question that has always teased me, as if the answer were hidden, somewhere, behind a curtain: whence came we? Whither goeth we?" (11). Dora is nearly desperate to get the facts of her paternity—which she sees as being crucial to the "whence came we" question—out there. Dora feels her personal story is tangled up with Melchior, that if she figures out who he was, she'll have a greater understanding of her identity. Even the way she phrases the question can be traced back to her biological father, Melchior; he has spent most of his life on the stage as Britain's foremost actor, and he has play acted that he

[1] "Drunk in charge of a narrative!" is perhaps the most gleeful of these little self-aware moments with the audience, and she spends much of the first few pages saying things like "No, wait, I'll tell you all about it in my own time" (13)

[2] "You'll find me in his famous *Hollywood* stories. I never rate more than a footnote in the biographies; they get my date of birth wrong, mix me up with Nora, that sort of thing. And I'm bound to say my best friend wouldn't recognize me in the far-from-loving portrait he'd penned after I'd gone. I'm the treacherous, lecherous chorus girl with her bright red lipstick that *bleeds* everywhere and her scarlet heart, sexy, rapacious, deceitful." (119)

isn't her biological father for her entire life. The entire project of *her* autobiography quickly gets caught up in her father as Dora interjects:

> Let us pause awhile…so that I can fill you in on the background. High time! You must be saying. Just who is this Melchior Hazard and his clan, his wives, his children, his hangers-on? It is in order to provide some of the answers to those questions that I, Dora Chance, in the course of assembling notes towards my own autobiography, have inadvertently become the chronicler of all the Hazards, although I should think that my career as such will go publicly unacknowledged by the rest of the dynasty as my biological career has done for not only are Nora and I, as I have already told you, by-blows, [3] but our father was a pillar of the legit. theatre and we girls are illegitimate in every way—not only born out of wedlock, but we went on in the halls, didn't we! (Carter 11)

Dora wants to document the Hazards, but even at the outset of the project—a project that started off as her autobiography—she feels she'll get no recognition for it, just as her "biological career," i.e., Melchior's being her biological father, has gotten no public recognition. She feels her social status as an illegitimate child has been a burden. Lee writes that, "Dora, as an illegitimate child, is someone who has been excluded from established society" (137). Lee goes on to argue that this very exclusion marks Dora as being "outside of history," a key component of Hutcheon's historical metafiction argument, which claims that its hero or heroine is on the fringe of society. Lee further elaborates that "the embedded stor[y] in the novel is generally told by or about women who are oppressed by men and who are literally and metaphorically excluded from or marginalized within male version of history… Within this context, the priority given to theatre, often associated with subversion, and to women taking control of their own story-history is very significant" (138). And yet, Dora is not really taking control, since her autobiography quickly turns into a documentation of how Melchior has hurt her by not acknowledging what she feels is his proper place in her life—some sort of acknowledgement of fatherhood. Hutcheon notes that "even documents are selected as a function of a certain problem or point of view" (106). Well, Dora's problem is that little to no documents exist describing Melchior as her father, so she is talking to the audience about a document she intends to create that solves that very

[3] bastards; Dora refers to herself as a by-blow several additional times over the course of the book (38)

problem. Her profession as a dancer rather than a Shakespearean actor (like Melchior) makes it even more unlikely the Hazards will acknowledge her as part of the family at all, much less someone who is documenting the family. The project of Dora's autobiography turned into a way to publically get the truth of her paternity out there—something Dora sees as being a huge part of her identity[4]; but it's worthless without the Hazard family as a whole acknowledging it. Dora wants to cling as close as she can to the societal construct of the family—which says your father is your BIOLOGICAL father, period—and if she has to write a book to tell the world who her father is because her family isn't telling, so be it. But why is Dora so caught up in this societal ideal of the family? As Jeffrey Roessner writes, "The novel suggests that Dora was wronged not only by her father, but also by a culture heavily invested in a patriarchal vision of the family. This ideal of the family as a heterosexual couple rearing biological children is a powerful discourse" (7). This statement breaks down the difference between the adoptive family and the societal ideal that the family is a natural, biological occurrence. Dora is caught up in trying to find a balance between her identity as an adoptee and her desire to fit into the mold society wants to cast the family in—a married couple raising children they've produced "naturally" (7). Dora believes having Melchior admit he's her "real" father is the closest she can get to this ideal family. I agree with Roessner; Dora is trying to buy into the idea that your biological father is definitively your family and nearly everyone else in the novel is, too. This brings us to Grandma Chance, arguably Dora's closest family member.

Grandma Chance is first introduced properly when Dora is discussing the photographs and other historical relics Dora has gathered of Dora's biological grandmother: "Our other grandmother, Grandma Chance…the grandma whose name we carry, she was no blood relation at all, to make confusion worse confounded" (Carter 12). Even though Dora momentarily follows this statement up by saying her grandmother raised her "because of pure love…" (12) and even though she acknowledges how meaningful their relationship is, she has to ground the relationship in the terms of the societal ideal of the biological family; that lack of "blood relation" must be established immediately. Furthermore, as Dora mentions her biological

[4] Roessner further supports this idea of Dora thinking Melchior would naturally feature heavily in her autobiography/identity because she is so caught up in society's ideal definition versus the family as a social construct: "The patriarchal family romance affects Dora to such an extent that for most of the novel she never questions the idea that her identity depends upon Melchior—a man she did not meet until she was an adolescent" (8).

grandmother, she quickly sums things up by saying, “But we never met our *real* grandmother” (12). Clearly, the societal ideal of biology is winning out against the idea of a family that’s built; Grandma Chance had a very special relationship with the girls, but the “real” grandmother is the one who’s been sought out and captured in numerous photographs and family stories told to Dora by her uncle Peregrine. Grandma Chance herself instructs the girls to call her “Grandma” because of this societal ideal of the family as equaling biology: when the girls’ mother, an orphan known only as Pretty Kitty, dies as soon as the twin girls are born, Dora writes that “Mrs. Chance adopted us but never let us call her ‘mother,’ out of respect for the dead” (26). Maybe Dora wanted to call her “mother”; the “let” would imply that they at least tried. And Dora thinks fondly of her: “She was our air-raid shelter; she was our entertainment; she was our breast” (29). Yet Grandma Chance, while wanting to let the girls know about their mother, will not let herself become their mother in name out of a desire to maintain at least some semblance of the societal ideal of the family as a biological, natural occurrence; she passes this viewpoint down to Dora.

Having established the societal ideal of motherhood as biological, Grandma Chance also does this with fatherhood. Grandma Chance is the one who most doggedly pursues Melchior to get him to admit fatherhood. Her motivation for doing so is chiefly financial: Melchior had stayed at Mrs. Chance’s boardinghouse, once upon a time, where he fathered Dora and Nora. Grandma Chance, as his last known address, received a delivery of a clock that belonged to Melchior’s aunt. “She left it to him in her will. Everything else went to the poor. Grandma cursed and swore when she read that. She couldn’t bear to think that clock was all we’d get. She moved hell and high water to seek our father out.” And the result of the search? The girls overhear Grandma Chance saying “[Melchior] flatly denies it and there’s sod all I can do” (30). So Grandma Chance, trying to find the funds to raise the girls, reaches out, gets nothing, and Dora is too young to process any of this, but she remembers it very clearly and put the pieces together later: Melchior won’t admit paternity, and the price of admitting paternity, according to Grandma Chance, is financially supporting your offspring. The idea of family as a natural biological occurrence is given value, financial value at that. Dora also quickly ascribes emotional value to the role of the biological father as well after Grandma Chance physically points out Melchior to Dora and Nora as their father. Dora recollects Grandma proclaiming: “‘That man…is your father!’ Her revelation didn’t have the force it might have had for us because, at that age, we still weren’t sure just what it was that fathers did. Since we didn’t know how to put one and one

together to make two, we didn't know we were different, either" (56). Grandma Chance is the one who initially points out that difference, then expands her explanation as Nora asks her to

> 'Tell us some more about fathers.' On top of the tram, on the way home, she told us the lot….We thought she made it up to tease us. To think we girls were in the world because a man we'd never met did *that* to a girl we didn't remember, once upon a time! What we knew for certain was, our grandma loved us and we had the best uncle in the world. Although Our Cyn, the worldly one, thought that Perry was our father (Carter 57).

At first, the idea of biology as being emotionally significant seems outrageous to Dora. She points out she can't remember her mother and that she's never even met Melchior. What matters to her is the adoptive family figures that surround her (and even Our Cyn, the girl adopted into the family by Grandma Chance, views Peregrine as the "real" father). But this point of view is quickly replaced as all of this talk initiates a change in Dora's outlook: "Something took root in us that afternoon, some kind of curiosity. At first it was a niggling thing. We'd spot his picture in the paper and exclaim… Over the years, the curiosity turned into a yearning, a longing… (57)." Melchior soon takes on significance in Dora's life; the groundwork for seeing him as a father and the acceptance of that societal ideal of biological relatives being your true parents (something that's a constructed idea in and of itself) has been brought about in part by Grandma Chance.

Grandma Chance is the one who told them her version of what fathers do. She literally keeps it focused on the biological details but she also creates a sense of difference within the girls by pointing out that Melchior was their father and not framing it within the context of a constructed family where the biological relationship isn't so important; she sticks with the societal ideal of family as equaling biology. This ideal is also embraced by the girls' uncle Peregrine.

Peregrine is very attached to the idea that biological relationships are inherently important, so attached that he theorizes that Grandma Chance was really Dora and Nora's genetic mother, not Pretty Kitty. Even after Dora proclaims the various reasons why that wasn't likely, Perry proclaims that, "She loved you as much as if—" (223). One can just bet he was

going to say "as if you were her own" before Dora cuts him off[5]. He needs to imagine that Grandma Chance is actually the biological mother of the girls because that is how he thinks families SHOULD work; it fits in with society's ideal of the family as a biological creation. Since Grandma Chance acted so motherly, part of him wants her to actually be their mother. And Peregrine is conflicted about his own role as a father of sorts to Dora and Nora, since he is not their biological father. Just as Grandma Chance does, Peregrine points out the fact of Melchior's fatherhood: "You do know, that you ain't my babies, worse the luck. I am not now nor ever have been your father. And you do know that [Melchior]…is" (69). Peregrine thinks it's bad luck he isn't the biological father of the girls, but it still matters to him that he technically is not their father. Many people actually think he is Dora and Nora's biological father, but Dora says "only the immediately affected parties" know otherwise.[6] "Peregrine *passed* as our father—that is, he was the one who publicly acknowledged us when Melchior would not. I should tell you, now, that Melchior's entire family, [the Lady Atalanta] apart, always maintained this fiction…." (17). Dora is summing up much here: her choice of the word "fiction" is very weighty. Her view of fatherhood is very matter-of-fact: you can really only have one father. What the public thinks is entirely incidental; she and Peregrine claim to know the *real* story, and the scoop is, he's not the father, but he pretends to be so Dora can publicly be acknowledged as being someone's daughter.

One of the ways that establishes Peregrine as Dora and Nora's father is that he helps support them financially; he put his name on the child support payments Grandma Chance eventually scared Melchior into providing….Peregrine is the one who stops by to tell them about the upcoming money, which is how he meets the girls. While he's setting up this financial support, he "decided to give out" that he, Peregrine, is the father of Dora and Nora (which Dora is appreciative of and says is a "gentlemanly thing") (33). He also tells the accountants who arrange the checks that Grandma Chance is really the girls' mother—another example of him wishing reality reflected biology, following that societal ideal of biological relatives being the most significant. We see behind the scenes of how the purported parenthood of Dora and Nora is

[5] Dora herself also uses this language when she asks Grandma Chance why she never had any children of "her own".

[6] Upon entering a party, Dora overhears people whisper, "'Here come the Lucky Chances. Of course, they're really Peregrine's daughters, you know.' 'They all believed it. Only the immediately affected parties knew it wasn't so.'" (98)

constructed—Peregrine as father, Grandma Chance as mother—but each parental figure takes great care to make sure Dora knows the biological truth of her parenthood (Peregrine is an uncle, NOT a father; Grandma is a grandmother, NOT a mother, as Dora tells it—because she heard it from them).

Peregrine's relationship with Dora definitely goes beyond just being a "sugar daddy" (34) as Dora cheekily calls him; he gives a great deal of affection and support, financial and otherwise, to Dora, so much so that she says "Peregrine was so much beloved by us and behaved so much more fatherly to us, not to mention paying most of the bills, that I know I need to claim him as something more than uncle" (17). Peregrine certainly doesn't support that claim or view himself as Dora's father. Peregrine is actually the biological father of Saskia and Imogen, and Dora feels this makes a big difference in their relationship: "… I think he loved Nora and myself as much as he loved Saskia and Imogen. But not, you understand, in the *same way*. We were not flesh of his flesh" (174). Dora perceives this difference between the way she is loved versus Saskia and Imogen—a difference she chalks up pretty succinctly to the fact that Saskia is related more directly to Peregrine—and she is not happy about it. And yet, how does Dora know Peregrine is Saskia's father, how does she know about the difference between them in the first place? She simply says, "Of course, we'd always known deep down inside he was their father. We tried to pretend otherwise. I was jealous as hell of it, but there you were. Biology is biology. You can't fool a sperm" (171). Dora does try to pretend Peregrine isn't the father—she repeatedly refers to Saskia as her "half-sister," in an effort to solidify that link between Dora and Melchior, but "deep down" she knows it isn't true, and she states outright biology is something that can't be denied.

Perhaps one of the things that tips Dora off about Peregrine's being Saskia's father versus Melchior is the color of their hair (Peregrine and Saskia both have red hair). Dora goes on to say she thinks Melchior never realized he was not the biological father of Saskia and Imogen and that if he ever wondered about their red hair, [7] it also ran in the family (171). And upon seeing Saskia, she outright laments: "If only we'd inherited that red, red hair!" Based on what Dora mentions about the hair color, it could have several different benefits: it could make her more

[7] Dora has a lot to say about red hair—at Melchior's big birthday party near the end of the book, she points out that Saskia's is "redder than ever"; her paternal grandmother's hair is "red, red", Peregrine's is a "foxy red".

readily identifiable as a member of the Hazard family; it could make her more readily identifiable as Peregrine's daughter—and maybe even make Peregrine think of her that way, too.

Physical traits shared among members of the same family are an extremely significant part of the societal ideal of the family—these traits are one of the more immediate ways biology is seen to influence family members. Physical characteristics are one of the signifiers that indicate you belong to the family, one of the ways in which you are marked as being part of that family. Dora believes in the societal ideal of the family as being a biological thing first and foremost, and her feelings about physical appearance help show she thinks this ideal matters the most. Hutcheon speaks of "the difference between events (which have no meaning in themselves) and facts (which are given meaning)"; she then goes on to say postmodernism "obsessively" examines this difference (122). A biological *event* (red hair) becomes, to Dora, a signifier of a *fact* (in this case, the fact would be red hair, which Dora thinks shows Saskia and Imogen can be immediately identified as part of the Hazard family).

Dora does find several physical characteristics she believes she shares with the Hazard family on the whole; for example, when Dora is ticking off the physical characteristics of her "*real"* grandmother (as opposed to Mrs. Chance), she notes that "We've got the legs from her" (12). Dora also traces these legs to Melchior, as she mentions "I do believe we get the legs from him, as well as the cheekbones" (72). She quite likes her legs and she quite likes her cheekbones, going so far as to say "Our cheekbones stick out more than they used to, too, but they're the very best cheekbones, I'll have you know—these cheekbones are descended from some of the most profitable calcium deposits in the world. Like all those who spend much time before the public eye, our father has always been dependent on his bone structure. God bless the Hazard calcium…" (6).

Dora is very happy about the physical traits she feels link her to the family, but she is somewhat bitter about Peregrine's children getting that same very significant physical resemblance to him, his red hair; Saskia also, according to Dora, has her mother's eyes ("Lynde-blue" eyes (181)). The very term "family resemblance" shows how immediately certain physical or emotional similarities between family members can classify a person as being part of a family. Charlotte Witt expands on this signpost of the societal ideal of the family as being a naturally biological occurrence:

> Family resemblances attribute relational properties to individual family members. A family resemblance is not simply a matter of having blue eyes, but having blue eyes like Aunty Ginny; not simply being moody, but being moody like Mom…family resemblances are relational properties which are biological/social hybrids; they exist only as part of a family mythology and hence are social, but the myth tells a story of genetic inheritance, and hence they are biological. (142)

Clearly, Dora buys into this myth that red hair instantly equals a genetic relationship between Saskia and Imogen and Peregrine (or at the very least the Hazard line, since no one "officially" knows Peregrine is the father). She keenly notes that Saskia and her mother have very similar eyes, which are then attributed as being part of the maternal family genetic makeup.

Dora also chalks up various behaviors to genetics: Melchior's love of the theatre "is in his blood" (22). Dora claims her paternal grandmother was a "wild thing" and that she "does[n't] have anything of her…not at all…but Nora, sometimes" (15). And sure enough, various wild romantic exploits of Nora are discussed. But where is she getting the social significance of these things from, to such an extent that she attributes everything from careers to emotional temperament to physical traits to the influence of genetics? One such possibility is Saskia's mother, the Lady Atalanta Lynde, who eventually becomes very close to Dora and Nora, in part because she mysteriously "says, as soon as she set eyes on us, *she knew* [Melchior was their father]" (77). How? Peregrine had apparently told her about Dora and Nora, but physical resemblance to Melchior makes Lady Atalanta believe Melchior is the biological father of the girls. Dora can extract from the very air of her culture these myths, these assertions that yes, yes, having a certain hair color or style of movement DOES make you part of the family, and she takes these things and runs with them: She has Melchior's legs (versus coincidental similarities in muscle tone). Saskia's hair runs in the family, and makes her part of the family. She points out that "the red hair only went to the legit side" (17), a side Dora is very unhappy about not being on.

Dora sums up her "illegitimacy": "Romantic illegitimacy, always a seller. It ought to copperbottom the sales of my memoirs. But, to tell the truth, there was sod all romantic about *our* illegitimacy. At best, it was a farce, at worst, a tragedy, and a chronic inconvenience the rest of the time" (11). The "farce" would be the "fiction" of Peregrine being their father—after all, the girls were still branded as illegitimate, but they were not associated with Melchior. The

identity of her father is hidden from society and yet she still is identified as illegitimate—"a chronic inconvenience". Dora can't even participate in the old model of the *adoptive* ideal family—i.e., a family where the child has a closed adoption, knows nothing of the biological parents, and is passed off as being the biological child of the adoptive family. Dora is taken in from the day of her birth by her "guardian"/"Grandmother"/adoptive mother Mrs. Chance. Garry Leonard writes that:

> At the center of the modern system of adoption is the bastard…the altering of the birth certificate, the sealing of the records, and the approval of church, state, and law all collude to contractualize a social baptism cleansing the illegitimate ones but also requiring that they give up all right to any knowledge of their illegitimate origins (126).

Dora hasn't had a closed adoption; she hasn't had an open adoption, yet still has knowledge of and contact with her biological father. She calls Peregrine out on the fact he hasn't adopted her when she claims that Nora always thought he should have married Grandmother Chance and "made a real family for us." Marriage, according to both society and Dora, is one of the ways fatherhood can be established outside genetics. There is, again, that tension between the idea that the family is a social construction and the idea that biology defines a family. Marriage as a way to construct a family works for Saskia and Imogen, and Tiffany, Dora's godchild. Dora says "Tiffany got a father of her own, in the end—Brenda [Tiffany's mother] married this big boxer. Brenda's a pillar of the community now—You'd never know her first fellow was here today, gone tomorrow" (35). Tiffany is no longer seen as being illegitimate through the covering up of her biological father through marriage. Dora has not received the "cleansing" Leonard speaks of, but in a sense, *Melchior* has; he has publically divorced himself from any association with an illegitimate birth. Dora remains branded a bastard, but she operates for most of her life under the pretense of having "given up the right of any knowledge of [her] illegitimate origins" as far as Melchior is concerned. She is stuck in the middle ground between a "pretend" ideal family and an "actual" ideal family, a middle ground that is fraught with reminders of her paternity. And disputed paternity is part of the history of the Hazards, according to Dora:

> Speaking of illegitimacy, there was more than a hint of romantic, nay, melodramatic illegitimacy in the Hazard family long before Nora and I took our first bows. Because Ranulph Hazard, during all his lengthy and extramarital career, had produced no issue, as

> yet, until his wife [was cast in a play with Cassius Booth, a famed Shakespearian actor of the day]. Tongues wagged…. Who can tell, at this distance at time. All the same, he loved his boys. (Carter 17)

Even though there "remains a giant question mark over…their paternity," (21) Dora herself writes that Ranulph Hazard considers the boys "his" and loved them. Dora goes on to list the possible other father's physical characteristics [8]and ascribe them to Melchior, another example of how much stock she puts into the idea of family resemblances and how much she thinks of biology.

As Alison Lee writes, "Dora and Nora Chance are the illegitimate offspring of Shakespearean actor Melchior Hazard…" (112). "Illegitimate" is an immediate marker of their paternity/blood relations, versus saying they are the adoptive daughters of Mrs. Chance, a way to immediately classify them as being outside the ideal family. Yet while the term "illegitimate" serves as connection to Melchior, it also marks the girls, whether they are being written about in academic texts or in day-to-day life…. Before the meeting, Dora keenly feels interest in her biological father and his profession, but she cannot be *recognized* as his daughter the same way she is recognized as Peregrine's daughter. The story of what constitutes family may come initially from within the family, but there is ideally external acknowledgement as well from society as a whole. For much of her life, Dora feels she cannot openly declare herself to be directly related to Melchior; there would be no verification, no straight answer to the "Where did I come from question?" from the person she and the rest of the world see as the truth keeper, the person whose word they would take: Melchior. She is keenly aware of her social status, her place outside the story of the ideal family, when she sees how regarded Melchior is by the world: "We never felt quite so illegitimate in all our lives as we did that day we were thirteen, looking at the glossy photos of Father done up in a kilt" (Carter 69). Family, at this point in Dora's life, cannot

[8] "Dark eyes, lashes of the kind they say 'are wasted on a boy' and a physique that turned out to be ready-made for leaping and climbing over fences and all the things a Shakespearian actor needs to do. I know that all these things, not forgetting his 'splendid gift of gravitas,' all together point the finger at Cassius Booth as his father, but don't forget that poor old Ranulph had been a matinee idol, too, in his day, even if in his day women wore crinolines, and there remains a giant question mark over their paternity, although whoever it was who contributed the actual jism, no child need ever had been ashamed of either contender and, as for me, the grandchild, I like to think *both* of them had a hand in it if you follow me" (21–22). Melchior's possibly being born out of wedlock does not really phase Dora; unlike her, he is not really seen as being "illegitimate."

just be the story you tell yourself; she wants the story reinscribed, confirmed by someone else. She uses her imagination and pieces together an imaginary narrative of what it might be like to be part of the ideal family, even for a moment: "Perhaps, discovering us here so unexpectedly, his lovely girls, lost before birth…he might permit us to hold his hand, even kiss his cheek, and …just the once…" allow the girls to call him father (71). Dora does not get to have this fantasy turned into reality. Melchior greets them, all right…as Peregrine's daughters. Dora is crushed:

> Such eyes!…his eyes…but those very eyes…were the bitterest disappointment of my life till then. No. Of all my life, before and since. No disappointment ever after measured up to it. Because those eyes of his looked at us but did not *see* us, even as we sat there, glowing because we couldn't help it. To see him fail to see me wiped that smile right off my face, I can tell you, and Nora's too… we got our little crumb of attention although it shot us down like the same bullet through both hearts. "And you've brought your lovely daughters, too!" (Carter 71)

Dora is finally before Melchior—and he's flatly ignored her existence as his daughter. No tearful reunion, no being "permitted, just the once," to call him father. Dora cannot let herself use the word after the narrative is broken and her fantasy of gaining the part of long-lost daughter instantly shifts back to square one. Reminding herself of her status as "illegitimate" remains one of the few ways she can use to directly point out that she is related to Melchior.

At one point she even calls Melchior her "illegitimate father" (7). Dora ascribes so much of her identity to him—even when she's contrasting her career against his. He is Sir Melchior Hazard, head of a theatrical dynasty; she sums up her career as such: she would "always be on the left-hand side, hoofers, thrushes, the light relief, as you might say; bring on the bear!" (59). This historical reference to bear-baiting shows that she thinks of herself as what comes on before Shakespeare, and with much less social significance; Melchior, on the other hand, may as well be the incarnation of Shakespeare for all the times Dora describes his roles as a Shakespearian actor. The theatre, as Dora sees it, is the epitome of legitimacy, the very mirror image of what she isn't. Dora positively revels in being a dancer, yet there is a tinge of unwholesomeness that she thinks everyone associates with her career. Left-hand girls, left-hand careers! (59). The references to illegitimacy stack up. Dora thinks she is seen in a certain light because of her parentage as she mentions after dressing up for Melchior's big birthday party: "We…re-emerged, transformed,

looking just like what, for all those years, the bloody Hazards always thought we were, painted harlots…" (192).

Saskia even goes so far as to mock Dora and Nora directly as bastards: One winter evening, when visiting Lady A., the twins have taken her a bunch of carnations, ostensibly to prevent her from having to dig around in the snow banks to search for flowers. Saskia does not appreciate the nurturing element to this gesture and, upon seeing them, "Saskia laughed like anything when she saw those carnations. 'How apt!'…"which some call nature's bastards. Winter's Tale, Act IV, Scene iii. Little did she know it was a case of the pot calling the kettle black" (166). Dora is irritated that Saskia is not labeled a bastard. Dora is also irritated that her relationship to Melchior does not have the benefits she thinks it should because he is her biological father: "…we knew already in our bones that those of us in the left-hand line were left out of the picture; we were the offspring of the bastard king of England, if you like, and we weren't going to inherit any of the gravy, so to hell with it…" (130). Dora is hurt that she gets none of the "gravy"—no social recognition, no inheritance. Dora even compares where she lives in town in terms of illegitimate and legitimate: "That's my sister, we've always lived on the left-hand side, the side the tourist rarely sees, the *bastard* side of the Thames" (1). It is an inherent part of how she sees herself. It bothers her that she is not seen as Melchior's daughter: when Melchior throws a banquet, Dora wryly notes, "We were not excluded. We got our kiss and handshake like everybody else" (98). She is not receiving the attention she thinks a daughter should get, yet she insists on identifying herself as Melchior's daughter through the only frame of reference she has: illegitimacy, like so: "We are his *natural* daughters, as they say, as if only unmarried couples do it in the way that nature intended. His never-by-him officially recognized daughters, with whom, by a bizarre coincidence, he shares a birthday" (5). If Melchior himself will not acknowledge fatherhood, then Dora will call herself his "natural" daughter. Why bother? Because in her mind, ideally, families have fathers. She is wounded again when he introduces Dora and Nora and says they are "almost as precious to me as my own daughters…." and introduces each one as the wrong one on top of it! "He'd betrayed us again, and this time in public" (134).

Makinen describes *Wise Children* as "…celebrating the sheer ability of the female protagonists to survive, unscathed by the sexist ideologies" (3), but Dora does seem damaged by the ideology of the family as one where your biological relatives raise you—and if that can't

happen, even a little acknowledgement of what she perceives as her roots, her identity, as Melchior's daughter would be the next best thing; she is wounded because she hasn't gotten it but everyone feels she needs it. Anytime she hears him on a television commercial, Dora claims, "I grow wistful and alert, my head tilted to the side like the dog listening to his master's voice on the record. Surely it's not as bad as all that, Dora? You've only got the one father" (127). That is what Dora and Peregrine and Grandma Chance believe, but that isn't inherent truth; it's evidence of how deeply she believes in the societal ideal of the family as equaling your biological relatives. This attitude is what society echoes, what her own family members echo. The lack of access to her knowledge about Melchior bothers her, particularly how he factors into her past. Perhaps the aspect of her illegitimacy that bothers her the most is not knowing anything, really, about the circumstances of her conception. As she says:

> Chance by name, Chance by nature. We were not planned. Melchior slept here…I picture him in front of a square of mirror…desperate, ravenous, on the make, tramping round the agents day after day ….I suppose my mother must have felt sorry for him. I can imagine her stripping off in the cold room, turning towards the starving boy. How did she do it? Shyly? Nervously? Lewdly? Then everything fades to black. I can't bear to think of it any further. It hurts too much. You always like to think a little bit of love, or at least a little bit of pleasure, went into your making but I do not know, I cannot guess….Was she scared? Or full of desire? Or half raped? (Carter 24).

Dora goes on to imagine a scenario where her mother, whom Grandma Chance said "was a slip of a thing but as bold as brass," (24) seduces Melchior. Without access to Melchior's version of the facts, she has no idea, no way of verifying this. Her personal history, she feels, is unverified. She also has no way of verifying what happened in the lives of Peregrine and Grandma Chance before she was born. Melchior is all around her, but out of reach; in newspapers, in television commercials. "Not that I *knew* [Melchior's last wife], exactly, but we read the papers, we kept in touch. After all, the Hazards belonged to everyone. They were a national treasure" (38). But the Hazards do not, Dora feels, belong to her personally, and she does feel she belongs to them personally, because Melchior has not acknowledged his fatherhood. Melchior's entire history is documented for Dora—and anyone else—which may be part of why she is so frustrated that Peregrine and Grandma Chance have such an elusive past. As Hutcheon writes, "historical metafiction reminds us that, while events did occur in the real empirical past, we name and

constitute those events as historical FACTS by selection and narrative positioning" (97). Dora gives the events of Melchior's life and career a lot more weight in her own personal narrative than she does Grandma Chance's or Peregrine's, in large part because she thinks your biological relatives' stories are that much more meaningful because the biological relationship is that much more meaningful.

Even the simplest day-to-day things find Grandma Chance covering up her past. When Grandma Chance waits up late for the teenaged Dora and Nora and scolds them a bit, Peregrine advises: "Give the girls a break…I bet you raised hell yourself, when you were their age." Dora notes: "But references to that forbidden country, her past, were taboo." (92) Dora really doesn't have anyone to compare her own teenage hood against; her adoptive parent Mrs. Chance simply does not discuss anything that happened before she settled into the house. Dora has a lot to say about the house itself: "[The boarding house] never looked *plausible*. It looked like the stage set of a theatrical boarding house, as if Grandma had done it up to suit a role she'd chosen on purpose. She was a mystery, was Mrs. Chance" (Carter 25).

It chafes Dora that she doesn't know much of anything, really, about her adoptive parent's past. Dora conflates her identity with the need for knowing "whence came we," where her family, biological or otherwise, came from. Her closest family member gives her no knowledge about her own personal past, so Dora falls back on her biological family's past as a way of understanding her own past; she's stuck on that societal ideal of the family: if you know where you come from, your background, you'll know where you're going. She thinks that concrete information about her family, biological, adoptive, or otherwise, translates to information about herself. But Dora is not really raised by her biological parents, and her adoptive mother leaves her no past occupation to speculate about or relate to herself, except for a tantalizing implication that Mrs. Chance, too, was a dancer, *just like Dora*. "The way she danced was the only clue to her past she ever gave" (33). The name "Chance" is, Dora suspects, made up; when relating the story of how she was adopted, Dora says, "Chance became our handle." The term "handle" which can mean "nickname" shows that Dora lacks confidence in it. Society's idea of the family implies a family name that can be traced back generations. Dora is, once again, stuck in between that tension of society's ideal—family names which are really ultimately a construct, something that can be changed, given to non-blood relatives, etc.—and an adoptive family name that is far more obviously a construct.

Dora claims her grandmother "invented herself…" (28). But self-invention isn't enough for Dora. She sees an absence compared against what others have: the theatrical legacy, after all, as shabby as it becomes with its tabloids and television appearances, is caught up in the name, Hazard—the name she traces across her grandfather's haphazard tour of the U.S. as she's chronicling the Hazard family, as she's trying to chronicle herself. "Of course we didn't know, then, how the Hazards would always upstage us. Tragedy, eternally more class than comedy. How could mere song-and-dance girls aspire so high? We were destined, from birth, to be the lovely ephemera of the theatre, we'd rise and shine like birthday candles, then blow out" (58). Dora loves and loathes the idea of destiny in the same breath—is it Grandma's influence on them, taking them to a dance show, showing them the song and dancing celebration on the day they were born, is that how Dora translates her understanding of her own career, her own self? She is examining the entirety of her life. Dora is struggling with that tension between what society says family is and the family as a social construct. Society itself says family is biological—your parents are this way, so you'll be that way too.

Neither Grandma Chance nor Peregrine provide Dora with much of a verifiable personal history. Melchior, on the other hand, has an entire career tracked by Dora, honored by the country (the knighthood), reachable and written about in the papers…thanks to his more commercial career, HE has not entirely been forgotten as Dora feels she has been ("bound for oblivion, nor leave a wrack behind!") (11). And then, it all turns around for Dora: she finally gets the recognition from her biological family she has so craved. At the party, Melchior "repented, with half of Britain watching," (200) and Dora becomes the guardian for the new generation of Hazards—a new set of twins that Peregrine produces from out of nowhere. Here is where, too, the audience is shut out of the narrative:

> "Have you seen him [the father of the twins]? How is he? Who is the mother? Where is she?" But who or where they both were do not belong to the world of comedy. Perry told us, of course, because we were family, but I don't propose to tell *you*, not now, when the barren heath was bloomed, the fire that was almost out sprung back to life and Nora a mother at last at seventy-five years old and all laughter, forgiveness, generosity, reconciliation.
>
> Yes.
>
> Hard to swallow, huh?

> Well, you might have known what you were about to let yourself in for when you let Dora Chance in her ratty old fur and poster paint, her orange (Persian Melon) toenails sticking out of her snakeskin peep-toes, reeking of liquor, accost you in the Coach and Horses and let her tell you a tale. (227)

After she and Nora are accepted and at the front of the Hazard clan as the parents of the latest twins, absolutely unquestioned, the new matriarchs of "the Hazard clan"—that's when we are no longer privy to family secrets. "They'd asked us on the stage and let us join in, legit. at last" (226). This one man's admission is what turns it all around, what allows her to feel like she is part of the family—and *legitimate*.

> And it is only after this great revelation that Dora is skeptical about her father: "Nora…don't you think our father looked two-dimensional tonight?...Too handsome, too kind, too repentant. After all those years without a word." And Nora replies, "I sometimes wonder if we haven't been making him up all along. If he isn't just a collection of our thoughts and dreams…think about it. We can tell [the new baby twins] whatever we like about their mum and dad if Per[egrine] doesn't find them but whatever we tell them, they'll make their own romance out of it." (230).

Even adopting the twins is fraught with ideal family imagery—Dora and Nora are part of the family, in her view, after Melchior admits paternity, and the biological mother and father of the twins are being sought out. Dora even doubts the sincerity of Melchior's admitting paternity: "I feared the softening of his heart was connected to the softening of his brain" (203) and she describes how a man, in public, grabbed him and said, "Good god, weren't you Melchior Hazard, once? He felt uncertain after that." Perhaps he is craving for more people to remember him.

It is only AFTER Dora admits paternity that she can doubt him, even a little bit. After Dora's role in the family is secure, we, the audience, are denied further information about the family, such as the identity of the mother of the newest set of twins (227).

On the surface, *Wise Children* seems to break down the very notion of the "ideal family," that is, a married couple with biological children. We're presented with a setting where Dora says she owes her adoptive mother "everything," and a "foundling" becomes part of the family almost immediately, and an ending where Dora and Nora, our heroines, triumphantly take custody of the next generation of Hazard twins (versus their grandmother taking custody of them). A not-so-subtle swipe is taken at the ideal family when it is revealed that Britain's own

“royal family of the theatre” is not what it appears: Melchior Hazard, the biological father of Dora and Nora, isn’t actually the father of “his” daughters—his brother, Peregrine, is! Yet tucked away within this break down is a bit of wishful thinking from Dora—wishful thinking that gives every adoptee a past (or a husband), every cast member a genetic family history or their own piece of the ideal family.

Even as the ideal family falls apart through Saskia’s snarls or Lady A’s Jerry Springer-style paternity reveal, Dora is happiest when she is finally accepted as part of THE family, her genetic family; Dora realizes the new set of baby twins will want their ideal family, too, and go looking for it, and the cycle of wanting a mommy and daddy and a clear-cut answer to the “Where did I come from” question will continue, even if the question is not 100% answerable, or those answers are seemingly insignificant. The tension between the societal ideal of the family as biological (itself a construct) and the constructed idea of the family is only seemingly resolved; Dora is happy with her place in the family only after Melchior admits she has one.

CHAPTER 3: WHOSE HISTORY, ANYWAY?: HISTORIOGRAPHIC METAFICTION AND PARENTAL PROPRIETY IN *ORANGES ARE NOT THE ONLY FRUIT*

Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit is a text that richly addresses the nature of many things: storytelling, fantasy, history and family. The latter two become inextricably entwined, especially when examined within the lens of historiographic metafiction. Posited by Linda Hutcheon, historiographic metafiction claims that an event, or what actually happened, is somehow turned into fact, which is "interpreted, signifying, discursive, textualized" (153). Combined with Louis Althusser's idea that the family and church, both Ideological State Apparatuses, are a reflection of the ideology of whatever group is in power, this paper argues that historiographic metafiction allows us to examine how adoption works—as an event, the adoption, is transmitted into fact, which is then interpreted in various ways by society. There is tension between society's idea that the family is simply a natural, biological phenomenon—an idea that is a construction in and of itself—and the idea of the family as a construct.

Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit (1991) spends an incredible amount of energy dealing with this tension. Written by British author Jeanette Winterson in the late 20th century, this novel is centered around Jeanette. Jeanette and the author share the same first name, which already gives the novel a tantalizing push into metafiction. A large part of the novel centers around the relationship between Louie and Jeanette; Louie is the adoptive mother of Jeanette. Louie is extremely focused on one definition of the family; she thinks it is entirely constructed and that knowledge of a person's biological roots has absolutely no place in the family, even as background information. Louie hid the fact that Jeanette was adopted and, in doing so, she tried to turn the fact of Jeanette's adoption into a nonevent.

Louie is the gatekeeper of the knowledge and interpretation Jeanette has of her own adoption. Louie attempts to add religious and fateful significance to the moment when the "event" of Jeanette's adoption is turned into the "fact" of Jeanette's status as her daughter. An absent birth mother and historiographic metafiction's observation that there is no "natural" law all serve to show how the idea of the family is a construct, and how this particular family is constructed on a conditional basis—namely, that Jeanette be a dutiful daughter and missionary.

Hutcheon defines historical metafiction as "historical fiction…which is modeled on historiography to the extent that it is motivated and made operative by a notion of history as a

shaping force (in the narrative and in human destiny)" (113). Winterson questions the very way history is written throughout the novel. Adoption is often separately highlighted as one of the most significant mechanisms for shaping a particular person's destiny in part because it makes us examine how, exactly, families form. Historiographic metafiction is an excellent venue for writing about adoption. After all, what questions and tests the boundaries of "history" more than adoption? Adoption and its significance have shifted continuously. The discourse of adoption shifts and changes: one day it's "unnatural," the next day it's "saving a child," and the day after that, all adoptions "should" be open[9]. The history of adoption is a part of history, in that it actually happened, and provides an interesting look into "history," with the skepticism of events that Winterson underscores throughout the novel. One reason for Jeanette's skepticism may be that Louie tried to fashion her own history of adoption—to begin with, she never mentioned that it happened at all. It was only when Jeanette confronted her about a birth certificate, a historical document in and of itself, that Louie addresses the issue. Louie also hides the very existence of Jeanette's birth mother from her.

Louie exhibits a selective control of the past in matters other than the birth mother, which makes her a historian of sorts of Jeanette's life. Interestingly, Louie's influence continues to show itself through the terms Jeanette uses to refer to her status as an adoptee. Jeanette refers to the "orphanage" from which she was adopted, as well as calling herself a foundling. Craig Greenfield writes in his book *Urban Halo* about how many of the Cambodian "orphans" he worked with actually had living parents that simply couldn't afford to support them—the children would often visit their parents on holidays. Both of the words that Jeanette uses to outline her adoption, foundling and orphanage, are terms that imply a lack of knowledge about the biological parents. To clarify this point, "foundling" means "an infant found after its unknown parents have abandoned it" (Merriam-Webster). Louie also changes Jeanette's knowledge about things in real life, such as changing the ending of *Jane Eyre* to make Jane Eyre marry St. John Rivers—and uses the example of this "marriage" to further reinforce the idea that Jeanette will become a missionary (Winterson 74). She also alters the family photograph album—an already compromised space where adoptive family members aren't to be asked

[9] "Open" adoptions are adoptions where the identity of at least one birth parent (the biological parent of the child) is known by the adoptive family and various degrees of communication between all parties involved take place; "closed" adoptions refer to adoptions where the adoptive child does not initially know any information about the birth parent.

about—and discards a picture of a "pretty woman holding a yellow cat," who is puzzlingly listed under "Old Flames" (30). In part of her reflection on history, Jeanette notes that "People have never had a problem disposing of the past when it gets too difficult. Flesh will burn, photos will burn, and memory, what is that?...And if we can't dispose of it we can alter it" (94). Jeanette has first-hand knowledge of how the past can be altered through the transformation of her birth mother from "my mother" to "carrying case" in the space of a few angry minutes. While Louie may not be able to dispose of the birth mother altogether—adoption papers remain, the woman herself remains—the *significance* of this piece of history in Jeanette's life can be altered, explained away, bullied away. "Very often history is a means of denying the past. Denying the past is to refuse to recognize its integrity. To fit it, force it, function it, to suck out the spirit until it looks the way you think it should" (93). This quote certainly seems to apply to the birth mother. And Louie seems to think that the birth mother should have no significance, that she should simply be a void. Louie wants to control the way that the family history, the narrative of the family itself, is written.

Jeanette writes her own narrative, but it still shows Louie as being in control; it still shows the biological family being completely cut out. It also shows how deeply the church/religious Ideological State Apparatus is at work within Jeanette's point of view: her very reason for being in the family stems from inspiration from the church. The novel opens with a refashioning of the Nativity scene with foundling Jeanette being discovered in lieu of baby Jesus. A few pages into *Oranges*, Jeanette shares the story of her adoption:

> 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… And so it was on that particular day, some time later, she followed a star until it came to settle above an orphanage, and in that place was a crib, and in that crib, a child. A child with too much hair.
>
> She said, "This child is mine from the Lord."
>
> She took the child away and for seven days and seven nights the child cried out, for fear and not knowing. The mother sang to the child, and stabbed the demons.
>
> She understood how jealous the Spirit is of flesh.
>
> Such warm tender flesh.
>
> Her flesh now, sprung from her head.

Her vision. (10)

Clearly, the Nativity scene is being referenced (and amusingly softened with the "too much hair" touch of humor). What is not soft, however, are the verbs: "get," "train," "build," "stabbed." Jeanette is hers physically ("her flesh now") and spiritually ("her vision"). Janet Farrell Smith begins her essay by looking at the phrase "A child of one's own," which she claims often means "a. the child is somehow one's natural property or possession and b. the special status of being 'one's own' derives from the fact that one biologically produced the child, and biological reproduction is prized as the primary, normal condition and foundation for parenting" (112). "Both (a) and (b) place an adoptive child in secondary status." The common question, "Is she your own or did you adopt her?" still influences "the moral psychology of parenting" (112). Biological families are seen as the natural order, Smith points out, and she also notes that " a property-based view of parental rights has historically tended towards the stigmatization and unequal status and worth of orphaned, foster, and adopted children" (112). It is stated by Louie, Jeanette's adoptive mother, that Jeanette was adopted so that she would grow up and become a missionary. Jeanette's worth as a daughter is, in large part, contingent upon her fulfilling her destiny as a missionary and participating in the church. Louie has also made the event of Jeanette's adoption not only into fact; she has made it into a story of a sort, a narrative about destiny. This story gives a new significance to the simple "event" of the adoption. The various ways in which adoption has been interpreted has changed enormously through the decades—some say adoption should be kept hidden from the child, some used adoption as a way for "fallen" women to start over, some now say it's "unnatural" for a mother to give up her child; everyone takes the event of a child's birth and makes it into a fact in their own way. Louie does not appear to be acting on advice to keep the adoption a secret; she simply recasts the adoption in an entirely new light, one that reaffirms the role of the religious ISA in Jeanette's life: the Lord was the reason Jeanette was singled out to be adopted.

Susana Onega argues that part of Winterson's work could be considered to meet certain criteria for belonging to a subcategory of postmodern fiction, namely, historiographic metafiction, a subgenre which "…suggests a distinction between 'events' and 'facts' that is one shared by many historians" (Hutcheon 122). Jeanette claims "People like to separate storytelling which is not fact from history which is fact" (93). Let's examine "fact"—the very word automatically implies truth, and storytelling, after all, is supposed to be entirely in the realm of

the fictional. It can be comfortably separated from the real. But "events" are neutral things that happen, and "facts" are how they are interpreted. Storytelling may not be something that happened concretely, but it can contain a certain kind of truth—who is telling it, what they are saying, can reveal so much. Storytelling can reveal the truth *behind* facts, just as Jeanette telling the story of her adoption shows how committed Louie is to the constructed, adoptive family and nothing else. Hutcheon tries to poke holes in our ideas of what "facts" really are, even though the world at large, as Winterson points out, tries to categorize things in black and white. Winterson is also skeptical of facts. Events, as Hutcheon writes, are turned into facts; historians and fiction writers alike get to decide what actually "counts" as a fact (122). Jeanette's mother assumes the power of a historian and decides the meaning of the event of Jeanette's adoption for her. "Since the documents become signs of events, which the historian transmutes into facts, as in historiographic metafiction, the lesson here is that the past once existed, but that our historical knowledge of it is semiotically transmitted" (122). Louie is the historian instead of Jeanette; she knows what happens in the past, but she literally controls the way it is transmitted to Jeanette, both in terms of what she chooses to tell her and what she does with the physical objects associated with the adoption. Jeanette's mother does this with Jeanette's birth certificate and adoption papers by keeping them hidden from her, though this practice does seem to be in keeping with the "closed" adoptions so prevalent in the 1950s and 1960s. The adoption papers themselves are signs of the past, but it is translated through the sign of divine birth. "It is this very difference between events (which have no meaning in themselves) and facts (which are given meaning) that postmodernism obsessively foregrounds" (122). The event of Jeanette's adoption is turned into a fact that has a lot of meaning—Jeanette's adoption has certain strings attached. She is not just part of any family; she is part of a family largely made up of members of the church who believe in a certain ideology.

Both church and family are two "ideological state apparatuses" that Althusser writes about. According to him, we are all "*always already* subjects" of whatever ruling ideology is in place in society at the time, and various institutions such as the church seek to further indoctrinate us with the beliefs appropriate to the society. Althusser writes that "Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (24). In other words, ideology provides a framework for people to understand their lives—they are either good or bad, just or unjust, depending on what they believe, and the ideology itself is what

reinforces these beliefs. Jeanette's participation in the ideology of the church is so deep that her family itself is formed around it. Althusser further writes that "I only wish to point out that you and I are *always already* subjects, and as such constantly practice the rituals of ideological recognition, which guarantee for us that we are indeed concrete, individual, and (naturally) irreplaceable subjects." This idea of already being a subject certainly applies to an event as significant as a birth or adoption of a child into a family. Jeanette is recognized as part of the family, as a subject. Even before her adoption, Jeanette is already part of the family; her point of view about everything is determined by the collective reality of the church, not something that comes from within. Althusser further expands how the ISA works from the moment a child is placed into a family:

> Everyone knows how much and in what way an unborn child is expected…it is certain in advance that it will bear its Father's Name, and will therefore have an identity and be irreplaceable. Before its birth, the child is therefore always-already a subject, appointed as a subject in and by the specific familial ideological configuration in which it is "expected" once it has been conceived (33).

In this case, the "specific ideological configuration" includes growing up to become a missionary. The church ISA BECOMES the family ISA. Within her family, Jeanette already has a place and identity not only as an expected child, but a child who is expected to become a missionary. Jeanette's place in the family has been established before she was born and, indeed, her eventual place in the family is cited by Louie as the main reason for the family existing in the first place. Jeanette, in a partial attempt to understand marriage, asks, "Why did you marry my dad?" Louie responds: "We had to have something for you, and besides, he's a good man, though I know he's not one to push himself. But don't you worry, you're dedicated to the Lord, I put you down for missionary school as soon as we got you" (74). There is another potentially troublesome word, stating that Jeanette was "got." Jeanette is cast as the focus of Louie's decision to marry Jack. Jeanette's mother has co-opted Jeanette's past with a vision of her own future for her. Louie has also neatly excused Jeanette from any future thoughts of marriage and underscored how different her destiny is from those around her.

Jeanette writes about her understanding of what she thinks is her destiny: "I cannot recall a time that I did not know I was special," she says, while launching into a sea of memories

related to being taught the Bible (3). Her sense of being special does not appear to have derived from the fact that she is adopted—Jeanette does not find this out for some time. She is special because of her destiny as a missionary. Yet, she was adopted specifically with that purpose in mind, as Jeanette's mother recalls. Louie seems comfortable keeping Jeanette's original adoption papers hidden and breezily replies that Jeanette is "from the Lord" (100) when she finds them; the event of the adoption turns into a significantly diminished fact. Jeanette's mother views Jeanette as property of a sort, not simply as a child: she belongs to Louie and she belongs to the Lord.

As Smith writes:

> The moral psychology of parent-child relations may manifest attitudes that are similar to or modeled on property relations…for example, a possessive attitude towards one's children or the view that energy devoted to children is an investment like any other. The return will be productive children whose demonstrated achievements will one day reflect back positively on parental and family status (113).

The very reason Jeanette is adopted is a kind of investment; she is to be "train[ed]" and "dedicate[d] to the Lord" by Jeanette's mother. Were Jeanette to have ever fulfilled the goal of becoming a missionary, surely this "demonstrated achievement" would have reflected well on the church and on Louie. As Margot Gayle Backus writes in her article, Louie gets moral credit for raising Jeanette—Louie's decision to mark Jeanette as a missionary "enable[s] her to lay claim to the sacrificial aspirations of a saint without having to sacrifice anything" (136).

Backus explores the idea that the very adoption itself lets Louie immediately gain status within the eyes of her church community. Louie has "a mysterious attitude towards the begetting of children…it wasn't that she couldn't do it, more that she didn't want to do it. She was very bitter about the Virgin Mary getting there first. So she did the next best thing and arranged for a foundling. That was me" (Winterson 3). It is somewhat ironic that the "next best thing" is not a biological birth, but adoption. "Next best thing" has echoes of language typically associated with adoption, that an adopted child is "second best" compared to one produced biologically. However, it is not biological birth that Louie is after; it is a child tinged with an element of otherworldliness. Jeanette is, in her mind, being held against an ideal, even if that ideal is the opposite of the usual one.

"In arranging for her own version of the virgin birth, Jeanette's mother also imaginatively positioned herself as a modern-day type of the Virgin Mary. By fashioning herself in the image of Christianity's most prominent figure of female power, Jeanette's mother…takes up a position…equivalent to that of a priest within her small Pentecostal sect" (136).

Here we see where the religious ISA becomes part of the family ISA; religion is the impetus for the family to be created, specifically religious power. Jeanette is dedicated to the Lord before her adoption; her future missionary work is the reason for the adoption. If, as Backus suggests, the adoption of Jeanette is mimicking the virgin birth, this gives yet another reason for the suppression of any knowledge about Jeanette's birth mother: it spoils the illusion. It gives the mystical origin—the child found by following a star to an orphanage—a firm grounding in reality (Winterson 10). The reality of Jeanette's own state as an independent individual comes as a shock, too. At one point in the novel, Jeanette reveals her intention to refuse to "repent" for being a lesbian—a decision she knows will mean she has to leave the church. As Althusser writes, "The Schools and Churches use suitable methods of punishment, expulsion, selection, etc., to 'discipline' not only their shepherds, but also their flocks'" (14). Punishment, in this case, being thrown out of the church, is how the religious ISA continues to function. Jeanette tried to remain part of the church by declaring that she and her lover, both adamant church members, were "pure" and that "to the pure all things are pure" (Winterson 123). The ISA won't let itself be redefined, however. After learning Jeanette does not intend to repent, to play by the rules of the ISA, Louie bitterly exclaims, "I'm a fool to meself…Keeping you as long as I have, letting you do more exams, and for what?" (130–131). That investment of letting Jeanette have extra academic studies has clearly been misplaced, in Louie's eyes; it was not really for Jeanette's pleasure or enrichment, but Louie tolerated it as long as she thought Jeanette was going to become a missionary. Once it is shown that Louie's time and effort have been misplaced and she is not going to get a missionary daughter out of the deal, she is wrathful. Louie is also quite angry and possessive during an incident where Jeanette's birth mother returns.

Jeanette writes about "That Awful Occasion" when her birth mother returns to claim her back (100). Louie has a discussion with the birth mother, who is never actually seen by Jeanette but only overheard. Afterwards, Louie and Jeanette have the following exchange:

> "She's gone."
>
> "I know who she was, why didn't you tell me?"

> "It's nothing to do with you."
>
> "She's my mother."
>
> No sooner had I said that then I felt a blow that wrapped round my head like a bandage. I lay on the lino looking up into the face.
>
> "I'm your mother," she said very quietly. "She was a carrying case.
>
> She's gone and she'll never come back" (101).

The birth mother—the biological part of the family—is completely dismissed by Louie. The birth mother is physically there, and just as Louie did with the birth certificate showing Jeanette was adopted, access to the birth mother is denied. Louie is repressing Jeanette's access to the birth mother. Althusser writes that "the Ideological State Apparatuses function mainly by ideology, but they also function secondarily by repression" (13). The birth mother's showing up spoils the story Louie has told about the adoption, the orphanage, everything. Her significance to Jeanette's life, to Jeanette's personal history, is diminished and repressed so that the religious ISA can function as intended.

According to Onega, part of the very mission of historiographic fiction is to explore some of the gaps that exist between "what really happened" and "history" as written from the point of view of a social minority[10]. As a character who discovers she is a lesbian later in the novel, AND as an adoptee, Jeanette would appear to be part of the movement towards "the contemporary creative writer becom[ing] a historian in an attempt to fill in the gaps left by traditional totalitarian history…" (Onega 16). Yet any gap left by the birth mother is utterly ignored.

Before the unexpected arrival of Jeanette's birth mother, Jeanette had "…had an idea that there was something curious about the circumstances of my birth, and once found my adoption papers…" "Formalities," my mother had said, waving me away. 'You were always mine, I had you from the Lord" (Winterson 100). Jeanette claims to have never thought about her adoption again until her birth mother appeared from out of nowhere. But clearly, there was something very significant that was being kept from Jeanette, despite the dismissal from her mother. After the opportunity to at least see her birth mother has been snatched away, Jeanette runs from the house and sobs "Why didn't you tell me?" (101). One can't help but wonder, exactly, what

[10] "The difference between the traditional novel and historiographic metafiction lies firstly, in the identity of the hero—or heroine—who does not belong to the dominant class, sex, race or culture but rather, to the social, sexual, racial or cultural fringe…" (Onega 17)

Jeanette wishes she had been told. The significance of what the adoption meant? That she had at least one birth parent still alive?

Backus writes that, "Jeanette's birth mother is decidedly 'vanquished'…and the bond between Jeanette and her adoptive mother is symbolically reaffirmed as the sole arbiter of Jeanette's identity" (145). Jeanette's mother does not simply control whether or not Jeanette thinks of herself as an adoptee—she also controls the very definition of family and God, two things that have become inextricably linked.

The idea of the adoptive family is extended to include not just Jeanette and her mother and father, but the church to which they belong:

> So she married my father and reformed him and he built the church and never got angry…of course, her own father was furious. He told her she'd married down, that she should have stayed in Paris, and promptly ended all communication. So she never had enough money and after a while she managed to forget that she'd ever had any at all. 'The church is my family,' she always said whenever I asked about the people in the photograph album. And the church was my family too. (Winterson 36–37).

The church and family ISAs are completely conflated here.

Here we have another form of adoption—Jeanette is discouraged from asking about her mother's family and encouraged to embrace the church as a family, a family that doesn't focus on blood or genetics in the least. Just as Dora observed in *Wise Children*, here is another "invented" family: Louie's relatives are rarely mentioned; we're not really sure what side of the family Jeanette's "aunt and uncle" belong to; Louie is teaching Jeanette to consider the church as her family. And Jeanette is, for a time, very happy with how this works: "When everyone arrived and started to pass the potato pie, we stood on the balcony, looking down on them. Our family" (89). The members of the church behave with intimate, familial airs around one another; they sleep over at one another's houses for days at a time. At one point in the novel, Jeanette is scolded for simply calling a church member "May" instead of the honorific "Auntie" May. All of this is to simply point out the degree to which Jeanette's mother has apparently discarded, on some level, ties to her own biological family and how deeply her understanding of "family" is tied to the church. Jeanette is brought into the family specifically to be part of the church and to extend the influence of the church into foreign lands, not just for her own sake as a child.

Ex-centric figures—such as lesbians—are a focus of historiographic metafiction (Hutcheon 114). Jeanette describes how she goes from one margin that seemed like the center of everything (the church) to another margin (lesbianism). In *Wise Children*, Carter writes of a family where, to be "real" family, you must be loved or a blood relative. Winterson writes of a family where belief and obedience earn you a place at the table. Ellen Brinks and Lee Talley discuss how *Oranges* refashions "domestic spaces that incorporate and welcome 'unnatural passions' (i.e., lesbianism)" (41) but Jeanette seems somewhat unsatisfied with the limbo she is left in at the end of the book. "Winterson's revelatory use of language to fashion an alternative, lesbian-encompassing family structure" does not appear to be fully realized (41). Brinks and Talley counter Onega's view of "the Bible as standing for dogmatic laws… and see it as illustrating the word as revelation….[which] allows the lesbian quasi-biblical writer to transform the originary family" (40). Jeanette and Jeanette's mother may participate in a somewhat unconventional, matriarchy-centered household, but participation in this family hinges on achievement/participation within the church. The transformation is somewhat incomplete; the importance of biology may have been eliminated or diminished in Louie's eyes, but Jeanette is not valued fully as an individual because, as Althusser would have it, is a subject. It is a source of fascination to me that *Oranges*, as much as it plays with the idea of history, never fully addresses the history of Jeanette as an adoptee. This shows how repression is working, courtesy of the religious ISA Jeanette has been participating in. It also shows how much tension there is between the constructed/adoptive family and the biological family. Jeanette doesn't address the subject at all, even to dismiss its significance; it's been repressed. It is one thing to say "I was adopted, but you know, I don't have any curiosity about my biological roots;" it is another thing entirely when your adoptive parent doesn't mention your adopted and boots your biological relative out. Jeanette is still functioning under the parameters of family her mother has set for her, the very history Louie has written for her.

The book continually probes the ways in which history influences our view of the world—especially significant given how Louie tries to bury Jeanette's knowledge of the history of her adoption and then interprets its significance for Jeanette in the form of a destiny as a missionary.

In part of her questioning the very idea of history, Winterson writes:

> So the past, because it is the past, is only malleable where once it was flexible. Once it could change its mind, now it can only undergo change. The lens can be tinted, tilted, smashed. What matters is that order is seen to prevail…and if we are eighteenth century gentlemen, drawing down the blinds as our coach jumbles over the Alps, we have to know what we are doing, pretending an order that doesn't exist, to make a security that cannot exist….
>
> 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 have not a seamless wonder but a sandwich laced with mustard of my own (95).

How does the "event" turn to "fact"? There is no impartial observer available. Winterson points out that we cannot absolutely know what happened, that memory is not infallible, that even things that happen to us or to someone we know are not 100% verifiable. Jeanette never outright states anything about her history as an adoptee. Even in her fantasies, the birth mother is absent. The fantasies also serve to question the past itself somewhat and show the ease with which memories can be rewritten.

Hutcheon writes about narratives, specifically that "*no* narrative can be a natural 'master' narrative: there are no natural hierarchies; there are only those we construct" (13). In a world where only a small percentage of children are raised by their "natural" parents, where adoptive mothers can breast feed, where the definition of "family" is changing on a daily basis, can we not apply this exciting statement that unhinges the master narrative to family itself? The biological parent is nearly completely absent in *Oranges*. Hutcheon cites Russell in her claim that "Postmodern art similarly asserts and then deliberately undermines such principles as value, order, meaning, control, and identity…Such a process reveals rather than conceals the tracks of the signifying systems that constitute our world—that is, systems constructed by us in answer to our needs. However important these systems are, they are not natural, given, or universal" (13). The family is something that is constructed by Louie to meet her needs—needs that intersect with her participation the church/the religion ISA. Louie wants to believe that it is the adoption that is part of a divine system—not any participation from the birth mother. Even as Jeanette examines how suspect history is, she doesn't completely examine Louie's definition of family.

In history, "Events…are configured into facts by being related to conceptual matrices within which they have to be embedded if they are to count as fact" (122). Louie puts the event of the adoption into the framework of religion, and thus it counts as fact in both her mind and Jeanette's. To further support this point, Hutcheon writes that:

> Historiography and fiction…decide which events will become facts…post-modernism points to our unavoidable difficulties with the concreteness of events (in the archive, we can find only their textual traces to make into facts) and their accessibility (Do we have a full trace or a partial one? What has been absented, discarded as non-fact material?) (122).

It is Jeanette's mother who decides, in this case, what "events" turn into "facts". Jeanette's birth papers are waved away, discarded. Their significance has been totally rewritten. As Jeanette writes, "Uncertainty was what the Heathen felt, and I was chosen by God" (Winterson 100). Whatever Jeanette hears when her birth mother visits is discarded as well, not left for the reader. It is only through Jeanette that we learn the birth mother "had come to claim [her] back" (100). Post-modernism questions *whose* truth gets told (Hutcheon 123). Ideology itself claims it IS the truth—if you are greeted on the street and you turn around, you're a subject; that becomes your truth. Louie has told Jeanette that the birth mother doesn't matter; Louie has dismissed the birth mother and substituted the religious ISA for her ("You were always mine, I had you from the Lord") (Winterson 100). Clearly, despite Jeanette's best efforts during the return of the birth mother, it is Louie's version of the truth that seems to have filtered through, despite Jeanette's struggles throughout the novel to assert the value of telling your own story.

Lynn Pykett writes that "Winterson's novels are people and narrated by storytellers whose stories have their origin in lack and desire. The stories of Jeanette and Jordan are family romances which compensate for the narrator's lack of family. Jeanette is adopted…" (54), but it is not biological family that Jeanette is mourning the "lack of." One of the most bittersweet moments in *Oranges* is when Jeanette is musing on what makes up a "real" family: "Families, real ones, are chairs and tables and the right number of cups, but I had no means of joining one, and no means of dismissing my own" (*O* 176). Jeanette's adoption makes her part of a "real" family—what is so heartbreaking is how Louie seems unwilling to expand the definition of family to include a birth mother or a daughter that does not do exactly as she is told. Jeanette has a family at the beginning of the novel, and still has a relationship with Louie, but Louie's firm

rule over Jeanette's idea of family leaves her literally out in the cold when Jeanette's adoptive family, the church, cuts itself off from her. Louie's overemphasis on a specific type of adoptive family leaves her unprepared for a daughter that does not return on her investment. While post-modernism seeks to pry apart and further examine constructed institutions of society, and the fantasy interludes and reflections on the malleability of history represent a link of sorts to historiographic metafiction, Winterson underscores how vital one's immediate understanding of "family" can be. Jeanette was not adopted simply to exist as a child for her own sake; she was adopted to be part daughter, part status symbol, and part of the adoptive family of the church. Louie overtly controls her past, present, and future throughout the book and while Jeanette may use fantasy interludes to explore and point out ways in which her mother influences her, she still feels adrift at the end of the novel. As alternative and revolutionary as the existence of the church family may be, there is little room for disobedience; *Oranges* as a whole shows how Louie aids in overemphasizing the importance of the adoptive family/church at the expense of a connection with Jeanette's birth mother or even stronger relationships with her immediate adoptive family members.

"Winterson's proposal to conceive history as the recording of individual memories of the past allows for the articulation of her heroine's subjectivity, even if only as coiner and interpreter of her own history. Thus, history becomes, instead of Western tale told by (male) Western voices and seen by (male) Western eyes, the history of the individual self, while the activity of recording the past becomes the means by which the subject is effectively defined" (Onega 141). Here, Jeanette is redefining what history is—one's own memories, a "sandwich laced with mustard of my own" (Winterson 95). But as empowering as it may be for Jeanette to record her own past, at the end of *Oranges*, she seems unable to face a future redefining family for herself. Jeanette can't alter her ideal of what a "real" family is; her fantasy life will not extend to imagine a true reunion with either her adoptive or biological mother, though she does have a visit with Louie at the end of the book and things seem somewhat patched up. As revolutionary as Louie's construction of the church family is—Brinks and Talley write that "within the extended family of the church, generational differences and hierarchical differences are non-existent" (41)—Jeanette can't re-enter the church family without abiding by their rules. When she first leaves the church and is thinking about where to seek refuge, she notes, "…no one in the church would really take the risk….all my relatives, like most relatives, were revolting" (136). Jeanette's mother has done

too fine of a job of setting up the church as the sole supporting family. Jeanette does not consider her biological mother as an alternative, has little adoptive family left, has a strained relationship with Louie, and has the possibility of a new lover for family but is somewhat wary.

The touches of historiographic metafiction within Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* serve to reinforce the idea that the family is constructed rather than natural—but at not only the expense of any possibility of interaction with a biological family member, at the expense of even considering that as a choice. Louie, as the chief means by which the religious/family ISA is passed on to Jeanette, is also her historian. It is intriguing to observe the mechanisms by which we see Jeanette's own definition of family come to pass: her mother's role as historian (and censor, to a degree) of Jeanette's life, the open family structure of the church, the birth mother's coming in and out of Jeanette's existence so suddenly. While there are no absolutes in adoption (every family has a different way of dealing with family lineage whether or not children are adopted) it IS interesting to see Jeanette first attempt to embrace and then reject the very memory of the birth mother so suddenly. Jeanette's mother has carefully constructed her family unit around the idea of a not just a child, but a child who will become a missionary, and she edits the entire family mythos accordingly. The jolts of questioning the very idea of western history, the interruptions of the narrative rhythm—these elements show the reader not only the novel as a construct, but the family.

CHAPTER 4: FANTASY AND ORIGINS IN *ORANGES ARE NOT THE ONLY FRUIT*

In *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, we have hints and pieces of Jeanette's origin story, retold as fantasies or, occasionally, stories that echo mythic language. Jeanette does not give us direct access to any cohesive story her adoptive mother may have told her about why and how she came to be here; we only get a few sentences directly from Louie, her adoptive mother. Yet some form of this origin story runs through the fabric of her every day life as a missionary-in-training. Jeanette has had this story heavily edited from the beginning, so she sets out to reconstruct her origin story on some level. The fantasies serve the purpose of Jeanette telling herself a story about how Jeanette came to be, and attempt to serve as a coping mechanism for not having a cohesive "Where did I come from?" narrative.

Anthropologists and psychologists have branched off from the study of the narratives of individuals—the stories we tell ourselves to make meaning out of every day experiences—and have begun to examine the idea of the family itself as a sort of narrative, the story of how our families came to be and how they operate from day to day.

Barbara Fiese and Arnold J. Sameroff discuss the importance of studying narrative framework as it relates to the family. They note that in addition to the narrative of the individual, "…Narratives may be constructed among family members and reflect family relationship functioning" (3). Intriguingly, the study uses ways of rating the "coherence" [11]of the narratives adoptive parents tell an interviewer about the adoption. Interviews discussing confidential or "closed" adoptions had the lowest coherence. While the study did not address the coherence of the story told to the children about their adoption, surely there was some effect.

In this case, Jeanette's adoption is not only closed, even she does not know about it until evidence of the adoption is found. Jeanette writes that, "I'd had an idea there was something curious about the circumstance of my birth, and once found my adoption papers" (100). Jeanette's mother waves away her concerns as "formalities" (100). Where had Jeanette formed this idea from? Where did the narrative of the adoption from the orphanage come from? Jeanette earlier claimed she accidentally found the papers while looking for a pack of playing cards. She claims that she never really thought about the adoption again until her birth mother turns up, but

[11] Fiese explains coherence as the following: "how the story is put together, the steps taken to present a unified whole, the degree to which the story makes sense, and the way in which the pieces of story match the affect of the storyteller" (8).

she's "never played cards since" (75). If Jeanette went so far as to go searching for something, perhaps she was subconsciously seeking out some explanation about the "curious circumstances" of her birth. Jeanette's mother makes no real effort to create a narrative about the adoption. Evidence of Jeanette's efforts to piece together a cohesive narrative about the adoption are scattered throughout the novel, especially in the fantasies.

In a fantasy-like sequence, Jeanette retells her own origin story through the eyes of her mother's conversion experience, but adds a mythic twist to it. Jeanette's mother, Louie, follows a star to an orphanage where she finds Jeanette, and she then proclaims "This child is mine from the Lord." "Not the jolt beneath the hip bone, but the water and the word" (10). In other words, Jeanette's mother claims that she has transcended biological birth[12] ("the jolt beneath the hip bone" or pelvis/womb) but Jeanette is somehow seen by Louie as being *manifested* through "the water and the word," symbols for the sacraments of holy water and the Bible. Jeanette's mother gains prestige and status in her church for the decision to adopt a child and to also stipulate that the child will become a missionary when it grows up. This eventual destiny of Jeanette's is a huge part of the way the family—and the family narrative—works.

Jeanette's family narrative is very protective—it largely focuses on how to deal with the outside world, how to maintain the status quo of the Church. At its heart, the reason Jeanette's mother doesn't want to go into the significance of the birth mother is because it would diminish her sacrifice, diminish the impact of the idea of the Lord as father. While Jeanette tells this story, we're not really sure if or when Jeanette was told a version of this story—how did she hear about the orphanage? Jeanette questions very little at the time, but portions of the novel seem to be one large question: Where did I come from? Jeanette goes to the very beginning of the story of how her family came to be, but SHE is the one piecing together the family narrative, versus being told all of this by her mother.

Jeanette may not have immediately understood the ramifications of her adoption, but some difference about her life immediately sinks in as she muses: "I cannot recall a time that I did not know I was special," (Winterson 3). In the section of her essay entitled "We Chose You,"

[12] Unlike Jeanette's mother, who shows no interest in bearing a biological child and is apparently fertile, the protagonist of Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry*, Dog Woman, wants to have a biological child, yet is essentially infertile due to her fantastically large body. "I would have liked to pour out a child from my body but you have to have a man for that and there's no man who's a match for me."

Songsuk Hahn delves into why she feels a story highlighting the adoptee as "special" can be damaging: "The genealogical 'specialness' and uniqueness that the child is supposed to enjoy only gives him a sense of the vast distance he has to travel across just to be regarded as 'normal'" (217). But what about a child who is not told she is adopted and finds out abruptly? What does that do to the continuous narrative of self and family we tell ourselves all the time?

The fantasies seem like an attempt to integrate such a major shift in how Jeanette looks at herself. Feeling "normal" is a problem for Jeanette; she detests going to school among people less familiar with her faith; her family is her world. Her adoption is an inherent part of her status as someone "chosen" to be a missionary, though there are no "you're special because you're adopted" passages in the novel. Jeanette is aware she's special; it is a key part of the narrative of her life. Jeanette's mother removes the cause of this "specialness" from the adoption, but the adoption, as the beginning of the story, is underlying it all.

Lyn Pykett explores the idea that "…Winterson's novels can be made to tell a different story; one in which some stories, or narrative modes are more real than others…Some stories are more true than others, and storytelling is (it would seem) more trustworthy, and also more vital, than history" (55). Jeanette reveals so much in the fantasies, the narrations, about her family. In the most involved fantasy, Winnet[13] undergoes a kind of reversal of what has happened to Jeanette….a sorcerer takes her into his castle, and she magically thought she had always been his daughter. It is highly significant that she soon forgets entirely where she came from. Jeanette's fantasies—on at least two separate occasions—feature an utter forgetting of the past at the hands of an adoptive figure. Margot Backus points out that

> Frequently adoptees' fantasies have a particular traumatic onset involving the withholding of information and the assertion of narrative power on the part of a parent… The first fantasy interlude pertains directly to Jeanette's adoption: [it] interrupts the story of Jeanette's mother's simultaneous decision to convert and adopt. (140)

The fantasy interlude is done as a fairy tale that talks about a "brilliant and beautiful princess" who is so sensitive she won't marry and can't settle down. The woman who makes this pronouncement is a sage (and in the "real" novel, a gypsy fortune teller also says Jeanette will

[13] Winnet's name is a mash up of Jeanette and Winterson as Chloe Taylor Merleau points out (92), further strengthening the connection between the fantasies and Jeanette's situation.

never marry). The sage in the story asks Jeanette to take over her position; when Jeanette does this, the sage thanks her and dies instantly (Winterson 9). The fairy tale, as Backus notes, turns Jeanette's adoption into her gaining admission into an enchanted realm where matriarchs have all the power; it claims her life before adoption was one where she simply couldn't fit comfortably or settle down (140).

Open adoption is not for everyone, but why is it necessary for Jeanette to "forget her former life" so completely? The conversion/adoption story itself is mythologized by Jeanette herself. The adoption is not part of the family narrative, merely a technicality to be brushed over by Louie. Jeanette has no idea about the significance of her adoption; she did not know what a "natural mother" was until the woman somewhat randomly showed up on her doorstep with the goal of taking Jeanette back (Winterson 101). As readers, we get information about this event secondhand; the reader does not hear what is said between Louie and the birth mother. Even Jeanette's summary of the event is brief and strained, going into a terrific argument Louie and Jeanette had afterwards and then simply saying they never spoke of it again (101). "As Winterson's novel illustrates, adoptees themselves inevitably become, like adoptive parents and the state, active participants within a traffic in children dedicated to the generation of self-protective narratives" (Backus 140).

Is the lack of speculation about the birth parents part of this self-protection in the novel? Even the language Jeanette uses to refer to the event—"that Awful Occasion"—sounds like the title of a short story, something not referred to as a family anecdote, or referred to ever again, something censored and nonspecific (Winterson 100). "That Awful Occasion" could be a fight or a family death or anything, really. The fantasies, however, are ripe with details and specificity. Jeanette tells her own story through the Winnet fantasy and changes the details. The details are more vivid and colorful than Jeanette's own life, but still reveal the pain of having basic information about her roots withheld. The birth mother, rather than earning a place within the stories of the family, is not even granted personhood or even considered a plot device; she is just a "carrying case," an object, not part of the story.

Winterson's work also features another adoptee who not only shows no interest in his biological family, he also appears to have little curiosity—or knowledge—about his adoptive mother's roots. In *Sexing the Cherry,* Jordan is an adoptee who lives in 16th century London; his

mother, nicknamed the Dog Woman because she breeds hounds, is a very physically large, imposing person, practically a giantess. Here Jordan muses on her background:

> I think she may have been found herself, long before she found me. I imagine her on the bank, in a bottle….[14]A woman coming by hears noises from the bottle, and taking her knife she cuts open the seal and my mother comes thickening out like a genie from a jar, growing bigger and bigger and finally solidifying into her own proportions. She grants the woman three wishes and throws the bottle out to sea, and now she has forgotten all that and sits with her dogs watching the tide (86).

It is intriguing to see a lack of concern not only about Jordan's biological family, but he has no knowledge of Dog Woman's past with her biological family. The bottle has no past; the bottle echoes the "carrying case" Louie relegates Jeanette's birth mother to. Jordan also fantasizes about Dog Woman forgetting her origins. Much of *Sexing the Cherry* features an intense inner fantastical journey that Jordan undergoes; it seems significant that Winterson pursues the adoptee with a rich fantasy life theme (yet fantasies without birth parents) in other works.

"Fantasies concerning Jeanette's birth mother are conspicuously absent from all of these episodes. The perfect (but not flawless) woman who tries to teach the idealistic prince the secret of perfect balance seems always to have inhabited her obscure corner of the kingdom….Winnet comes from nowhere" (Backus 141). There is, however, a brief mention of the grandmother's aduki bean stew, the tiniest glimmer of Winnet, in fact, having come from somewhere, though it is literally forgotten the moment she is adopted by the sorcerer who comes along—"She forgot how she had come there, or what she had done before. She believe[d] she had always been in the castle, and that she was the sorcerer's daughter. He told her she was. She had no mother, but had been specially entrusted to his care by a powerful spirit. Winnet felt this to be true, and besides, where else could she possibly wish to live?" (Winterson 145). In the Winnet fantasy, Winnet forgot she was not adopted, and never discovers that she wasn't, but adoption of some kind is addressed with deceit being part of the mix. While birth parents are absent in the Winnet fantasy, Jeanette's birth mother literally shows up on the doorstop one day to "take her back" (Winterson 101).

[14] Intriguingly, Angela Carter also has Mrs. Chance, the adoptive mother of Dora Chance in *Wise Children*, say she "came out of a bloody bottle, dearie, like a genie" (223). There seems to be a trend in adoptive parents erasing or minimizing their own pasts.

This appearance is practically fantasy in and of itself, this idea of the "real" mother sweeping in from the blue, a shared fantasy of biological and adopted children alike. "From the Lord" is abstract; a woman turning up from out of nowhere is the essence of flesh and blood and reality. The stories told to Jeanette by her mother were made suspect after the birth mother shows up; the family history has been falsely revised. Janet Carsten, an anthropologist who conducted a series of interviews with adoptees who sought out their birth parents, cites that memory AND stories are crucial to self-identity: "Antze and Lambek argue that who you are is linked to what you remember, to the stories you tell yourself about your past. They discuss not only memory as socially constituted in narratives, but also the constitution of self through remembering" (697). Jeanette tries to tell herself stories about her own past, especially through the Winnet fantasy, which encompasses everything from her adoption to the idea of the church as family.

If the sorcerer's castle is meant to represent the church—as seems obvious if we remember Louie's saying God entrusted Jeanette to her care just as a "powerful spirit"—we have yet another example of the church as the end all and be all of Jeanette's life. Winnet has responsibilities and a sense of self-worth in the castle and surrounding village. She had no real sense of direction before being adopted by the sorcerer. And she utterly forgets her life before being adopted—there is no record of the event in Winnet's memory; it does not register as a fact. "The glaring absence of origins in the novel's fairy-tale representations of adoption suggests that the fictional Jeanette (and perhaps Winterson herself, who "never traced her genetic parents") derives the gift of vision from the same fertile absence that empowers her mother: the suppression of Jeanette's biological origins" (Backus 141). Backus seems to be saying that a potential loss of information Jeanette has about her has been rechanneled into the very source of these fantasy interludes, which, at times, take cues from the plot structure and language of fairy tales (the Winnet tale begins with "A long time ago" [Winterson 141]). Fairy tales often feature problematized adoptions—stepparents are rarely satisfied with their stepchildren; ducks turn out to be swans; there is a whole host of foundlings whose biological parents are the source of either exaltation or disaster. Susana Onega notes that "some episodes in Jeanette's life story have a distinctive fairy tale flavor" and goes on to note that Jeanette loves Louie so powerfully—and unquestioningly—just as fairy tale heroines love. She also points out that Louie treats Jeanette as cruelly as a fairy tale stepmother does, particularly when Louie abandons Jeanette alone for days in the hospital (20).

But Jeanette's fairy tale "visions" do not dwell on where the various characters came from; the adoptive parents benefit from their new family members, at least until the child rebels or leaves. One mythic figure who leaves is Perceval, who is seeking the Holy Grail. His appearance in the fantasy portion of the novel links back to a common theme in Winterson's writing, "the archetypical quest" from Mort D'Arthur (Onega 4). One "typical" quest could be the search for the birth parents, yet two of the fantasy elements involve Perceval and Winnet actually leaving two adoptive parental figures. No emphasis is placed on finding "real" parental figures; rather, the Perceval and Winnet fantasies deal with Jeanette's struggle to find an identity outside of the church.

These powerful, and at times, empowering fantasy counter-narratives illustrate a major link between postmodernism and the storytelling that is often found within it. Their metafictional aspects shock the reader into examining the border between the "fantasy" and "real" portions woven throughout the novel; they take the reader into a realm of villains and heroes they only think they know. Jeanette's story is peppered with vivid fantasy sequences; the relationship with her mother is explored during the majority of them. The fascinating portions of the novel where artifacts from the fantasies pop up as symbols in the more traditional scenes of the novel only reinforce their power and purpose of trying to make sense of the story of her family, adoption and all. Onega addresses the issue of fantasies within Winterson's work:

> In these novels, as in…*Oranges are Not the Only Fruit*…the characters fight for the integration of their fragmented selves in a labyrinthine world of mythical overtones that suddenly metamorphoses into a literary text. We then realize that they have been weaving themselves into existence within the fictional walls of their own novel, acting as narrator, author and even reader of their own subjective versions of 'world' history (17).

Just as Onega alludes, several of the fantasies have ties-ins to the more "realistic" parts of the novel. "Sir Perceval curses himself for ever leaving the Round Table, leaving the king, and leaving the king's sorrowing face" (Winterson 166). Later that night, Perceval dreams of the Holy Grail "covered in white samite" (166). Jeanette writes of "servants of God" and how servants are "betrayers" and writes "If the servants hadn't parted us, I might have been disappointed, might have snatched off the white samite to find a bowl of soup" (170). A number of different interpretations for the Holy Grail have been proposed, ranging from a romantic

lesbian relationship to Jeanette's "desire to stay within the church and be accepted," but the clear collapse of the Perceval character into Jeanette is what stands out so clearly (Cosslett 43, Meyer 51). The Perceval and Winnet myths both use thread imagery, with Perceval likening himself to a bobbin wound with thread and "want[ing] to give in to the pull and wake up round familiar things" (Winterson 174). Christy L. Burns notes that "Fantasy, in Winterson's works, is not an experience that leaves a reader content, but one that fuels desire, denies catharsis, and propels readers back out into their contexts" (302). The ending certainly represents this lack of catharsis where Jeanette reflects that "real" families "are chairs and tables and the right number of cups…I had no means of joining [a real family], and no means of dismissing my own; she had tied a thread around my button, to tug when she pleased" (Winterson 176) This passage directly links us back to the portion of the Winnet fantasy where "The raven, struck dumb, could not warn her that her father had crept in, in the shape of a mouse, and was tying an invisible thread around one of her buttons" (148). Cosslett discusses how Perceval's thread, unlike Jeanette's, can be broken, but the connection between the fantasy and reality shows how reflective the fantasies are of Jeanette's story.

Another fantasy portion of the novel features Winnet. Winnet is incredibly alarmed when the sorcerer in the fantasy, a cipher for Jeanette's mother, appears to know her name, for "Naming meant power" (142). During the conclusion of the book, Jeanette notes that "Naming is a difficult and time-consuming process; it concerns essences, and it means power" (170). If the sorcerer did know her name, it would apparently give him instant power over Winnet. It is later revealed that he is bluffing and was simply guessing her name, but the name issue immediately invokes one caveat of closed adoptions: the original birth certificate that is created with one or both of the birth parents' names and the baby's original name. When a child is legally adopted, he or she traditionally takes on the surname of their adoptive family, and adopted infants are usually given a first, middle, and last name by their adoptive parents. Naming [15]is more than just

[15] Winterson also alludes to the power of naming in her novel *Sexing the Cherry.* In *Sexing the Cherry,* Dog Woman finds Jordan as a baby in a river. Jordan knows that he has been found but neither he nor Dog Woman ever ponder his birth family. Intriguingly, Dog Woman grants greater significance to the river in which she found him than his absent birth parents: "I should have named him after a stagnant pond and then I could have kept him, but I named him after a river and he…slipped away" (*S C* 3–4). Jordan is aware of his past. Like Jeanette, he also shows no interest in finding his biological parents. Unlike with Jeanette's mother, there does not seem to be a forbidding lack of discussion of the past, at least as it relates to adoption.

a symbolic means of a child joining a family; it has the power to make a child immediately and legally recognizable as part of a family. These tie-ins strengthen the argument that the fantasies are a way for Jeanette to attempt to make sense of her family situation; the symbols are just as potent in the "real" sections of the novel as the fantasies.

Carsten addresses "…the role of the ethnographer who listens to these narratives [of reunions with birth families]. It seems clear that both telling these stories and having them listened to is constitutive of the process of rearranging the past to assert one's creative control over events shaped by others" (698). This statement reinforces the idea that the fantasies are a form of control—a way of rewriting the narrative about Jeanette's family and how it functions, a narrative that has been disrupted when Jeanette learned for certain she was not biologically related to Louie and Jack. What role does the *reader* play? Could Carsten's observations also apply to the process of writing something that is intended for a reader—particularly in a text with elements of metafiction? While the reader is passive and does not ask questions, the very act of imagining an audience for a work, a semi-autobiographical work at that, must have stirred up fundamental questions for the author. If an ethnographer provides a way for an adoptee to tell the story of their adoption, the reader must play at least some role for the author when he or she is retelling the story of their adoption, especially in a work of metafiction where reality and fantasy are blurred. While everyone is brought here through some twist of genetic fate, awareness of the conscious, intentional element associated with child rearing is heightened with adoption. The fantasies that deal with the way the family came to be are stories Jeanette tells to us, to herself, to make sense of the past, more importantly, *her* past, which is heavily dependent on what Louie tells her.

Jeanette's mother, from the very first page of the book, is seen as dividing the world into the heathen and the holy. Jeanette's birth mother seems to represent the very embodiment of "the heathen"—Jeanette even notes, without having any sense of who the woman was, that she was shocked she was allowed in the house because her mother "didn't like having the Heathen in the house—'leaves a bad atmosphere'" (Winterson 100). Louie demands an acceptance of her world completely; it's all or nothing, and the birth mother is part of the great void outside the church, something not to be considered. The birth mother is absolutely not part of the family narrative.

Jeanette, at first, lives and dies by the simple, black-and-white rules her mother has established. As Fiese emphasizes, "Family narratives move beyond the individual and deal with

how the family makes sense of its world, expresses rules of interaction, and creates beliefs about relationships" (3). The part of the family narrative about how the family deals with the outside world is reinscribed in her consciousness over and over again, but the issues of adoption and the genesis of families are left alone. Jeanette struggles with this concept not only as an adoptee, but also when she deals with her disinterest in men (she later discovers she is a lesbian, and upon being told she can pursue this lifestyle or the Church, she chooses the former and becomes estranged from her family).

Fantasy interludes serve as a symbol of Jeanette's voluntary exile as well. Perceval is an "adopted" figure in a way, too, seeing King Arthur as a father and the Round Table as a mirror of the church family Jeanette clung to for much of her life. Later, Perceval becomes outright delirious and wants nothing more than to return to the idyllic time of the Round Table. Just as Perceval finds no meaning outside of his quest for the Grail, Jeanette cannot fathom a life or a family outside of the Church initially. While her pastor and mother are trying to "exorcize" her demons, an actual demon appears to her during a feverish daze. The demon gives her a choice—and a pebble. Winnet, too, is given a pebble and the advice that "You will find yourself destroyed by grief. All you know will be around you, and at the same time far from you" (Winterson 147). For a time, everything is the same but different when Jeanette discovers she is adopted, but that time is shut down, suspended for a few minutes in one haunting afternoon, only to resurface in fantasies. As Backus writes, "The novel's fantasy sequences correspond to research showing that adoptees frequently have recourse to fantasy as a means of making sense of their unspeakable and incomprehensible situation" (140). Jeanette is literally not allowed to "speak" about her birth mother or adoption; her mother shuts down all dialogue immediately. Jeanette is also denied any tools to understand or prepare herself for the encounter with her birth mother.

Winterson's novel delves into contemplations of the past and the power of history—particularly how easy it is for certain versions of history to triumph, just as Louie so neatly erases the birth mother. "The Renaissance historiographers defined history as an empirical search for truth; the historian could speak only of what HAD happened, while the poet spoke of what could or might happen according to the laws of probability and possibility, not truth" (Onega 9). Jeanette and her mother can only speak of what had happened as it pertains to the birth mother; there is no "what if I had spoken to her" moment that is imagined. Winterson imagines what

might have happened if she stayed home instead of being exiled from the church for loving women—but there is nothing imagined about the birth mother.

The fantasy elements in *Oranges* show us several ways in which Louie's decision to take over guardianship not only of Jeanette, but her history, has affected her. "Historiographic metafiction reminds us self-consciously that, while events did occur in the real empirical past, we name and constitute those events as historical facts by selection and narrative positioning" (97). Jeanette—and Louie—give the birth mother almost no position in the narrative, even in the fantasies.

Hutcheon writes that "historiographic metafictions appear to privilege two modes of narration, both of which problematize the entire notion of subjectivity: multiple points of view…or an overtly controlling narrator…." (117). One could even argue that Winterson has both: the book has segments where Jeanette is absolutely in control of the narrative, but then it segues frequently into fantasy episodes. "In neither, however, do we find a subject confident of his/her ability to know the past with any certainty" (117). At first, Jeanette is absolutely certain of…everything, through her confidence in her mother. As the book progresses, Jeanette learns to question the past and to question her mother's position at the main source of truth, including the past. "Jeanette's process of maturation and self-definition…involves the rejection of her mother's and of other people's totalizing and absolutist categories of truth and falsehood, of good and evil…Jeanette makes the tantalizing discovery that her mother's absolute truths were in fact subjective and relative" (Onega 146). This statement appears to tie in with Paulina Palmer's observation that "The fantasy episodes of *Oranges*…are an integral part of the novel and perform a number of important functions. The interplay of narratives which they create highlight the part which fantasy plays in construction of the adolescent psyche…." (30). Jeanette is at least attempting to test her boundaries and analyze her mother's black-and-white viewpoint during some of these fantasy segments in the novel, though the fantasy interludes reveal the amount of power Louie still has—Perceval never returns home, despite his desire for "the pull of familiar things" (Winterson 174). Winnet Stonejar's myth focuses on how difficult it was to leave home and how empty it would be if she returned.

When Jeanette visits her estranged mother over Christmas, she muses on identity.

> My mother was treating me like she always had; had she noticed my absence? Did she even remember why I'd left? I have a theory that every time you make an

> important choice, the part of you left behind continues the other life you could have had…There's a chance I'm not here at all, that all the parts of me, running along the choices I did and didn't make, for a moment brush against each other. That I am still an evangelist in the North, as well as the person who ran away. Perhaps for a while these two selves have become confused. I have not gone forward or backward in time, but across time, to something I might have been, playing itself out (169).

But what about choices others have made for you? This idea is only so fleetingly glimpsed at; the novel doesn't pause to take into account the afternoon when the birth mother is turned away. Jeanette is also clearly bothered that her mother does not acknowledge her absence. Carsten also seeks to prove that one of the main ways in which kinship is built between biological AND adoptive kin is "…the more everyday…work of kinship" (700). After their estrangement, one presumes that many of these everyday rituals of kinship had been disrupted, which seems to make it all the more confusing when Louie accepts Jeanette back into the family home as a visitor with little fuss.

Carsten interviewed many adoptees who sought out reunions with their birth parents. The results were surprising to her; while many participants were satisfied to find out "where they came from" most did not wish to form a closer relationship with their birth parents. She notes the lack of a daily narrative that makes things like Christmas and birthday cards *meaningful*. Yet what seems meaningful is the urgency and significance many people give to knowing their origins—as Homans points out, western cultures have a habit of "equat[ing] biological origins with identity" (5). Jeanette finds out what it MEANS that she is adopted—that she came from another parent—and that her birth mother has been denied access to her in the same afternoon.

Many adoptees have fantasies about their birth parents and feel genetic ties represent a crucial part of their identity. Many adoptees do not. Jeanette is initially so secure in her adoptive family, so secure in the identity already carved out for her, that there is little room for speculation about her birth parents. What seems most upsetting is that the rewriting of Jeanette's identity is allowed, in part, because of the fact that she was adopted, in part, as a way of gaining prestige for Louie. So many of the fantasy sequences are about Louie, and several of them allude directly or indirectly to adoptive parental figures or adoption itself. Is Jeanette regaining some of the control that was taken from her when her origins were never explained through the

alternative narrative format of the fantasies? The quest for an identity that seems to dominate most of the fantasy sequences also seems to reflect her desire to discover who she is once her position within her family has been disrupted.

Ellen Herman notes:

> In their eagerness to reduce the stigma and increase the authenticity of kinship made socially, many participants in modern adoption held that institution up to the mirror of biogenetic nature, denying what is surely the most obvious thing about adoption: it is a different way to make a family. The matching paradigm stipulated that parents who acquired children born to others should look, feel, and behave as if they had conceived those children themselves (340).

Louie does this, with one key exception. She tries to situate Jeanette as someone who comes from the Lord, whose whole life is going to be dedicated to the Lord. Louie goes to the other extreme and seems to lose sight of what the "family" is, preferring to view Jeanette as a participant "in a tag match against the Rest of the World" (Winterson 3) more so than a child. Jeanette struggles with forging an identity that is separate from being a good participant of the Church; the Winnet fantasy also reflects her struggle.

Winnet, after fleeing her father's domain, seeks out a new city. "In a place where truth mattered, no one would betray her" (158). Perhaps the "truth" Jeanette seeks out is refuge from a double blow: if she can no longer participate fully in the family into which she was adopted, why is she there at all? Who is she at all? It is curious that both of the fantasy sequences that take place after she voluntarily leaves the church feature adoptive figures. The close of the novel is fraught with concerns about truly being part of a family and pondering what a family is. Jeanette uses the fantasies largely as a coping mechanism, to deal with the unrealistic expectations she's had to face as a result of being adopted with a purpose, to deal with the pain and stress of losing her family.

Jeanette tells herself stories; she takes narrative structure from other sources and reinvents them. Jeanette does this, in part, one senses, as a way of echoing her own story; the closest thing she gets is being told the church was built because "we had to have something for you". She is reforming and retelling a story to herself about where she came from, filling in gaps, making the story her own, but with a mixed bag for a happy ending. Her adoption colored her mother's motives for making her part of the family; Jeanette must strive to find an identity

outside of the Church. The fantasies that are woven throughout the novel only build upon the seriousness of this problem. The fantasies intersect with the more conventionally written portions of the narrative in ways that underscore just how significant their inclusion is; they represent Jeanette's attempts to make a cohesive narrative about herself and her family. It is not an easy task, especially since knowledge of her adoption altered her view of herself and her place in the family when she understood the human element behind her adoption—the birth mother. The fantasies show the great lengths Jeanette must go to to revise her identity and at least attempt to have an origin story that breaks from the one her mother told her.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Adoption studies is reaching out to take a broader view of adoption as it relates to narrative theory. Families are being studied in terms of narrative theory; fiction and nonfictional adoption stories are read through the same lens. This thesis highlights the tension that arises when adoption narratives favor one interpretation of origins over another, the adoptive family vs. the biological family.

Dora thinks her origin story starts with her biological parents, and it bothers her that she doesn't know the circumstances under which she was conceived (Carter 24). This thesis examines different ways in which biological family members can be given greater significance than adoptive family members by society; not only is there the matter of personal origins, there is the every day matter of physical appearance. Dora takes great pride in what physical characteristics she can immediately ascribe to her biological father, but is equally, if not more so, regretful she has not inherited her uncle's red hair, a trait that, in her eyes, would immediately make her relationship to the family clear. Charlotte Witt writes that

> "Family resemblances…seem to be properties that are both genetic and ingredients in a person's self-understanding; hence, they seem to resurrect the claim of genetic essentialism [the idea that someone's identity is determined by their genetic background] and with it to support the superiority of biological families" (Charlotte Witt 137, 141).

Dora honors and love her adoptive family members, but her "grandmother" and uncle reinforce this biological ideal of family. She also can't pinpoint the origins/past of her adoptive family members, much to her frustration, as well as documenting the history of her biological family. As Margaret Homans writes, "Adoption narratives are often obsessively oriented towards an irretrievable past" (7), something Dora seems to cling to as she collects memorabilia of her "real," biological grandmother and other relatives. Jeanette, on the other hand, is told by her adoptive mother that she cannot access the past; she is denied access to her birth mother and even photo albums are altered, causing Jeanette to reflect on how purely malleable and uncertain the past is, an uncertainty Linda Hutcheon points out with her theory differentiating between "facts" (the actual thing that happened) and "events" (what historians say happened) (73).

Both texts have a lot to say about adoption and how it is turned from an event to a fact. Both texts take different meanings from this event, which is only appropriate, given how the meaning of adoption, aside from the obvious one of it being a way to build a family, changes from day to day, with an emphasis ranging over the years from its "unnaturalness" to a way to "rescue" children to public outcry for all adoptions being open. *Wise Children* admits that adoption can be a way to build a family, but that biological relatives, biological birth, is more important. *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* dismisses the biological relatives almost entirely, even when Jeanette's birth mother physically shows up—something that is a common fantasy among adopted and non-adopted children alike, the idea that your "real" parents will show up to claim you. This literally happens, and yet Louie controls this occurrence just as she controls Jeanette's understanding of what family is. Jeanette's distrust of history reflects this idea that history, and origins, are unknowable.

The societal ideal of biological family members as being the only way families should be formed is very powerful. Is it so powerful that it must be completely eliminated in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, for fear of disrupting the way the family is structured around the church? So powerful the birth mother must be bowdlerized even from fantasies in a text that explores various alternate histories?

Wise Children gives in to the power of this idea; Dora is preoccupied with her genetic roots to the extent that she can only question this preoccupation once her biological father, Melchior, accepts her. Dora views herself as being "illegitimate" because she was born out of wedlock. She cites marriage, a key component of the ideal family, as being one way to erase the stigma of illegitimacy, but does not dismiss it as a concept that applies to her.

Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit spends an equal amount of time fighting the ideal family, to the extent that there is no room for the biological side. Unlike in *Wise Children*, which focused on family resemblance as a significant and longed-for aspect of the biological family, there is next to no physicality in *Oranges*. Neither Louie nor Jeanette's appearance is described, apart from Jeanette's curly hair. Even Louie's biological relatives are dismissed out of hand. Unlike the Who's Who in *Wise Children*, which has Dora mentioning her own last name and the Hazard name very frequently, Jeanette's last name is only mentioned once. Louie has almost entirely decided the definition of family, and it only has room for the church. Louie claims Jeanette is "from the Lord" (Winterson 100) and feels that biology, especially in the form of the

birth mother, has no place in her family. To admit otherwise would be to abandon the strict tenets of the religion she has embraced—and made part of the family ISA.

Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit also uses fantasy to explore the idea of a family narrative; it lets us glimpse the idea that the family, and how it came to be, is a narrative itself. Louie clearly thinks that only the adoptive family matters, and even the fantasies of Jeanette reflect this idea. The story of where she comes from and how she came to be part of the family—her origin story—are very heavily edited, and this editing is still present in the fantasies, such as when Winnet (whose name is a combination of Winterson and Jeanette) simply forgets she is adopted.

Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit and *Wise Children* are excellent examples of two different perspectives about adoption. Both of them are concerned with origins; both of them question what is history and fact, and where one's personal stake is in all of it. Jeanette pushes away the idea of biological family; Dora embraces it. Each has a side on a tug of war against an individual definition of family; each shows a different perspective of the tension that builds when one definition of family is favored over another.

REFERENCES

Althusser, Louis. “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)”. Web. 10 Nov. 2008. <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1970/ideology.htm>.

Backus, Margot Gayle. “I Am Your Mother; She Was a Carrying Case.” *Imagining Adoption: Essays on Literature and Culture*. Ed. Marianne Novy. Ann Arbor, MI: U of Michigan P, 2004.

Brinks, Ellen and Talley, Lee. “Unfamiliar Ties: Lesbian Constructions of Home and Family in Jeanette Winterson’s *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* and Jewel Gomez’s *The Gilda Stories*.” *Homemaking: Women Writers and the Politics and Poetics of Home*. Ed. Catherine Wiley and Fiona R. Barnes. New York: Garland, 1996.

Burns, Christy L. “Fantastic Language.” *Contemporary Literature* 37 (1996): 278–306.

Carlson, Katheryn Blaze. **“**Baby by stealth: Reproduction law forcing ‘dangerous alternatives. ’” Web. 16 March 2010. <http://www.nationalpost.com/m/story.html?id=2677573&s=home>.

Carsten, Janet. “‘Knowing Where You’ve Come From’: Ruptures and Continuities of Time and Kinship in Narratives of Adoption Reunions.” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute.* 6.4 (Dec., 2000): 687–703. *JSTOR.* 09 March 2009. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2661037>.

Carter, Angela. *Wise Children*. New York: Penguin Books, 1991.

Cosslett, Tess. *The Novels of Jeanette Winterson.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. “*Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985) as a Postmodern Text.” Ed. Nicolas Tredell.

Fiese, Barbara, and Sameroff, Arnold T. “The Stories That Families Tell: Narrative Coherence, Narrative Interaction, and Relationship Beliefs.” *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development.* 64.2 (1999): 1–36. *JSTOR.* 31 March 2009. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3181518>.

Greenfield, Craig. *The Urban Halo.* London: Authentic Media, 2007.

Hahn, Songsuk. “Accidents and Contingencies of Love.” *Adoption Matters: Philosophical and Feminist Essays*. Ed. Sally Haslanger and Charlotte Witt. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2005.

Herman, Ellen. “The Paradoxical Rationalization of Modern Adoption.” *Journal of Social History.* 35.2 (Winter, 2009): 339–385. *JSTOR.* 10 March 2009. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3790114>.

Homans, Margaret. “Adoption Narratives, Trauma, and Origins,” *Narrative* 14:1. (Jan. 2006): 4–26.

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

Lee, Allison. *Angela Carter.* New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997.

Leonard, Garry. "The Immaculate Deception: Adoption in Albee's Plays." *Imagining Adoption: Essays on Literature and Culture*. Ed. Marianne Novy. Ann Arbor, MI: U of Michigan P, 2004.

Makinen, Merja. *The Novels of Jeanette Winterson.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. "*Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985) as a Postmodern Text." Ed. Nicolas Tredell.

Merleau, Chloe Taylor. "Postmodern Ethics and the Expression of Differends in the Novels of Jeanette Winterson." *Journal of Modern Literature*. 26.3/4. (Summer, 2003): 84–102. *Project Muse.* 12 March 2009. Web. <http://muse.jhu.edu/login?uri=/journals/journal_of_modern_literature/v026/26.3merleau.html>

Morgan, Patricia. *Adoption and the Care of Children: The British and American Experience.* West Sussex, Great Britain: Hartington Fine Arts, Ltd., (1998).

Myer, Kim Middleton. *The Novels of Jeanette Winterson.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. "*Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985) as a Postmodern Text." Ed. Nicolas Tredell.

Onega, Susana. "'I'm Telling You Stories. Trust Me': History/Story-Telling in Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit.*" *Telling Histories: Narrativizing History, Historicizing Literature.* Ed. Susana Onega. Amsterdam, Atlanta: Rodopi, 1995. 135-147.

Onega, Susana. *Jeanette Winterson.* New York: Manchester UP, 2006.

Pykett, Lyn. "A New Way With Words?: Jeanette Winterson's Post-Modernism." *"I'm telling you stories": Jeanette Winterson and the Politics of Reading.* Ed. Tim Woods and Helena Grice, Amsterdam, Atlanta: Rodopi, 1998.

Roessner, Jeffrey. "Writing a History of Difference: Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* and Angela Carter's *Wise Children*." *College Literature*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Winter, 2002): 102–122.

Smith, Janet Farrell. "A Child of One's Own: Property, Progeny, and Adoption." *Adoption Matters: Philosophical and Feminist Essays*. Ed. Sally Haslanger and Charlotte Witt. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2005.

Winterson, Jeanette. *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. New York: Grove Press, 1985.

Winterson, Jeanette. *Sexing the Cherry.* New York: Vintage House, 1989.

Witt, Charlotte. "Family Resemblances: Adoption, Personal Identity, and Genetic Essentialism." *Philosophical and Feminist Essays*. Ed. Sally Haslanger and Charlotte Witt. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2005.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Mariann Grantham was born in Florence, South Carolina, and received her B.A. at the University of South Carolina in 2003 where she majored in English. She received her Masters in English Literature from Florida State University in 2010. In addition to British literature and adoption studies, her interests include creative writing and adolescent literature.