

HOUSING SEXUALITY
DOMESTIC SPACE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF FEMALE SEXUALITY IN THE
FICTION OF ANGELA CARTER AND JEANETTE WINTERSON

A Dissertation

by

SAMANTHA E. CANTRELL

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2004

Major Subject: English

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ABSTRACT

Housing Sexuality

Domestic Space and the Development of Female Sexuality in the Fiction of Angela Carter and Jeanette Winterson. (May 2004)

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A repeated theme in the fiction of Angela Carter and Jeanette Winterson is the use of domestic space as a tool for defining socially acceptable versions of female sexuality. Four novels that crystallize this theme are the focus of this dissertation: Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985) and *Art and Lies* (1994) and Carter's *The Magic Toyshop* (1967) and *Nights at the Circus* (1984). Each chapter examines both authors' treatments of a specific room in the house.

Chapter II, "Parlor Games: Spatial Literacy in Formal Rooms," discusses how rooms used for formal occasions project a desirable public image of a family. More insidiously, however, the rooms protect the sexual order of the household, which often privileges male sexuality. Using the term

spatial literacy to describe how characters interpret rooms, the chapter argues that characters with a high spatial literacy can detect not only the overt messages of these formal rooms, but also what underlies those messages.

Chapter III, "Making Meals, Breaking Deals: Mothers, Daughters, and Kitchens," discusses the kitchen as the site of the production of domestic comfort. An analysis of who has primary responsibility for the production of comfort and whose comfort is privileged often reveals the power hierarchy of a given household. The chapter also examines the kitchen as a volatile space that can erupt with violence and the expression of repressed emotions and repressed sexuality. Finally, the kitchen is analyzed as a space of intimacy between mothers and daughters.

Chapter IV, "Bedtime Stories: Assaulting Sexuality in the Bedroom," argues that the privacy of the adolescent bedroom is often disrupted by the surveillance of family members trying to control the sexual identity of the room's occupant. The chapter also examines how social prescriptions encourage women to tolerate the interruption of their privacy.

Each of the protagonists from these four novels has opportunities to learn about subverting the discursive constructions of domestic space, and several characters enact that subversion. This ability for subversion suggests the possibility for agency, a possibility that postmodernist thought often rejects, but one that Carter and Winterson allow.

This dissertation is dedicated to
Angela Carter (1940-1992)

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Sexuality . . . is never expressed in a vacuum. (Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman* 11)

In *Art and Lies*, Jeanette Winterson's protagonist Picasso is a young woman ready to leave home and make her way on her own, but her transition into adulthood is complicated by the emotional and physical abuse that she has suffered at the hands of her family. Her brother habitually rapes her, her father once pushed her out of the attic and then called it a suicide attempt, and her mother manipulates her by expressing her disappointment in Picasso's unfeminine ways. As Picasso begins the emotional work of recovering from this abuse, Winterson describes her as climbing stairs: "She climbed the stairs. She hated her brother. She climbed the stairs. She loved her mother. She climbed the stairs" (43). Winterson's refrain for Picasso, this image of climbing, works both literally and metaphorically. Literally, Picasso climbs stairs in times of crisis. Trying to make sense of her life, she ascends to the attic and crawls through the

This dissertation follows the style and format of *The MLA Style Manual*.

parapet onto the roof. Metaphorically, the stairs serve as an emotional exercise by helping her to reconsider the spaces of her house. On one particular landing, for example, she visualizes the room where she was raped as sealed and her staircase as changing direction. Winterson's poetic rhythm in this passage depicts Picasso's emotional journey, her climbing of the stairs, as plodding and methodical; her mental battle is a strenuous, repeated pattern of thought, an exercise she must nonetheless undertake in order to deal with the abuse she suffers. By imagining herself on staircases and landings, Picasso locates herself in the passageways of the house instead of in a specific room. Her destiny, the attic, can be read as a marginalized space: in domestic terms, the attic is the room where unused items gather dust.

Stairways, landings, and the attic, all envisioned by Picasso as the margins of domestic space, are important to her because the individual rooms of her house prove treacherous for her. The parlor consolidates an image of the family's wealth and gentility, which requires that the abuse Picasso suffers, as well as the fact that she is her father's illegitimate child, be hidden. Her mother uses the kitchen to remind Picasso of the sacrifices she has made for her and

to accuse her of being heartless. The bedroom that Picasso shares with her older brother allows him to rape her on a regular basis. Because the individual rooms of her house are organized so effectively against her, it is not surprising that she tries to picture herself outside of them. From that vantage point, she not only gains some perspective on the rooms, but also a temporary, albeit imaginary, reprieve from the spaces that define her according to someone else's concept of her. By depicting Picasso's ability to find new physical and psychological vantage points, Winterson encourages her readers also to consider domestic space from new perspectives. Winterson wants readers to pay closer attention to the ways that domestic space bolsters the roles each family member is assigned to play. If everyone in the family adheres to the agenda promoted by the rooms of the house, a status quo is established, and the power hierarchy is evident.

Winterson depicts domestic space in this novel as encoded with the sexual hierarchy of the family: male sexual privilege is protected by the house itself. By illustrating how domestic space is used to channel sexuality into socially accepted modes of expression, Winterson establishes an

important theme that is also evident in the fiction of Angela Carter. Both of these authors argue that domestic space is a critically important tool for the sexual scripting of social behavior, and both are particularly interested in the ways those scripts affect young women in the process of shaping their sexual identities. Their interest in domestic space and its relationship to sexuality is a repeated theme in their fiction and therefore deserves closer examination.

Accordingly, four novels that crystallize these thematic concerns serve as the focus of this dissertation: Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985) and *Art and Lies* (1994) and Carter's *The Magic Toyshop* (1967) and *Nights at the Circus* (1984). I chose these four texts because they share a number of characteristics in common. In each of these novels, the author is specifically interested in how female sexuality is shaped. As a part of their accounts of the development of their protagonists' sexualities, Carter and Winterson include depictions of their protagonists' childhoods; moreover each of the novels can be read as the sexual coming-of-age story of a young woman. All four novels pay extensive attention to domestic space, particularly as it is experienced by young female protagonists. Since houses

figure so predominantly in these novels, it is important to examine how the authors are treating domestic space. In each of these novels, the juxtaposition of a focus on domestic space and a focus on the development of sexuality is striking and calls for extended analysis.

In each of the first three novels (*Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, *Art and Lies*, and *The Magic Toyshop*), there is a protagonist who is just entering adulthood by the end of the novel, while the protagonist of the fourth novel (*Nights at the Circus*) is already a grown woman at the novel's opening. Nonetheless, her inseparability from her foster mother, who travels with her and advises her, suggests a certain emotional immaturity. All four protagonists are in the process of forming or re-shaping their sexualities during the course of the novels, and Carter and Winterson examine how domestic space functions in that process. More often than not, domestic space complicates these characters' attempts to define themselves sexually because rooms are set up to protect the sexual order of the household. That order often requires the containment of female sexuality, especially the sexuality of adolescent women. Nonetheless, those very complications often equip the characters with experience and

knowledge that better prepare them for the world outside their homes.

An analysis of the relationships between domestic space and the development of female sexuality offers several advantages to a study of Carter and Winterson. For one, it emphasizes the authors' abiding interest in the material circumstances of peoples' lives. Through their depictions of individual rooms, these authors illustrate the extraordinary amount of energy that is invested in controlling young women's bodies, in part by controlling the material spaces they occupy. Analyzing domestic space also allows for a focus on the family as a microcosm of social behavior: an examination of both the mother's and the daughter's sexualities reveals how social strictures apply across generations. Finally, domestic space represents one of the primary spaces used to house sexuality. That is, the house is an important context for sexuality, one which can be thoroughly analyzed because it is a finite space. Once complete, that analysis can serve as a model for examining other material contexts that inflect sexuality. If, as Carter insists, "Sexuality . . . never takes place in a vacuum" (*The Sadeian Woman* 11), then context is considerably

important to an understanding of sexuality. Domestic space offers a starting point for such an understanding.

Reading Carter and Winterson together makes sense because they echo one another's themes. Throughout their writing, Carter and Winterson have consistently shown an interest in sexuality, particularly female sexuality, and the socio-cultural forces that shape it. Their characters investigate the social dictates that circumscribe their lives. The question these characters seek to answer, as one of Winterson's characters puts it, is "How shall I live?" (*Art and Lies* 23). For young women who are first beginning to take an interest in their sexual identities, this question is particularly difficult to answer. For Carter's and Winterson's young characters, the question implies not only what shape their lives will take, but also their ability to survive in a world all too often organized against them, a world where many social dictates are designed to contain their sexuality in order to protect the social hierarchy. While they are still living at home, these characters face enormous pressure to conform to household rules designed to define their sexualities according to social prescriptions.

Through their fiction, Carter and Winterson ask many of the same questions about women and sexuality, and often they even arrive at similar answers. They share a common interest in women's material lives, although both authors also blend surrealist and fantastic elements with their materialism. Both authors can be categorized as feminists and postmodernists, although, as we shall see, the significance of those labels can be debated. The label of postmodernism, often applied to the fiction of both authors, derives from a number of elements evident in their writing, including their commitment to telling the stories of people who are marginalized, their questioning of the ways history is written and interpreted, the metatextual elements of their writing, their use of fantastic elements within realist narratives, and the ways they leave their texts open to the play of meaning. Of course, for all their similarities, these writers are not identical. Because their thematic conclusions can vary from one another as well, this suggests another reason they should be read together. When they do not echo one another, they round each other out through complementary themes.

Angela Carter, who began her writing career with the publication of *Shadow Dance* in 1966, was prolific during her lifetime. Before her death in 1992, she completed nine novels, three collections of short stories, a non-fiction study of the pornography of the Marquis de Sade, as well as numerous essays and several scripts for radio plays. She also edited a collection of short stories by women writers and two collections of fairy and folk tales. Particularly on the topic of women and their experiences of the world, her earlier work is characterized by darker themes than her later work. Women in her earlier novels often face manipulation and imminent destruction by powerful male figures. Beginning with *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), however, there is a turning point in her work, characterized by more celebratory moments when women are able to overcome their oppressors. Her last two novels, *Nights at the Circus* (1984) and *Wise Children* (1991), represent female characters with greater awareness of the forces designed to oppress them and consequently more power over their own destinies. Carter has received escalating critical attention, which is particularly noticeable in the proliferation of articles and books published about her writing in the years since her death.

Although most critics are interested in Carter's feminist themes and her ideas about women, their gender identities, and the socio-cultural forces that shape their lives, a few critics have questioned the effectiveness of her feminism, from accusations that some of her writing simply reproduces male oppressive regimes to objections that her fictional and non-fictional treatments of pornography cannot be reconciled with a feminist agenda.¹ A number of critics, however, see Carter's controversy as another one of her strengths. By keeping her audience unsettled, she refuses closure and keeps readers questioning her ideas as well as their own.

Jeanette Winterson, who is still writing, began her career in 1985 with the publication of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, which has been followed by seven other novels, a collection of short stories, and a book-length essay on art

¹ Examples of these concerns include articles written by Robert Clark, Patricia Duncker, and Avis Lewallen. Clark posits that readers who are not aware of Carter's feminist concerns are likely to see much of her work as a representation of the real world and that consequently her work merely re-inscribes the oppressiveness of a patriarchal society instead of exposing and challenging that oppression. Criticizing the erotic elements of *The Bloody Chamber*, Duncker argues that pornography, no matter who authors it, always "uses the language of male sexuality" and that "Carter envisages women's sensuality simply as a response to male arousal" (7). Lewallen argues that Carter creates a Sadeian schema in *The Bloody Chamber*, a schema that Carter herself has criticized. Lewallen describes the limited choices that women have in this schema as: "sadist or masochist, fuck or be fucked, victim or aggressor" (146).

and literature. Her interest in lesbian sexuality has driven much of the critical response to her work, although she has protested against being categorized as a lesbian writer. Winterson's feminism is evident from her early work, and she has for the most part escaped major controversy among her feminist critics. Winterson has identified Carter as an important influence on her. In *Art [Objects]*, she points to *The Magic Toyshop* as a bench mark in provocative literature: "For myself, in the literature of my own language, I find little to cheer me between the publication of *Four Quartets* (1944) and Angela Carter's *The Magic Toyshop* (1967)" (41). These two works stand out for her because she characterizes the 1940s and 1950s as a period during which a return to realism limited art. As I have done in this dissertation, a few critics are taking an interest in the affinities between Carter and Winterson, and articles are beginning to appear that discuss these writers together.²

² See, for example, Jeffrey Roessner, "Writing a History of Difference: Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* and Angela Carter's *Wise Children*"; Sara Martin, "The Power of Monstrous Women: Fay Weldon's *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* (1982), Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (1984) and Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* (1989)"; Paulina Palmer, "Postmodern Trends in Contemporary Fiction: Margaret Atwood, Angela Carter, Jeanette Winterson"; and Allison Lee, "Bending the Arrow of Time: The Continuing Postmodern Present."

As one of the terms that focuses my analysis of Carter and Winterson, *sexuality* warrants closer examination. A starting point for defining this term can be found in a theory put forth by Jean LaPlanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis about the origin of sexuality. In examining how fantasy and auto-eroticism function in the development of sexuality, LaPlanche and Pontalis conclude that sexuality emerges when an individual divorces erotic desire from a tangible object. In the earliest experiences of erotic arousal, an infant associates desire with an object; for example the breast is an object of desire because it enables an infant to satisfy her hunger. When eroticism is detached from a tangible object, "sexuality, disengaged from any natural object, moves into the field of fantasy and by that very fact becomes sexuality" (25). This definition of the origin of sexuality is a particularly useful starting point because it is grounded in psychoanalytic theory, but it is also open-ended enough that it does not reify sexuality into a phenomenon universally experienced in the same way by all men or all women. The "field of fantasy" can be interpreted as differing for each individual and allows for the influence of social forces that inflect sexuality.

The preceding psychoanalytic definition of the origin of sexuality only provides a rudimentary understanding of it. Theories that examine how social forces inflect sexuality better explain how sexuality is expressed in a given socio-cultural context. For example, in *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault argues that because sexuality serves "as an especially dense transfer point for relations of power" in Western society, it has necessarily been discursively constructed to facilitate such transfers, examples of which occur "between men and women, young people and old people, parents and offspring, teachers and students, priests and laity, an administration and a population" (103). To document the discursive construction of sexuality, Foucault points to the myriad of ways people have historically been called upon to talk about sex, from the religious practice of confession of one's sins to the psychoanalytic practice of dissecting a patient's fantasies and dreams. Foucault's theories about the methods society invents for using language to construct sexuality highlight the critical role that society plays in the expression of sexuality by individuals.

Published within a year of Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*, *The Sadeian Woman* by Angela Carter echoes many of

Foucault's theories. Like Foucault, Carter also examines how social forces inflect sexuality, but she is interested more specifically in female sexuality than Foucault is. Carter argues that "Flesh comes to us out of history; so does the repression and taboo that governs our experience of flesh" (11). Through the use of the term *history*, Carter is emphasizing that social and cultural circumstances are specific to a given time and place. Because socio-cultural influences dictate the expression of sexuality, Carter is particularly concerned about the ways that restrictive social roles for women in contemporary Western society (for example the wife who is perceived to be economically, and consequently emotionally, dependent on her husband) can also restrict their ability to take pleasure in sex.

Moreover, Carter is critical of psychoanalytic theories of female sexuality (most notably the theories of Sigmund Freud) that are grounded in the idea that normal femininity is characterized by passivity and that penis envy plays a central role in the development of female sexuality. Freud theorizes that it is a sense of anatomical lack, a girl's envy of the penis, that drives her to take her father as a love object in the hope that he will give her a baby to

compensate for a lack of a penis ("Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes"). Freud refers to the child's desire for the parent of the opposite as the Oedipus complex, after Sophocles' mythical character who kills his father and marries his mother. Carter points to the damage done when such theories are widely accepted:

the memory of the social fiction of the female wound, the bleeding scar left by her castration . . . is a psychic fiction as deeply at the heart of Western culture as the myth of Oedipus, to which it is related in the complex dialectic of imagination and reality that produces culture. Female castration is an imaginary fact that pervades the whole of men's attitude towards women and our attitude to ourselves, that transforms women from human beings into wounded creatures who were born to bleed. (*The Sadeian Woman* 23)

She is concerned that psychoanalytic theories, particularly when they draw on Western literature and mythology, are presented as universal—and therefore natural—truths about human sexuality. Instead of being understood as products of a historical context, these theories too often take on the privileged status of truth.

In *This Sex Which is Not One*, Luce Irigaray is also critical of psychoanalytic theories about female sexuality. Like Carter, she is concerned about how those theories

position women as inferior: "the feminine is defined as the necessary complement to the operation of male sexuality" (70). She criticizes Freud because "he fails to investigate the historical factors governing the data with which he is dealing" (70).³ Through their critiques of widely accepted concepts of female sexuality, Carter and Irigaray are disrupting those discursive constructions, or as Irigaray puts it, they are "jamming the theoretical machinery itself, . . . suspending its pretensions to the production of a truth and of a meaning that are excessively univocal" (78).

Although I do not want to invalidate psychoanalysis entirely, I think that Foucault, Carter, and Irigaray argue persuasively that social forces powerfully inflect how sexuality is defined in a given historical context. It is therefore important to temper psychoanalytic theories by

³ Carter also discusses how Freud's inability to understand his own historical context limits his understanding of female sexuality:

Sade, the eighteenth-century lecher, knew that manipulation of the clitoris was the unique key to the female orgasm, but a hundred years later, Sigmund Freud, a Viennese intellectual, did not wish to believe that this grand simplicity was all there was to the business. It was socially permissible for an eighteenth-century aristocrat to sleep with more woman than it was for a member of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie, for one thing, and to retain a genuine curiosity about female sexuality whilst doing so, for another. Yet, Freud, the psychoanalyst, can conceive of a far richer notion of human nature as a whole than Sade, the illiberal philosopher, is capable of; the social boundaries of knowledge expand in some areas and contract in others due to historical forces. (11)

examining how they operate within a socio-cultural context. As Foucault points out, psychoanalysis is one example of how society discursively constructs sexuality. Following his argument, one must understand society's uses of discourse in order to understand sexuality. When we add semiology to Foucault's formula, we can see that discourse extends to other sign systems besides written and spoken language.

Drawing on the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes writes that the object of semiology is the analysis of "any system of signs, whatever their substance and limits; images, gestures, musical sounds, objects, and the complex associations of all these, which form the content of ritual, convention or public entertainment" (9). Such "systems of signification" resemble spoken and written languages in their structure and produce a "demand for semiology" (Barthes 9). In my analysis, I understand rooms in houses as spaces that have been designed, decorated, and used according to conventions that are common to large groups of people. In other words, domestic space uses systems of signs that are well established by social conventions. On a basic level, the system of signs that defines a room in a house allows one immediately to distinguish a kitchen from a parlor or a

bedroom even if that kitchen is in a house one has never before seen. On a more sophisticated level, the system of signs within a house guides the behavior of its occupants: the kitchen, which has a utilitarian function, is a less formal room than the parlor, which is used to receive guests. Family members use the rooms and adjust their behavior according to the function of the room and the expected level of formality.

A closer analysis of the semiotics of domestic architecture reveals how it addresses sexuality. Beatriz Colomina, for example, calls for an analysis of built space as a system of representation in order to understand its sexual politics. In her introduction to *Sexuality and Space*, she argues, "The politics of space are always sexual, even if space is central to the mechanisms of the erasure of sexuality" (n. pag.). Mark Wigley contributes an essay to Colomina's book that analyzes built space as a discourse that contributes to the production of sexuality and gender. In his examination of Alberti's fifteenth-century work, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, Wigley discusses how "The house is literally understood as a mechanism for the domestication of (delicately minded and pathologically embodied) women"

(332). Women are to kept deep inside the house because their circulation in the public space implies their sexual mobility. Moreover, beginning in the fourteenth century, Wigley documents the inclusion in the house of a private room for the sole use of the male head of the household. Such a space, which represents "the true center of the house," privileges male authority, while it simultaneously "marks the internal limit to the woman's authority in the house" (Wigley 348).

In contemporary Western society, there are still many examples of domestic spaces that protect male power and privilege. Leslie Kanés Weisman has examined the gender assumptions evident in the design of domestic space in the U.S. Weisman argues that there is no private room set aside for a woman's use that corresponds to the man's private study, which continues to be common in twentieth-century houses. Instead, the woman's space is the kitchen, a room that rarely affords privacy. Weisman takes issue with the way housing design privileges the traditional heterosexual family with a male head of household, while neglecting to consider the housing needs of other groups such as single parents, the elderly, or childless couples. Because home

ownership is "a system of enfranchisement" that is "linked with status, power, and control," Weisman is concerned that single women are often unable to achieve home ownership on their own (119). Instead, she points out, "women have traditionally achieved home ownership through marriage, divorce, widowhood, or inheritance" (119).

Another critic who examines domestic space, Marion Roberts, argues that laws in Great Britain governing home ownership, the location of housing developments, and domestic design are complicit in women's subordination to men. Until 1882, she notes, a British statute prevented married women from owning property in their own right. A woman without the economic support of a man could become a "woman of the streets," a phrase that "has particular resonance," Roberts writes, since it linguistically emphasizes the woman's lack of a house (19). Roberts describes the British government's plans after World War II to rejuvenate depressed regions of the country by re-locating industry and developing new housing. During this effort, the government privileged the male wage earner and assumed that whole households would re-locate based on men's job opportunities. Roberts also argues that housing design symbolizes female subordination because

the kitchen, which is associated with women, is usually relegated to the back of the house. Like Weisman, Roberts concludes that housing design needs to be more various in order to suit the needs of women in circumstances different from those of the traditional family.

Jessica Benjamin considers space in the context of psychological development, including the process of separation of the infant from the mother. In her revision of Freudian and Lacanian theories of separation, Benjamin posits the concept of intersubjectivity to describe a mutual recognition between parent and child of each other's autonomy. According to Benjamin, intersubjectivity is promoted when an infant child is given a chance to move about and play independently within a designated area. This area serves as a transitional space, allowing the child to develop independence while still feeling the protection of a nearby caregiver. She also points out that this transitional space is related to the type of space necessary to enable women to develop a sexual identity:

the spatial metaphor repeatedly comes into play when women try to attain a sense of their sexual subjectivity. For example, a woman who was beginning to detach herself from her enthrallment to a seductive father began to dream of rooms.

She began to look forward to traveling alone, to the feeling of containment and freedom as she flew in an airplane, to being alone and anonymous in her hotel room. Here, she imagined, she would find a kind of aloneness that would allow her to look into herself. (128)

This woman's "dream of rooms" is suggestive since concrete space often promotes confining roles for women. Her ability to imagine other spaces for herself is pivotal to her emotional development. As this dissertation argues, such an ability to see beyond the social agendas promoted by domestic spaces is an important skill for those who challenge those agendas.

Benjamin's close attention to space as a component of psychological development illustrates another reason why Carter's and Winterson's concerns about space and sexuality should not be ignored if we are to understand the full import of their fictions. Taken together with the arguments above—that space is often designed to privilege men and to channel women into confining roles—Benjamin's emphasis on the role space plays in the development of women's identities takes on further importance. Moreover, Benjamin's interest in the role that transitional space plays in mutual recognition suggests that careful attention to the spatial

interactions between a mother and her child can offer a better understanding of the child's psychological development. As the setting for many of these mother/child interactions, domestic space demands closer analysis.

My own interest in space as a topic of analysis echoes these critics. However, even as I read rooms as texts in order to discern their social meanings, I do not want to lose sight of the materialism of those spaces because Carter and Winterson also use their fiction to comment on the material world. My argument is informed by critics like Valentine Cunningham, who has called for a return to a consideration of materialism, the physical existence of spaces and bodies. The relationships between materialism and textuality are relevant to my analysis because domestic space is an important example of the intersection between textuality and materialism. Designed to encourage the proper social functioning of a family, the space of the house represents a fundamental locus where material space becomes a text, one that is written to convey to family members the behavior expected of them.

The intersection between materialism and textuality is not the only intersection that informs this dissertation.

There are a number of intersections between postmodernism and other critical modes of thought that come into play. Jean-François Lyotard has famously summed up postmodernism as “incredulity toward metanarratives” (xxiv), but he and other critics have elaborated *ad nauseam* on that definition in order to describe the complexity of postmodernism as a theoretical paradigm.⁴ Because the term *postmodernism* has been so variously defined, I find it is most relevant to my own work when critics consider its intersection with other theories. The relationship between postmodernism and feminism has been particularly troubled. For example, in *The Politics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon argues that feminism has a political agenda, while postmodernism is “politically ambivalent, doubly encoded as both complicity and critique,” that feminism develops strategies of resistance to the dominant culture, while postmodernism rejects the possibility of agency (168). As a result, “Feminisms will continue to resist incorporation into

⁴ For example, in addition to Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition*, other book-length studies that grapple with the term *postmodernism* include *The Poetics of Postmodernism* and *The Politics of Postmodernism*, both by Linda Hutcheon, and *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture* by Ihab Habib Hassan.

postmodernism, largely because of their revolutionary force as political movements working for real social change" (168).

On the other hand, in her analysis of Jeanette Winterson, Laura Doan responds to Hutcheon's conclusions by arguing that it is "equally dangerous" for feminists to neglect postmodernism since it can presumably undermine feminism in the same way it undermines other discourses (140). Because Winterson's lesbian politics inflect the postmodern elements in her writing, Doan argues, her writing suggests new possibilities for postmodernism: "lesbian feminist critics and theorists have everything to gain from acknowledging the potential of a political postmodern" (154).

Due to the various intersections between feminism, materialism, and postmodernism in Carter's and Winterson's work, their writing does not fit neatly into a particular theoretical framework. These intersections demonstrate that Carter and Winterson have been influenced by more than one critical paradigm. Although both writers adopt postmodern strategies in their writing, they do not use postmodernism to the exclusion of other theoretical frameworks. Carter herself has emphasized that her work is based in "an absolute and *committed materialism*" and that "in order to question the

nature of reality one must move from a strongly grounded base in what constitutes material reality" ("Notes from the Front Line" 38; Carter's emphasis). Carter's and Winterson's interest in materialism takes on greater significance when they are read within the context of current objections to the ways that theories of postmodernism and deconstruction overlook material space, while they privilege textual space. In *Feminism and the Postmodern Impulse: Post-World War II Fiction*, Magali Michael argues that feminists, including Angela Carter, who are committed to illustrating how the material world affects women, strengthen their writing by using postmodernist strategies, such as fantastic elements, metatextuality, and language play, alongside the realist elements in their texts.

By emphasizing the materiality of space, Carter and Winterson encourage readers to examine characters' bodily experiences of space. This emphasis on the body reflects yet another movement in contemporary feminism. Elizabeth Grosz, for one, insists that feminism must recover the material body, which has been under-theorized by feminists fearing the problematic linking of women and biology. She points to the relationship between bodies and spaces when she writes, "what

is at stake [in competing theories of the body] is the activity and agency, the mobility and social space, accorded to women" (19). Marilyn Farwell is also interested in the body, especially as it is portrayed in fiction with lesbian themes. She has noted the use of a postmodern concept of "an embodied and sexualized figure whose performative identity is never fixed" as an emblem of the lesbian (10), and she argues that one of Winterson's strengths is her portrayal of excessive and grotesque female bodies because such depictions disrupt traditional ways of understanding women. Overall, there is an important movement in current scholarship to examine the intersections between feminism, textuality, and materiality. The novels of Carter and Winterson make an important contribution to that discussion.

Individual rooms of the house determine the organization of this dissertation. I devote a chapter each to parlors, kitchens, and bedrooms and examine them as they are depicted in each of the four novels that serve as my primary sources. Such an organization allows for a sustained focus on the authors' interest in the role each of these rooms plays in the development of characters' sexual identities. By defining a specific thematic perspective for analyzing each

room, I am able to discuss Carter's and Winterson's feminist agendas from three different angles and consequently present a multifaceted interpretation of these four novels.

Moreover, because the principle theme that guides each chapter is illustrated at varying levels of development in each of the novels, the organization allows me to put Carter and Winterson in a dialogue with each other.

In Chapter II, "Parlor Games: Spatial Literacy in Formal Rooms," I discuss how rooms used for formal occasions and the reception of guests are designed to project a desirable public image of a family. More insidiously, however, the rooms protect the sexual order of the household, which often privileges male sexuality at women's expense. Because these rooms are so deliberately constructed to convey a message about the family, they invite occupants to read them. Using the term *spatial literacy* to describe how characters interpret rooms, I argue that Carter and Winterson show that characters with a high spatial literacy can detect not only the overt message of these formal rooms, but also what underlies that message—how it calls for women's sexuality to be contained in order to protect the status quo. Through an understanding of the agenda underlying the design of formal

rooms and the arrangement of objects within them, some of the characters take steps to disrupt these spaces in order to challenge the social order in the household.

Chapter III, "Making Meals, Breaking Deals: Mothers, Daughters, and Kitchens," discusses the kitchen in light of three premises. First of all, I examine the kitchen as the site for the production of domestic comfort. An examination of who has primary responsibility for the production of comfort and whose comfort is privileged in a given household often reveals the degree to which the women of the household submit to traditional gender roles. Secondly, I examine how Carter and Winterson treat the kitchen as a volatile space. Because it is for the most part an informal space, family members may let their guard down in the kitchen. As a result, the kitchen sometimes erupts with violence and the expression of repressed emotions and repressed sexuality. Finally, the kitchen is an important space of intimacy between mother and daughter. Carter and Winterson use the room as the setting for scenes that are revelatory of both the mother's and the daughter's sexualities.

Chapter IV, "Bedtime Stories: Assaulting Sexuality in the Bedroom" is an analysis of bedrooms and the concept of

privacy in relationship to sexuality. In both Carter and Winterson, the privacy of the bedroom is disrupted by the surveillance of family members trying to control the sexual identity of the room's occupants. The chapter also examines how social prescriptions encourage women to tolerate the interruption of their privacy.

In each of these chapters, Carter's *Nights at the Circus* offers a counterpoint to the other novels. Like the adolescent protagonists from *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, *Art and Lies*, and *The Magic Toyshop*, Fevvers encounters domestic spaces that threaten to contain her sexuality within socially accepted boundaries, but her experiences also suggest that women can overcome these threats. For all their various threatening situations, however, each of the protagonists from these four novels has opportunities to learn about subverting the social order, and several of the characters find ways to act out that subversion. In the end, Fevvers is not the only character who shows the potential to define her own sexuality. She simply is further along in the process than the others. This ability for subversion and for self-definition suggests the possibility for agency, a possibility that postmodernist thought often rejects, but one

that Carter and Winterson allow because they do not embrace postmodernism as their only critical paradigm. Their interest in women and their potential to answer the question, "How shall I live" shows them to be committed feminists who write texts that depict a world they believe can be changed.

Through their treatment of domestic space, Carter and Winterson demonstrate that discursive constructions that inflect sexuality, particularly for women, permeate the house all the way into its most private spaces. Not only are these discourses pervasive in the house, they can also be enormously influential. Nonetheless, the wide range of their characters' differing reactions to these prescriptions—from oblivious acceptance to outright rejection of them—implies that the discursive power of domestic space is not absolute. By examining how the politics of space are scripted, Carter and Winterson insist, young women can resist those politics and begin to use space to their own advantage. An example of this can be found in *Art and Lies*, when Winterson's character Picasso says, "The past stands behind me as a house where I used to live" (40). Her depiction of her past as a house is telling. It speaks to the centrality that domestic space has played in the formation of her identity, and yet her ability

to see it as a place where she no longer lives indicates that she can reclaim some of her autonomy. By realizing how powerfully those spaces have worked to control her sexuality, Picasso begins the process of detaching herself from her family's house. Her statement reflects the argument that Carter and Winterson make: the sexual politics of domestic space are designed to control women's sexuality, but an awareness of how those spaces work allows women to assess the damage that has been done and begin again "in a new direction" (*Art and Lies* 42).

CHAPTER II

PARLOR GAMES: SPATIAL LITERACY IN FORMAL ROOMS

My analysis begins with the most public spaces in the house, parlors and other formal rooms where guests are received and decorum is required. These rooms are particularly important vehicles for the consolidation of a family image that can be projected into the community when guests carry that image away with them, but they also serve an important function within the family as spaces where power is implemented to establish who is the head of the household and to bolster a hierarchy within the family. Both family members and guests understand these messages about image and the power structure of the household because they are able to read parlors and formal rooms, but not everyone reads them with equal skill. This chapter will analyze degrees of *spatial literacy*, my term for the skill with which characters interpret messages organized within the space of a room.

The idea of spatial literacy is inspired, in part, by the work of Katherine C. Grier, who has done an extensive study of the parlors of middle-class Americans of the Victorian era (1850-1930), a time when a developing commercialization allowed a broader spectrum of people to

refine their homes by furnishing a parlor or other formal space. She argues that the arrangement of furnishings and decorative objects in the parlor communicated a wealth of information about the homeowner's social standing and/or social aspirations. According to Grier a number of elements—including the marketing of parlor furniture; essays in periodicals about parlor designs and parlor etiquette; and public parlors located in hotels, photographers' studios, and stores—contributed to the rise of a "language" of parlors that middle-class consumers learned and put to use. Grier explains that "In a fundamental way, carefully planned rooms were designed to be rhetorical statements expressing aspirations, what a person believed or wished to believe" (15). Constellations of objects in the parlor conveyed to culturally astute visitors how cultivated and refined the host was. In addition, Grier contends, the ability to "read" the parlor was almost as important as being able to create and maintain a parlor: "The tenets of the popular aesthetic of refinement implied that not only the ability to make but also the ability to see and appreciate intricate detail were natural outgrowths of the civilizing process" (169).

Grier's idea that Victorian Americans understood "the civilizing process" to include an ability to interpret accurately the rhetoric of a room tastefully furnished and arranged is a particularly useful concept for understanding the fiction of Angela Carter and Jeanette Winterson.

Although Carter and Winterson set most of their novels in the twentieth-century, the remnants of the Victorian age—when the implementation of a language of space became more widely used—are still evident. Twentieth-century culture in both the US and Britain evolved from and built upon Victorian culture, so similarities between the two eras are easily recognizable. Like the Victorians, the fictional families in Carter and Winterson still work to project a public image of civilization and refinement, and they still use the parlor and other formal rooms to consolidate that image.

Consequently, Carter's and Winterson's characters inherit the same skills that the socially refined citizens of the Victorian age possessed; that is, they have the spatial literacy necessary to interpret the social meanings conveyed by space and are also able to set up spatial messages within their own homes for guests to interpret.

I want, however, to distinguish between levels of this spatial literacy. For example, several important characters in Carter and Winterson, usually the protagonists, have out of necessity developed their spatial literacy to a higher degree. As subordinates in their families, these young women are often more perceptive than other characters about how space is organized to promote an agenda. These characters have a compelling reason for learning to interpret spatial rhetoric from a more sophisticated critical position than the other characters take. They take an interest in spatial literacy when they perceive how domestic space can be used to contain and repress female sexuality and, consequently, to consolidate male sexual privilege and control over the family.

By repeatedly highlighting how certain domestic spaces are organized against women, Carter and Winterson strengthen the feminist themes of their fictions. They illustrate how space can be used to survey, to control, and to veil women's sexuality. But they also create protagonists who have a high level of spatial literacy, and this literacy allows them to be better readers of the rhetoric of space than those who are using space against them. These characters understand space

from a postmodern perspective in that they discern the gaps in the rhetoric of a room and the instability of meaning (the play of the spatial text). Rather than understanding spatial rhetoric simply as the physical manifestation of—in the case of formal rooms—a family's sophistication and its acquisition of objects of culture, they discern what must be repressed in order to project that image. Spatial texts, they perceive, maintain the status quo not only by displaying objects of value, but also by concealing anything or anyone that could disrupt the narrative of sophistication and culture. In other words, characters with a high level of spatial literacy perceive clearly what realities are being glossed over by the rhetoric created within a space, while characters who are less spatially literate maintain confidence in the rhetorical power of a carefully constructed space.

Characters who have a lower level of spatial literacy perceive spatial rhetoric as more opaque. For these characters, the rhetoric constructed within a room successfully covers realities (such as the possibility of women's sexual subjectivity) that might challenge the status

quo.⁵ Differing degrees of spatial literacy resemble differing degrees of textual literacy. Less experienced readers interpret texts with less critical acumen than more experienced readers, who are more likely to explore a text's metaphors, its intertextuality, its political themes, its symbolic relevance. Likewise, characters who have developed a high level of spatial literacy interpret a room as a text deliberately crafted to achieve specific political and social goals, while those with less spatial literacy may not understand a formal room as having a political agenda beyond the display of beautiful and/or expensive objects. Because they better understand how and why a room's symbolism is

⁵ A familiar story offers a pointed metaphor of a character developing better spatial literacy. In Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," the protagonist is initially nonplussed by the wallpaper in her attic bedroom. Literally speaking the wallpaper is an opaque overlay on the walls, although the protagonist does notice that it has been torn away in a few places. The wallpaper's opacity suggests the same opacity of the narrator, who maintains a facade in front of her husband and sister-in-law, Jenny. The husband's failure as well as Jenny's failure to penetrate either the narrator's or the wallpaper's opacity suggests that these characters are not very spatially literate. However, the narrator begins to read the space around her more adeptly when she notices the wallpaper resembles the bars that are fastened against the windows of her bedroom and the gate that spans the landing at the top of the stairs. Then she perceives a woman behind them who wants to escape. Finally she is able to recognize herself as the trapped woman. For the protagonist, the wallpaper--an implement that covers the walls of a domestic space in order to make those walls more presentable--becomes transparent. She understands the wallpaper as a metaphor for the facades she has felt compelled to maintain in order not to disturb the status quo. And although this recognition culminates in a nervous breakdown for the character, she has nonetheless reached a better understanding of herself and her treacherous position in society.

created, they can achieve an ironic distance that prevents them from deferring too naively to a room's overt political and social message.

In addition to her insight about how Victorian Americans wrote and read the rhetoric of parlors, Katherine Grier also offers useful analysis about how that rhetoric directed the deportment of bodies. Grier devotes an entire chapter to "Bodily Comfort and Spring-Seat Upholstery," where she explains how Victorian era parlor furniture signaled the formality of the room and thus encouraged visitors to hold their bodies in upright, formal postures. This same furniture could simultaneously suggest civilization's progress towards greater comfort for the human body through such innovations as spring-seat upholstery. Consequently, this furniture paradoxically offered comfort to guests in a room where they were expected not to relax their bodies. Meanwhile, by owning such technologically advanced furniture, the family could affirm its social refinement and economic power (Grier 117-142). Grier's account of parlor furniture provides a historical context for the formality and bodily modesty dictated by the parlor and other formal rooms, as well as the tensions created by the rooms' uses for receiving

visitors and, ostensibly, for making them feel comfortable, at home. While acknowledging the comfort and beauty of the furniture, a guest is nonetheless encouraged to carry him/herself with decorous formality, including a straight posture. In Winterson's fiction in particular, these tensions between culture and comfort are still evident. Winterson's fictional families still utilize the parlor to announce their social standing and to invite visitors to enjoy the domestic comforts they have acquired. At the same time, the families take pains to ensure that the parlor's formality protects the dignity of their public image.

***Art and Lies* (Jeanette Winterson, 1994)**

Jeanette Winterson's *Art and Lies* (1994) is divided into sections devoted to the stories of three separate protagonists whose lives intersect at key moments: Handel, Picasso, and Sappho. Although Handel and Picasso are contemporary characters who inhabit present-day London, Sappho is represented as the actual poet, though Winterson fantastically portrays her as existing in both ancient Greece and contemporary London. Picasso, who is a young woman trying to establish a sexual identity for herself, is the

character on whom this dissertation will focus because, in the sections about her, Winterson devotes extended attention to the house in which Picasso grows up.

The daughter of a wealthy family, headed by her domineering father Sir Jack Hamilton, Picasso lives in a Queen Anne house⁶ with both her parents and her brother Matthew. When he first married, Sir Jack bought the house in a dilapidated state because he had plenty of ambition, though little money. Over time, he renovated the house and filled it with expensive furniture and art in order to establish his social status. The house and all of its contents signal the family's dignity and gentility, which Sir Jack protects fiercely. Consequently, the family's dark secrets must be kept hidden. Sir Jack's habitual infidelity—out of which Picasso was born—and Matthew's sexual abuse of Picasso are the two most damaging secrets. In order to ensure that the family's social status is never damaged, the evidence of the men's illicit pleasures must remain invisible. In other words, Picasso, who embodies both men's abuses, is expected

⁶ The Queen Anne style of architecture is characterized by a paucity of ornament and simplicity of design. Purveyors of this style were influenced by French and Italian architecture. As the name suggests, the style was established in the early eighteenth century, during Queen Anne's reign.

to remain quiet and unobtrusive. Male sexual privilege is protected at women's expense in the Hamilton household.

If we dismantle Winterson's fragmented and recursive narrative (which emulates the cubism of the modern painter Picasso by retelling scenes from slightly different angles), we can reassemble it into a chronological account of Picasso's life. Although Winterson does not reveal it until the end of the novel, Picasso is the illegitimate daughter of Sir Jack Hamilton and a Spanish maid employed in his household. The baby's given name is Sophia;⁷ only later does she rename herself Picasso to signal her devotion to painting, although her father refuses to call her by this new name. Winterson depicts Picasso's infancy as disruptive to the rest of the Hamilton family. The baby, unlike the rest of the "dead" family, screams relentlessly (159). Picasso's older brother Matthew begins his sexual abuse of her early, and despite Picasso's pleas for her own bedroom, her mother is impassive, wholly ignorant of Matthew's abuse and

⁷ This name is particularly important, not only because it denotes *wisdom*, but also because it quite possibly alludes to Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (1984). In Carter's novel, the protagonist is born Sophie/Sophia, but like Picasso she also goes by a different name: Fevvers. The characters have another important similarity in that they both take dramatic leaps out of attic windows, as I discuss later in the chapter.

incapable of detecting violence in her perfect home. Meanwhile, Picasso takes up painting as a medium of expression even though her father insists that women cannot paint.

The situation reaches a climax one evening when Picasso, after Matthew has raped her, climbs to the attic and sits on the parapet to recover. When her father finds her there, even though she is naked and ill, he believes Matthew's version of events: that Picasso has attacked him. He dismisses Picasso's accusation of rape, calling her a slut. Her threats that she will report the rape to the police evoke an even more violent rejection from her father, who pushes her off the parapet. He literally ejects her from the space of the house because to him she represents what must be repressed and expunged in order to preserve the family's gentility. Although Picasso survives the fall, for years she represses the memory that her father pushed her, so the fall is interpreted as a suicide attempt, and her family has her committed. She only returns home after an extended stay in an asylum. Eventually remembering what really happened that night in the attic, Picasso resolves to leave her family home again, but this time on her own terms. Naked, she paints her

body and confronts the family. She splashes gallons of paint all over the rooms of the house then retreats to the attic. Sir Jack calls his doctor friend, Handel, in an attempt to have Picasso committed a second time, but Picasso eludes them, this time jumping safely out of the attic window, leaving the attic door locked behind her.

The Hamiltons' Parlor

[My mother] ran up the complicit stairs and into one of her favourite memory rooms, the family parlour. . . . It was here that Sundays were played out with magnificent genteel sadism. (Art and Lies 41)

Although the Queen Anne house Sir Jack buys when he first marries is run down and in an unfashionable neighborhood, he "recognize[s] it as an investment" and "a grand house" (160). As he acquires more wealth, he decorates and furnishes the house expensively in order to announce this wealth, as well as his power and his social standing. He protects these investments resolutely. He has his son's kitten declawed, for example, in order to protect the furniture. From Sir Jack's perspective, "The furniture had cost thousands of pounds. The kitten had been dumped.

Nobody wanted the kitten, everybody admired the furniture, the boy would inherit it one day, long after the kitten was dead" (158-159). Here, Winterson highlights how thorough Sir Jack is in defending his house from anything or anyone that might devalue it. The declawing of the cat echoes the institutionalization of Picasso. Both incidents have the same goal. Picasso and the cat are disenfranchised so that wealth can be transferred from father to son in a seamless continuity of male property and power.

Winterson portrays Sir Jack as stern and as the indisputable head of the household. The parlor in his home is particularly important to the image he cultivates of himself and his family. To fortify his power, Sir Jack displays a portrait of himself on the parlor wall, a depiction of himself in his military uniform. Staring out from the painting, Sir Jack's image overlooks the parlor, as though he were monitoring the room to ensure that dignity is preserved there. The parlor decor includes valuable figurines—Dresden shepherdesses and their "prim sheep" (41)—that represent the family's refinement. An expensive clock that chimes the hour contributes a sense of orderliness and consistency. The room, as Picasso describes it, is

"obscenely clean" (41), indicating that this is not a room where one has a physical existence with all its attendant messiness. We can deduce that occupants of the room are expected not to call attention to their bodies. In other words, the family does not live in this room; rather they affirm there a self-important image of themselves. Picasso's illegitimacy and the sexual abuse she suffers are among the physical realities that must be covered by the carefully constructed rhetoric of the room that advertises the Hamiltons as gentility.

Winterson points out the power of the parlor's rhetoric most clearly through Lady Hamilton's response to the room. Picasso recalls that the parlor is "one of her [mother's] favourite memory rooms" (41). When reminiscing about the past, she uses the parlor and other rooms to prop up her versions of Picasso's childhood. Lady Hamilton reads spatial rhetoric quite literally. For example, to her the children's bedroom evokes the nursery, the innocence of childhood, so even as her children grow to adolescence, she understands the space as de-sexualized and is therefore oblivious to Matthew's sexual abuse of Picasso. As soon as she was married, Lady Hamilton succumbed to the oppressive power of

her husband's house, succumbed to "the sealed rooms where she would find the compass of her life. Nothing for her beyond those rooms. She was his wife and the rooms of his house were her granted kingdom. At the centre was the marriage bed. She got in it and lay still" (158). She is both physically and mentally submissive to the house's rhetoric. Because of her literal interpretation of space and her acquiescence to its rhetoric, Lady Hamilton always takes comfort in the parlor. A striking example of a person whose low level of spatial literacy exhibits her naïveté, she firmly believes that the gentility evident in the room's furnishings will ensure that anybody who goes there will act with gentility. She understands that the formality of the parlor and the bodily modesty that it requires is in direct contrast to the physicality on display in a room like the kitchen, where Picasso, as a toddler, flung food all over the floor.

Indeed on one particularly disturbing morning, when the family secrets are threatening to erupt, Lady Hamilton asks the family to leave the breakfast table (which is in or near the kitchen) and go to the parlor. The night before, Picasso has stayed up painting. Picasso has imagined how each family

member became unsettled as one of Picasso's colours seeped into his/her dream. Over breakfast the next morning, they watch each other suspiciously. Each of them is "spotted with guilt, each could see in the other, the patterns of infection. They ate their family breakfast in solitary silence. Unclean, leper spotted, found out over night" (46). Spilt tea on the tablecloth blossoms into a stain that Lady Hamilton cannot clean. At her request, the family retreats "to the comfortable ark of the Sunday parlour" (47). Lady Hamilton is calling for them to rally the power of the mind over matter, requesting that they leave the kitchen, with its associations with the body,⁸ and enter the parlor, where they can draw on a long history of "civilized" and "refined" behavior as well as a long history of social ceremony and formality in order to suppress their bodies and the anxiety they feel that their sexual indiscretions and abuses could be revealed.

In contrast to her portrayal of Lady Hamilton's blind faith in the rhetoric of the house, Winterson writes Picasso as a highly literate and resistant reader of domestic space. Unlike her mother, who accepts a very literal interpretation

⁸ See Chapter III for an extended treatment of kitchens.

of the parlor, Picasso discerns the gaps in the narrative, where the explicit message of the family's gentility cracks to reveal the implicit message of male sexual privilege. In the same breath that Picasso mentions the portrait of her father that hangs in the parlor, she also notes that "there were no portraits of his mistresses" (41-2). She notices that the Dresden shepherdesses are "leering" at each other (41), and she resents the pleasure that her brother Matthew takes from the clock because "On the hour, it chimed its lecherous gurdy music, and out shot a soldier, drum propped on his swollen penis. My brother kept his hands in his pockets" (42). She recognizes the clock as an explicit representation of wealth, but she also understands its implicit affirmation of Matthew's and her father's sexual privileges. Also implicit, through her reference to Matthew's hands, is the idea that he is aroused by this affirmation of his sexuality and his privileged status in the household. The drummer boy, with his penis erect, makes an hourly appearance, a regular reminder of how insistently Matthew and Sir Jack sate their desires on, respectively, Picasso and a string of mistresses. Her mother, by contrast, cannot read this implicit meaning. Instead, she simply

refers to it as "that beautiful clock," the one Picasso smashed (42).

Sundays in the Hamiltons' parlor, according to Picasso, are "played out with magnificent genteel sadism" (41). Picasso understands the gentility as sadistic because it prevents the exposure of the sexual hierarchy of the household. Picasso, however, will not collaborate with the family in their efforts to maintain a civilized existence in and through the parlor. As I have already noted, Winterson portrays Picasso as capable of interpreting the implicit as well as explicit messages conveyed by the family parlor. But Winterson also shows Picasso as capable of rejecting the parlor's rhetoric and attempting to subvert it. In reaction to what is implied within that space, Picasso makes several important symbolic gestures in the parlor. For example, she smashes the parlor clock that houses the randy drummer boy, voicing her disagreement with the clock's implicit affirmation of male sexual privilege. The action also serves to suggest that violence itself is what enables this space to be a sanctuary for "civilization." She reenacts the violence she herself has suffered within this allegedly loving, well-respected, and civilized family. Picasso also chooses the

parlor as the setting for an impassioned plea. It is in the parlor that she begs her mother to let her have her own bedroom instead of sharing one with Matthew, so again Picasso challenges the gentility of the space, this time by calling attention to her physical needs and by indirectly referring to the dark family secret of incest and rape.

The third symbolic gesture that Picasso makes in the parlor is her most powerful reaction against that space. On the morning when the family has retreated to the parlor, Picasso very dramatically re-introduces the body into the parlor. Completely naked, Picasso runs "into the parlour, into the newspapers, into the best clothes and the dead air. She was painted from head to foot" (47). She does so "Without *thinking*," body over mind, so to speak (47; emphasis mine). The action highlights one of Winterson's most important feminist statements in the novel. Picasso reclaims her body by painting herself. Rejecting Matthew's understanding of her body as his property, she interprets her body anew. She counteracts the insecurity she has felt about her body with the paint: "I painted my uncertain breasts with strong black arrows and ran a silver quiver down my spine" (45). She puts rings on her buttocks, a diamond on her

navel, mercury on her heels and yellow chevrons on her legs. The mercury on her heels alludes to the Roman god Mercury, a messenger with winged heels, while the arrows, quiver, and chevrons suggest warfare. One interpretation of her body painting is that Picasso is a herald of war: she is beginning to mount an offensive against the family's abuse of her.

When she presents herself to her family, she announces this as "Self-portrait" (48). Picasso turns her body, which the family has so diligently tried to keep subdued, into a visual text. By doing so, she makes her body nearly impossible for them to ignore. To discern the patterns of this painted text requires one to look directly at her individual body parts, each of which has its own motif. The text she creates is one of confidence, even bravado. This new interpretation of her body stands in stark contrast to the other text that is "written on her body" (85),⁹ a limp from the night she was thrown out of the attic window by her father. By using art to make her body into a text, she mimics the social process of using art and other objects to make a text in the parlor.

⁹ Winterson here is alluding to her novel, *Written on the Body* (1992), another text where she is interested in bodies and bodily inscriptions.

Covering herself in paint is also a very sensual act that suggests an early psychological stage identified by Sigmund Freud. Freud defines the polymorphously perverse disposition as an infant's capacity to derive sexual pleasure from almost any surface on her body. Because the infant has not yet learned how to project sexual pleasures onto the specific zones of the body that society has identified as erogenous, she can be seduced by presumably innocuous kinds of stimulation (Freud, "Three Essays" 119). Freud defines such sexual behavior, when it continues in later childhood and adulthood, as a perversity, and he notes how prostitutes exploit this "disposition to perversions" since it "is a general and fundamental human characteristic" (119).

While Freud discusses polymorphous perversity in indifferent, clinical language, later scholars have focused on the subversive potential of unlocalized eroticism. In particular, Luce Irigaray's interpretation of women's sexuality celebrates female erotic pleasure as diffused across the entire body instead of localized near the sexual organs. In *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Irigaray insists that a woman's "sexuality, always at least double, goes even further: it is plural . . . woman has sex organs more or less

everywhere" (28; Irigaray's emphasis). Irigaray celebrates this female eroticism, which sharply contrasts to the relentlessly phallogocentric nature of male pleasure. In writing a scene where Picasso embraces polymorphous perversity, Winterson is also celebrating female erotic pleasure. Through Picasso's actions, Winterson revises Freud much in the same way that Irigaray has.

But Picasso re-interprets more than just her body. By running into the parlor, Picasso dramatically alters the space of that room. It is useful here to turn to some spatial studies in order to understand better how Winterson is commenting on the spatial text of the parlor. Mary Douglas, in her groundbreaking work *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*,¹⁰ examines the way that societies maintain order. Douglas's definition of dirt is crucial here because she rejects the idea that our dislike and fear of dirt is primarily derived from a concern for hygiene and health. Instead, she understands dirt in

¹⁰ *Purity and Danger* was originally published in 1966. It laid the groundwork for important scholarship on bodies and spaces that followed, including *Powers of Horror* (1980), where Julia Kristeva describes the concept of abjection. Abjection is that which "disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules" (4). Kristeva's concept offers yet another way of understanding Picasso.

spatial terms, dirt as "matter out of place" (36). She argues that "If we can abstract pathogenicity and hygiene from our notion of dirt, we are left with the old definition of dirt as matter out of place" (36). She continues, "Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements" (36). The examples she uses to elaborate this definition are telling:

Shoes are not dirty in themselves, but it is dirty to place them on the dining-table; food is not dirty in itself, but it is dirty to leave cooking utensils in the bedroom, or food bespattered on clothing; similarly, bathroom equipment in the drawing room; clothing lying on chairs; out-door things in-doors; upstairs things downstairs; under-clothing appearing where over-clothing should be, and so on. (36-37)¹¹

In defining dirt spatially, Douglas emphasizes that the clear demarcation of domestic spaces allows for the maintenance of order in a house.

¹¹ One of the main thrusts of Douglas's argument is to discredit the idea that rituals and social practices of so-called primitive cultures are based on superstition while our own practices derive from a knowledge of germ theory. Instead, she shows that all cultures are acting on the same principal: the principal of maintaining order through the act of classifying. The definition quoted here is particularly important for the spatial theorists who followed Douglas's groundbreaking work. Many spatial critics cite this definition as a starting point for their discussions.

Douglas's examples suggest that the domestic order so carefully maintained by Winterson's fictional family is not unusual. It is noteworthy that in her example of dirtiness in the drawing room, Douglas should point to equipment that rightfully belongs in the bathroom, a room devoted to the body. Bathroom equipment dirties the parlor because it calls up associations of the body and bodily functions, which belong to a different category of space than the parlor with its associations of formality. Like Winterson, Douglas indicates that the suppression of physicality ensures the purity of the parlor.

Douglas contends that the body is also an important spatial symbol for society as a site where one can "see the powers and dangers credited to the social structure reproduced in small" (116). The social structure is symbolized in the cultural rituals that carefully regulate the treatment of bodily fluids and excretions (116). In his article on racist attitudes towards Gypsy communities in Britain and Europe, David Sibley takes Douglas's concepts a step further. Sibley argues that "In order to legitimate their exclusion, people who are defined as 'other' or residual, beyond the boundaries of the acceptable, are

commonly represented as less than human" (107). Winterson illustrates this dehumanizing tendency through the family's reaction to Picasso when she refuses to gloss over her otherness as lesbian and as the abused and illegitimate child. Picasso places her naked body inappropriately in the parlor and disrupts the order and "cleanliness" of the family home by splashing paint throughout the house. Her father is immediately ready to expel Picasso from the house by having her committed a second time. She herself has become the "matter out of place" that threatens the status quo. The family's only means of neutralizing her protest is through the dehumanizing gesture of defining her as insane.

Picasso's introduction into the parlor of a naked body out of place necessarily disrupts the gentility the family has worked so hard to establish. Here in the place where the family has taken such pains to repress its dark secrets, Picasso abstractly but effectively publicizes the abuse she has suffered while at the same time declaring an emotional victory over that abuse. She exposes the family's hypocrisy by calling attention to the conflict between the explicit symbolism of the parlor, which advertises the family's gentility and wealth, and the room's corresponding implicit

meaning, which requires the suppression of several disturbing truths about Picasso's abuse and illegitimacy.

The moment is also crucial because Winterson writes a lesbian character displaying her body as excessive: Picasso's body transgresses all of the boundaries set by the rhetoric of the parlor. In *Heterosexual Plots and Lesbian Narratives*, Marilyn Farwell discusses how postmodern writers defy the nineteenth-century characterization of the lesbian body as "a monstrous creature whose body exceeds all cultural . . . boundaries" (168). Farwell argues that writers like Winterson instead celebrate the monstrosity and excessiveness of the lesbian body because of its disruptive potential: "the postmodern lesbian body can be excessively and cruelly sexual and therefore explode 'natural' gender boundaries" (169). Such a body refuses to be contained by traditional narrative.¹² Traditional narratives, Farwell argues, conclude with a resolution for the male hero, while the female provides a means for him to achieve this resolution: he either marries or transcends the woman.

¹² In a chapter devoted to Winterson, Farwell analyzes *Sexing the Cherry* and *Written on the Body*. In the characters of Dog-Woman and Louise, Farwell sees examples of the excessive, even grotesque, lesbian body that refuses to be contained.

To make her point, Farwell cites Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theory of homosocial bonding, the idea that men's relationships with each other are homosocial in nature but that the sexual tensions informing those bonds are mediated through men's competition for/attention to women (the Other) as well as through homophobia. She comments:

Although Sedgwick distinguishes male homosocial desire from male homosexual desire, particularly in the twentieth century, she also provides the theoretical possibility to conclude that narrative institutionalizes male homosexual bonding using the same pseudo-heterosexual positioning of woman as Other. (15)

It is a given that heterosexual relationships are sanctioned by the traditional narrative, but Farwell argues that traditional narrative also sanctions male homosexuality through the trope of the love triangle. Drawing on Sedgwick's work, Farwell posits that the love triangle allows for a relationship between men that is preeminent and that relegates the female character to a secondary position.

Only the lesbian, Farwell asserts, is completely excluded from this schemata of traditional narrative because she "exceeds the constructed boundaries for women's otherness" (16). The lesbian's exclusion is problematic, but that exclusion allows for the possibility of disrupting the

traditional narrative. Because she is the "narrative impossibility," who cannot be contained within boundaries that delineate the otherness of women, the lesbian has the power to disrupt heterocentric narratives (Farwell 16)—much as Picasso disrupts the narrative of the Hamiltons' parlor.

Through this disruption, Picasso attempts to write herself back into a narrative that has been set up to exclude her. Picasso displays her body in the parlor, challenging the rhetoric of the room. Farwell identifies a contemporary trend in fiction that enacts lesbian themes using postmodernist strategies, including the disruption of linear narrative, the subversion of traditional gender roles, and the depiction of "an embodied and sexualized figure whose performative identity is never fixed" (10). Particularly in this parlor scene, I contend that Picasso exemplifies the embodied and sexualized figure that Farwell identifies. Through the character of Picasso, Winterson demonstrates several advantages that a postmodern perspective affords women. First of all, because Picasso reads with a postmodern sensibility, she interprets spaces as having multiple, sometimes even disruptive, meanings. While other members of her family maintain faith in the stability of the narrative

of gentility constructed in the space of the family home, Picasso perceives that narrative as an overlay, a veneer that can be pierced or torn away to reveal another narrative of illicit behavior.

Second, because Picasso refuses to understand the narrative as fixed, she can devise ways of disrupting it, most importantly by composing her body as a postmodern text and introducing it into the parlor. In painting herself, she covers the surface of the body, but she is still naked. The text she creates, in other words, is transparent. No one who sees her can deny her nakedness even though she is "covered" in paint. Moreover, because she has created a pastiche of different colors and designs for different body parts, she is calling attention to each of those parts and highlighting her nakedness. If anyone is to understand the individual paintings on Picasso's body, s/he must study closely the particular area of the body where the image appears.

In producing this postmodern text, Picasso offers her family an alternative way of reading, a postmodern perspective on both body and space. She gives them a surface that is transparent—her nakedness is obvious underneath the text—in the hopes that they can learn to read spaces like the

parlor in the same way. She wants them to detect the physicality that the parlor's rhetoric is attempting to cover. Despite her efforts, however, the family does not embrace a new interpretation of space or of Picasso herself. Neither do they become more spatially literate. Picasso liberates herself, but her family can only revert to their former interpretation of her: Picasso is mad, and her first commitment to the asylum has not reconditioned her well enough to fit back into the orderly space of their genteel existence. By returning to their earlier categorization of Picasso as mad, they do not have to accept her behavior as an indictment of themselves or the lies they have constructed in the parlor.

In drawing the parlor as a crucial site of contestation, Winterson effectively calls attention to the ways that domestic spaces can be used to consolidate male power over women like Picasso. The Hamiltons' parlor can be categorized in the group identified by David Sibley as "strongly classified spaces" (115). Drawing from the work of Basil Bernstein, Sibley argues that "Strongly classified spaces have clear boundaries, their internal homogeneity and order are valued and there is, in consequence, a concern with

boundary maintenance in order to keep out objects or people who do not fit the classification" (115). By rigidly enforcing such a space, those who create it are consolidating their power. A threat to a strongly classified space can "lead to internal cleansing, an urge to expel anyone who appears not to represent collective values" (Sibley 115). Picasso rejects the way the space of the parlor has been written and classified and instead reads what underlies the space: everything that must be covered or expelled in order to preserve power. She is consequently expelled from the space, but that very act of expulsion reveals the gap in the power. The dependence on homogeneity is the weak point in the parlor's rhetoric. When the homogeneity is disrupted, the power of the rhetoric falters.

Through Picasso's acute interpretation of the parlor and her rejection of that text, Winterson reveals the power inherent in disorder. Mary Douglas argues, "disorder by implication is unlimited, no pattern has been realised in it, but its potential for patterning is indefinite" (95). She further contends that "though we seek to create order, we do not simply condemn disorder. We recognize that it is destructive to existing patterns; also that it has

potentiality. It symbolizes both danger and power" (95).¹³ This power of disorder is evident in Winterson's novel. In laying out an illustration of an oppressive system, Winterson nonetheless does not describe that oppression as absolute. Instead, as several critics have pointed out, Winterson uses the artist figure to challenge oppression. Marian Eide argues that Picasso's art makes passionate expressions about the family's abusiveness. She observes that Picasso "began painting by first coating all her brother's objects and belongings with white paint to indicate the extent to which his trappings and privileges in the family whitewashed the actuality of his violence and domination" (287). In *Art and Lies* and Winterson's other novels, Eide demonstrates how Winterson's innovative use of the Evangelical tradition and Biblical language allows her characters to express passion in ways that emphasize both the joy and the pain of human relations.

Mette Bom maintains that one of Winterson's central arguments in *Art and Lies* is that language must be changed in order for the social system to change. Winterson

¹³ Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* echoes Mary Douglas, as is evident in this passage. According to Elizabeth Grosz, Kristeva's *Powers* relies heavily on Douglas's *Purity and Danger* (Grosz 192).

accomplishes this in part, Bom asserts, by portraying Picasso as an artist-writer who "must . . . create disorder" and disrupt convention (75). Similarly, Cindie Aaen Maagaard argues that Winterson's primary concern in *Art and Lies* is how to resurrect dead language and put it to use to describe individual, subjective experiences of the body and desire. Maagaard sees in the novel Winterson's efforts to ground language in bodily experiences and to imagine the potential of a language more akin to premodern models of language, a language grounded in ethics and responsibility to the other, where the signifier is "made to answer to, and for, what it signifies" (56).

The argument I am making—that Picasso has a high degree of spatial literacy and an ability to challenge spatial texts—follows a thread similar to these arguments. Picasso's skills as a reader allow her to serve as an example of how language can be revised, renewed, to the benefit of those who seek to challenge the social order. By applying this skill to understand how domestic space consolidates male authority and maintains the status quo, she works to expose how the carefully constructed text of the parlor has a material goal of controlling and containing her body. Winterson's interest

in how domestic space affects women, particularly the ones who threaten to disrupt male power, is crucial to her feminist themes. For all of the novel's surrealism, Winterson's focus on domestic space points to her concern about how women live in the material world and how they can react against domestic space when it is organized to control their sexuality.

***Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (Jeanette Winterson, 1985)**

Winterson has shown in *Art and Lies* that the Hamiltons' use of furniture and other decor to inscribe their social status in a public room such as the parlor is a simple proposition, at least in terms of arranging the objects in the room. As we have seen, however, controlling how that inscription is interpreted by women like Picasso is an altogether different undertaking. For families at the other end of the economic scale, like the working class family depicted in Winterson's first novel *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, the keeping of a parlor is a more complicated financial undertaking. Because the main characters live in a terrace house in a working-class neighborhood, their home shares a wall with the neighboring terrace house and the

space within the house is very limited. In fact, there are only two functional rooms downstairs: the kitchen and the parlor.

In her book *Living in a Man-Made World: Gender Assumptions in Modern Housing Design*, Marion Roberts argues that, historically, such housing, called by-law housing because it adhered to the government regulations for housing, reinforced the conservative ideal of the male wage-earner as the economic foundation of the family: the rents on terraced houses were prohibitive for a single, working-class woman. Women's employment outside the home was also discouraged by the location of these developments because they were not built near "places of casual employment" (Roberts 25). Furthermore, covenants prohibiting homeworking made it difficult for a woman to earn money by establishing a business in her house (Roberts 25).

Roberts also argues that gender hierarchies were reinforced by the design of such housing, explaining that kitchens and any other rooms where domestic labor was undertaken were relegated to the back of the house, while the parlor was positioned in the front. This design provided for "a clear division" between two categories of space: the

female space of domestic labor and the male or public space of the house (Roberts 27). Roberts explains that "In symbolic terms . . . an emphasis on formality and order to the public side, combined with meanness and squalor to the private side emphasised the subordination of women to men" (27); nevertheless she also points out that this design "permitted a degree of comfort in permitting a separation between leisure and housework" (28).

It is clear, however, in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, that the dynamic of the family is not the subordination of woman to man but of daughter to mother. Winterson interprets the space of the by-law housing with more subtle complexity than the simple principle of female subordination to men. With a husband who remains submissive and unobtrusive, the mother is the unquestioned authority figure in this household, and through her, Winterson demonstrates that women can overcome the gender biases of housing design and even exploit them to their advantage. By using space to her advantage, Jeanette's mother appropriates power. Unfortunately, though, the power she derives from her skillful use of space is put to work to her daughter's disadvantage. Because she is so aware of how space can be

used, she is able to maintain surveillance over her daughter's sexuality. She is determined to keep her daughter in line with the tenets of Evangelical Christianity, and the close quarters of the house make this surveillance particularly easy. The ultimate effect on Jeanette of her mother's control over the space of her house resembles male efforts to curb female sexuality.

As suggested by the protagonist's name—Jeanette—the novel has a number of autobiographical elements. The *bildungsroman* recounts Jeanette's struggles, from childhood through early adulthood, to reconcile the evangelical tradition she was raised in with her desire to explore possibilities (which range from having a relationship with another woman to pursuing a higher education) excluded by that tradition. Jeanette is the adopted daughter of working class parents. Jeanette's mother strictly adheres to the fundamentalist teachings of her church; she understands the world through inflexible categories of right and wrong. She adopted Jeanette in order to shape her into the perfect missionary to promote her evangelical message. Jeanette embraces this role wholeheartedly until the church discovers she has a sexual relationship with one of her young female

converts. In spite of her protests of her faith and her love of God and the church, the congregation forces her out of their membership and her mother throws her out of their home. Nonetheless, the novel concludes with a tentative reconciliation between mother and daughter after Jeanette has left home to make her way on her own. In telling Jeanette's story, Winterson draws on fairy tales and on the Bible, which provide a running commentary on Jeanette's experiences.¹⁴ Unlike *Art and Lies*, *Oranges* is a roughly linear narrative, a chronological account of Jeanette's life for her first eighteen years, though the chronology is periodically interrupted by passages ranging from fairy tales to commentaries on historiography.

Grier's study of American parlors is useful again when we turn to *Oranges*. Grier argues that not everyone in the Victorian U. S. subscribed to the ideals of parlor culture. There was a tension between what Grier identifies as *culture* (the term she uses to designate gentility, cultivation, and consumption associated with cosmopolitanism) and *comfort* (the term she uses to designate the more conservative valuing of

¹⁴ For a particularly astute reading of Winterson's use of the Ruth story, see Laurel Bollinger's "Models for Female Loyalty: The Biblical Ruth in Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*."

family, domesticity, and moderation) (2). In "City Parlor, Country Sitting Room: Rural Vernacular Design and the American Parlor, 1840-1900," Sally McMurry draws similar conclusions about this tension. Both Grier and McMurry note that a vocal faction of social critics denounced the idea that middle-class families should sacrifice precious domestic space for a room like a parlor that is reserved for formal occasions and not everyday use. In other words, the comforts of the family and the preeminence of domesticity should not be sacrificed in the name of keeping a parlor and the aspiration of being cultured.

This tension between culture and comfort is apparent in Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. With such limited space in their terrace house, the family cannot afford to keep a room for ceremonial/guest use only. They cannot, in other words, use the room exclusively to establish themselves as cultured because their limited space dictates that every room serve a practical, domestic purpose. Nonetheless, there are ways that Jeanette's mother ensures that the parlor is designated as formal on Sundays and on special occasions. One rule, which she enforces strictly, is that the television must be covered on Sundays. To this

purpose, she keeps a cloth decorated with Biblical scenes. She also earnestly battles intrusions from "Next Door." On a Sunday when she arrives home with a fellow church member, she is appalled—though simultaneously titillated—when her neighbors' "fornicating" can be heard through the wall (54). She quickly covers the TV and then rallies her visitor's help. They decide to counter the neighbor's intrusion by playing the piano and singing a hymn.¹⁵

The need to sanctify the parlor, especially when it is being used for formal occasions, is also motivated by the fact that parlors are often the rooms that face the street. They represent the public face that the family presents to the rest of the world. Sally McMurry has pointed out that middle-class American parlors in the second half of the nineteenth century were always legible from the outside of the house: "An individual approaching a town, suburban, or city middle-class residence in the nineteenth century had

¹⁵ Although Jeanette's mother is certainly motivated by her religious convictions in this scene, she also wants to distinguish herself from the neighbors because she considers them to belong to a lower class than she does. The neighbors, originally from a poorer neighborhood, inherited their terrace house. Meanwhile, Jeanette's mother has married down and forfeited some of the privileges and education she enjoyed before her family disowned her. However, as evident in this scene and elsewhere in the novel, she still considers herself above most of the people with whom she has contact.

little doubt about where the parlor was located; he or she could usually 'read' its position quite accurately" (262). Its position was announced by one or more of several clues: the room was built as a wing, or it faced the street or it was marked by a bay window (McMurry 262). McMurry's observations echo Marion Roberts' point about British by-law housing being designed to provide "a clear division" of categories of space with the kitchen in the back and parlor in the front (27). Like American parlors, the parlors of these by-law houses provided visual clues as to what they were. The moldings and fireplaces were more elaborate, there was more architectural embellishment on the front of the house, and there might also be a bay window (Roberts 26-27).

Parlors in Oranges/Oranges in Parlors

My mother got up early on Sundays and allowed no one in the parlour until ten o'clock. It was her place of prayer and meditation. (Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit 4)

When the parlor in *Oranges* is dressed for formal occasions, its function is similar to the function of the Hamiltons' parlor. The mother in *Oranges* uses the parlor to

preserve her family's dignity, reputation, and holiness.¹⁶ Privately she uses it for prayers on Sunday morning, when she will not admit other household members into the room. The parlor's formality depends on how it is altered for the formal occasions, so consequently it is not a very stable text, much less stable than, for example, the text of the Hamilton's parlor. The cloth that covers the television, for example, does not trick anyone into believing the television is no longer there. In fact, the mother occasionally catches her husband, having uncovered the television, watching wrestling on Sunday afternoons. From the wrestling on TV to the noise of the neighbor's fornication, the body is making its presence known in this parlor in spite of efforts to repress its carnality in favor of spirituality. The mother's efforts to stabilize the parlor's formality suggest that she has a relatively high spatial literacy. She understands that space can be used to consolidate power and identity, but she also understands that no matter how carefully she arranges her parlor, unholy objects or actions can sometimes still be

¹⁶ The holiness that the mother in *Oranges* creates and tries to sustain in the parlor is a way of controlling the family similar to the one that Lady Hamilton uses when she asks her family to go to the parlor. However, the mother in *Oranges* exerts power over the family much more intentionally and methodically than Lady Hamilton does.

detected in the room. Her awareness of the ways the parlor's rhetoric can be destabilized makes her more vigilant.

Winterson's novel shows how this high level of spatial literacy makes the mother's power over the space of the house very threatening to Jeanette as she begins to mature sexually.

Jeanette herself is also very spatially literate, as Winterson indicates in several ways. The novel is primarily told from her point of view, giving readers an opportunity to assess her critical abilities. The very fact that she describes her mother's fight to keep the unholy intrusions out of the parlor at least suggests that Jeanette understands the significance of her mother's actions. Jeanette also endeavors to formulate theories about her environment and how categories of space affect people. This is apparent when she speculates about why her teachers become upset when she promotes her Evangelism at school. When a sampler she creates with a religious theme becomes a point of contention between Jeanette and her teacher, she reflects on her needlepoint teacher's distaste for the sampler:

She [the needlepoint teacher] recognized things according to expectation and environment. If you were in a particular place, you expected to see

particular things. . . . What constitutes a problem is not the thing, or the environment where we find the thing, but the conjunction of the two; something unexpected in a usual place (our favourite aunt in our favourite poker parlour) or something usual in an unexpected place (our favourite poker in our favourite aunt). (45)

With echoes of Mary Douglas's point about categories of space and how out-of-place objects are disruptive to a given space, Jeanette's reflection here helps her to accept the fact that her teacher dislikes her sampler. As she considers how spaces are texts that influence the way people think and behave, Jeanette decides that her teacher, "suffered from a problem of vision" in her inability to read the space/context of the school with more flexibility (46). Like Lady Hamilton in *Art and Lies*, the needlepoint teacher in *Oranges* reads space literally and rejects any challenges to spatial texts.

Winterson makes it clear that Jeanette's spatial literacy serves her particularly well once she reaches adolescence and begins to see life differently from the way her mother sees it. As her mother continues to try to stabilize the spatial texts she has created in their home, Jeanette becomes more interested in the ways that spatial texts can become destabilized. In fact, she overturns the

formality expected of guests when she has sex in the house of a fellow parishioner, Elsie.

As an important figure in her childhood, Elsie offers friendship to Jeanette and recognizes her as an individual with her own will, whereas Jeanette's mother always understands her as an instrument of God's (and, of course, the mother's own) will. Unlike her mother, who listens to her only to assess how her religious education is progressing, Elsie has conversations with Jeanette; she acknowledges her ideas and ponders her questions instead of simply feeding her religious dogma. Elsie becomes a substitute mother, staying with the young Jeanette as she recovers from an operation on her adenoids, while her mother is too preoccupied with her church duties to pay more than cursory visits to the hospital. When Jeanette is released from the hospital, she stays with Elsie for a few days until her mother returns from a church trip. Elsie celebrates Jeanette's recovery with a surprise, which she presents to Jeanette in the parlor. The whimsical gift is a model of a biblical scene with three mice playing the parts of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. This scene shows Elsie's parlor as a

warm and welcoming space, where Jeanette feels protected and loved.

Elsie's house, a small terrace house similar to Jeanette's, expresses her personality and is another reason Jeanette is drawn to her. The young Jeanette explains, "I liked her [Elsie] a lot because she had interesting things in her house" (23), including a pedal organ, a collection of foreign coins, and a collage of Noah's ark with a detachable chimpanzee that Jeanette is allowed to play with at the end of her visits. Perhaps most importantly, Elsie frames the sampler Jeanette makes in school and proudly hangs it in her home in her front room, that is, in her parlor. This action helps Jeanette formulate her understanding of how space creates a rhetorical context: "I knew that my sampler was absolutely right in Elsie Norris's front room, but absolutely wrong in Mrs. Virtue's sewing class" (45). By displaying Jeanette's needlework on her wall, Elsie creates a rhetoric of the parlor that is markedly different from the one Jeanette's mother creates. Elsie welcomes informality in the parlor, from the whimsical cage in which mice play Biblical characters to the needlework of a child. Elsie's house, therefore, is a space where Jeanette feels that she can be

herself, and as she grows older it becomes a place where she feels comfortable exploring her sexuality.

Jeanette and her girlfriend, Melanie, often spend the night at Elsie's. Because they are guests, their sexual encounters there are in effect publicized, but because Elsie goes to bed and leaves them to their own devices, the girls enjoy a certain degree of privacy. Jeanette's action conflates the public/private binary. By using Elsie's house as a place where she has sex, Jeanette is revealing her desire to publicize her sexuality to Elsie. Jeanette hopes to find the approval here that she cannot seek in her own home, though she pretends to believe that Elsie has no clear idea of what she and Melanie do when they spend the night. Elsie plays along with this charade of ignorance, though Winterson later reveals that Elsie is protecting the girls from discovery by other church members. On mornings, Elsie brings the girls coffee: "'Whatever did you talk about?' she [Elsie] scolded, as we yawned and fumbled our way through breakfast. 'Still, I was the same'" (101-102). These exchanges indicate Jeanette's attempt to announce her sexuality to Elsie. Taking her cue from Elsie, who shows her that formal spaces like the parlor can admit whimsy, Jeanette

herself acts informally by having sex in a space where she is considered a guest. If Elsie's parlor can provide the right context for the sampler that her teacher has disparaged, Jeanette's logic goes, then Elsie's house can also provide a context for the sexuality that her mother condemns.

Given how attentively Jeanette's mother works to stabilize her own parlor as a space that reflects her holiness and culture to guests in her home, it is not surprising that the congregation chooses the parlor as the room where they confront Jeanette about her "demons" after learning about her relationship with Melanie. During a Sunday church service, Jeanette refuses to repent of her relationship with Melanie. She leaves the church and takes refuge for one night with a woman who sympathizes with her situation. The next morning as she tries to collect her things from her home and go to school, the church members grab her, detain her, and try once again to exact repentance from her. The day before the confrontation at the church, Jeanette has already caught a hint of events to come. The clue comes from her mother, who has been vigorously cleaning the parlor. Jeanette overhears her mother boasting, "You could keep a coffin in here [the parlor] without feeling

guilty, not a speck of dust anywhere" (99). She also notices that her mother has changed the seat covers to the best ones they own and polished the brass. Jeanette understands that the ritual cleaning of the parlor foretells some important event, though she is initially ignorant as to what the event might be. Her mother is sanctifying the space, dressing it for a formal occasion so that the space is ordered and its text is monolithic. The resulting conformity within the space parallels the social conformity she wants to enforce in Jeanette.

This episode can be more fully understood if we momentarily return to another scene in the novel. The scene, described earlier, recounts how the mother and a fellow parishioner respond to the sounds of the neighbors' fornication by singing hymns. It is important to note that Winterson chooses this scene to open the chapter she has entitled "Leviticus." The Biblical chapter of Leviticus contains verses often cited as a prohibition against homosexuality. But Winterson's allusion to Leviticus is also important when read in the context of Mary Douglas's analysis of Leviticus' treatment of homogeneity. Douglas's interpretation of the dietary rules laid out in Leviticus

helps explain what Winterson accomplishes through the character of the mother. There is a discernible logic to the dietary rules in *Leviticus*, Douglas argues, although many analysts have interpreted them as arbitrary. Douglas points out that the animals deemed appropriate for eating are the ones that fit unquestionably into a classification system, whereas animals that appear to be hybrids of two classes are considered unclean. For example, pigs are not ruminant, and they are not cloven-footed. They are considered unholy for consumption because they do not fit very precisely into the same category as cattle (who are ruminant and are not cloven-footed) nor into any other category of animals (Douglas 56). By adhering to these laws, the devout would avoid any ambiguity they encountered in the world. Douglas concludes that "the dietary laws would have been like signs which at every turn inspired meditation on the oneness, purity and completeness of God" (58).

It is a similar type of purity, one that is based on clear categories of people's roles in her world, that prompts the mother in Winterson's novel to strive for a monolithic text within the space of the parlor. As a fundamentalist, she reads texts literally. Like the devout who follow the

dietary rules laid out in Leviticus, Winterson's character strives for "oneness, purity and completeness" in her home, whereas her daughter is more likely to find more than one meaning in the text of their house.

When the congregation seizes Jeanette in order to pray over her and exact her repentance, they drag her into the parlor of her own home, recently cleaned and ordered by her mother. Under the pastor's direction, they begin to pray over Jeanette and continue for more than twelve hours, laying hands on her and demanding that she renounce her relationship with Melanie. During this confrontation, Jeanette notices a temporary lapse in her mother's control of the space of the parlor. Dirty teacups begin piling up as the standoff continues. One of the church members cuts herself when she accidentally sits on a cup. Still, her mother continues to make tea without washing the cups that have been used. The building up of clutter within the room is emblematic of the power struggle taking place between Jeanette and the congregation. The sanctified, ordered space is disintegrating into disarray, indicating that Winterson is zeroing in on the parlor as a crucial site of contestation between the two ideologies set forth in her novel.

Since prayers fail to break Jeanette's will, the congregation decides to lock her in the parlor. The pastor advises Jeanette's mother to refuse to give her food until she gives in. The parlor, with its a text of conformity and social restraint, becomes a literal prison. As she is suffering through the ordeal, Jeanette begins to see her orange demon, a hallucination that appears to her when she faces crises. To conjure it up in the parlor shows a certain amount of irreverence on Jeanette's part since the demon is usually an advocate of lesbianism. Just after it appears, the demon jumps up and sits on the brass crocodile nutcracker that adorns the mantelpiece. Jeanette discusses her options with the demon and then wanders to the window to ruminate over her dilemma. She returns to the mantelpiece and notices that the demon is polishing the crocodile with his handkerchief.

Since it is an emanation of her unconscious, the way the demon inhabits the space of the parlor deserves some attention. The demon's choice of perches is important. The brass crocodile is a gift to Jeanette's mother from Pastor Spratt, the man who drew her into the church during a crusade. His sexual charisma played no small role in the

conversion. Jeanette's mother describes him as resembling "Errol Flynn, but holy," and she points out that "A lot of women found the Lord that week" (8). Jeanette's mother takes delight and pride in this gift and others she has received from Pastor Spratt.

When Jeanette's orange demon sits on the crocodile and polishes it, it is a highly charged moment. Through her demon, Jeanette is zeroing in on the irony of the space of the room. Ostensibly, the parlor is the holiest room in the house, a room devoted to spirituality rather than physicality—particularly when it is cleaned and ordered. The holiness that Jeanette's mother fosters in the parlor is in keeping with her rejection of the flesh. She carries this rejection to the extreme of adopting, rather than bearing, a daughter. She even resents the Virgin Mary for beating her to the immaculate conception.¹⁷ Nonetheless, she is certainly vulnerable to temptations of the flesh, as is evident in her attraction to Pastor Spratt. His gift to her,

¹⁷ In "Inverted Conversions: Reading the Bible and Writing the Lesbian Subject in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*," Amy Benson Brown draws an insightful comparison between Jeanette's demon and her mother's demon. As Brown points out, in one version of the story of Jeanette's adoption, she is described as springing from her mother's head, just as Sin sprang from Satan's head. The mother, Brown argues, creates her own demon in adopting Jeanette. Her fable of Jeanette's birth anticipates the demon that Jeanette later creates for herself (237).

a crocodile, is a phallic image, and the demon's action of polishing it is sexually suggestive. The action calls attention to the mother's sexuality, which she has not quite completely repressed and which she has perhaps even sublimated into the act of cleaning and polishing. Furthermore the crocodile evokes hypocrisy, as in the phrase *crocodile tears*.

The demon's action also calls attention to an irony in the way power is wielded in the house. The caress suggests an enthrallment with the phallus and male power. Jeanette's family home is clearly dominated by her mother, a very strong woman. As Susan Rubin Suleiman has aptly noted, however, her power derives from men:

Surrounded and sustained by women friends and totally dominating her husband, the mother is nevertheless in thrall to male authority figures: God, and his earthly representatives, a few fundamentalist pastors. Fortunately for her, these authorities are quite distant, which allows her to wield considerable local power while disclaiming it. (Suleiman 137-138)

In fact, at a critical moment later in the novel, when the church is divesting Jeanette of most of her authority in the church, the mother sides with the pastor when he argues that women should not be allowed to preach in the church.

Jeanette is able to zero in on the irony of her mother's power by conjuring her orange demon, and she consequently is able to withstand the thirty-six hours she is held prisoner in the parlor. Rallying behind the pastor and his recommendations, the mother and the rest of the congregation have attempted to consolidate their power and dictate Jeanette's social role by using the parlor as a prison. Jeanette's ability to perceive the ironies within the parlor keeps her from succumbing to the congregation's power. She also finds it easier to implement her own form of self-preserving irony. She publicly repents for her actions, while she privately holds on to her love for Melanie.

As in *Art and Lies*, Winterson calls attention to the parlor as the site of an important power struggle. But in *Oranges*, the struggle is both less and more. The physical and emotional abuse that Picasso suffers at the hands of her family is more extreme and immediate than the sexual oppression and social ostracism that Jeanette faces. Jeanette's situation is a little less dire in terms of immediate physical danger, but her struggle is more acute because her mother has a level of spatial literacy that is almost as well developed as her own. Conjuring a demon in

the parlor to sit on a crocodile and polish it is more subtle than running naked into a parlor full of family members on a Sunday morning. Jeanette's rebelliousness is carried out in increments and is more calculated, while Picasso's is driven by the emotional urgency she feels when she reaches a breaking point.¹⁸ But both characters drive home Winterson's point. The text of the parlor speaks volumes about the sexual order that is being imposed within a household. If she has the ability to understand the spatial text of a room, a young woman can identify the ironies within the room. These ironies can empower her to disrupt the sexual order, if

¹⁸ Elsewhere, Winterson creates female characters who wield even more dramatic power over space. In *Sexing the Cherry*, Dog-Woman's enormous size and strength make her a formidable woman, who is not intimidated by the rhetoric of space, and will go anywhere she pleases, uninvited. She lives in a hut that she built herself, and when her son Jordan is invited to assist the King's gardener, she ignores the protests of the gardener who says she need not accompany Jordan to Wimbledon. On a three-day journey by foot, she carries all of their belongings in a bundle so heavy it flattens the gardener when he tries to help her and unabashedly brings along her thirty dogs to the King's garden, where she builds a new hut. Also in that novel, Winterson revises the tale of the twelve dancing princesses: each princess leaves the house where she is taken by her husband, and eleven of them live together in a new house, many of them with new lovers. The twelfth princess, Fortunata, establishes a magical dancing school in a remote location. In *The Passion*, Villanelle invests some of the fortune she inherits from her husband in a house across the canal from the home of the woman she loves. When Villanelle learns that the woman's husband— who is following a map he believes will lead him to the holy grail—may yet return, she realizes she will never get a commitment from the woman. She closes up her newly bought house, never returning to it. Although Villanelle has the power to purchase a house and use that space as she pleases, she also feels no need to be rooted in one spot. Winterson depicts her as free of the power of domestic space.

only temporarily.

***The Magic Toyshop* (Angela Carter, 1967)**

In turning our attention now to Angela Carter, we find characters who are at the extreme ends on the continuum of spatial literacy. While the two characters from Winterson are highly literate when it comes to space, Carter's Melanie, in *The Magic Toyshop*, is all but spatially illiterate; and Fevvers, in *Nights at the Circus*, not only reads space proficiently, but also actively participates in writing spatial texts. Carter's *The Magic Toyshop* is the story of Melanie, who enjoys fifteen years of middle class comfort until she and her siblings are orphaned and forced to take up residence with their Uncle Philip and his family: his wife Margaret, who fell mute the day she married Philip, and Margaret's two brothers, Finn and Francie. With this move, Melanie joins the working class and has to re-assess her middle-class values. Carter's allusions in the novel signal several key texts she is revising, including *Alice in Wonderland*, Genesis, and Freud's essays on female sexuality.

When the novel opens, Melanie is living in a spacious Edwardian country house with her two siblings, Jonathan and

Victoria, and her nanny, Mrs. Rundle, who is caring for the three children while their parents are abroad. Their father, a writer, is on a lecture tour in the United States, and their mother has accompanied him on this tour. This particular summer is an exciting time for Melanie, who is discovering and reveling in her newly developed body. Because her father has done so well as a writer, Melanie has her own bedroom and bathroom, and she exploits the advantage afforded by this privacy. When she is not helping Mrs. Rundle with the care of her younger siblings, Melanie's favorite activity takes place behind the locked door of her bedroom, where she stands naked in front of her full-length mirror, marveling at herself. The hours she spends exploring her new womanhood are described by Carter in very positive terms:¹⁹

she would follow with her finger the elegant structure of her rib cage, where the heart fluttered under the flesh like a bird under a blanket, and she would draw down the long line from breastbone to navel (which was a mysterious cavern or grotto), and she would rasp her palms against her bud-wing shoulderblades. And then she would writhe about, clasping herself, laughing,

¹⁹ Other scenes depict Melanie posing as women from famous paintings by men. Critics like Jean Wyatt have interpreted those scenes as Melanie's willing participation in voyeurism. While the point is well taken, it overlooks the passage I quote, where Melanie revels in herself without any mediation by male artists.

sometimes doing cartwheels and handstands out of sheer exhilaration at the supple surprise of herself now she was no longer a little girl. (1)

Protected by wealth and free from male tyranny, Melanie enjoys a privileged and happy childhood.

When her parents are killed in a plane crash, however, Melanie loses her room and with it her autonomy. Her father, assuming he could always write a new novel, has saved no money. The house and all of its furnishings must therefore be sold, and Melanie and her siblings become completely dependent on their uncle, Philip Flowers. They go to live with Philip and his family in the rooms above the toyshop that he owns. Melanie is disillusioned by the poverty in which her relatives live and by the filth and unpleasantness that result from it. She must sacrifice her privacy since here she must share a room with her younger sister. She also is subject to the control of her uncle, who maintains a tyrannical rule over his family.

Carter's novel reaches a crisis when Philip enlists Melanie to play Leda opposite his swan, which is a life-sized puppet constructed and operated by Philip himself. During the performance when she is forced to act out Leda's mythical rape, Melanie comes apart emotionally because the scene is

almost as traumatic as an actual rape. Later that night, Finn destroys the swan in an act of rebellion against Philip. The next morning, since Philip leaves early and does not discover what Finn has done, the family decides to celebrate a day of freedom, disregarding Philip's rules of the house. Melanie learns that Francie and Margaret have an incestuous relationship, and when Philip returns home, he catches his wife and her brother together. In his fury, Philip vows to kill everyone and sets fire to the house. Carter ends the novel with Melanie and Finn's escape from the burning house, though the fate of the other characters is left unresolved. Also unresolved is the future of Melanie and Finn's relationship. Although she is not yet sixteen, Melanie has begun to feel like a union with Finn has become inevitable.

Parlor Plays

His silence had bulk, a height and a weight. It reached from here to the sky. It filled the [dining] room. He was heavy as Saturn. She ate at the same table as this elemental silence which could crush you to nothing. (The Magic Toyshop 168)

Melanie's new home is a shop owner's dwelling. At street level is the toyshop, which provides the economic

support for the family. There is a small parlor behind the shop, but this room is less interesting for my study than a few other formal rooms in the house, the dining room and the theatre in Philip's workshop. Even though the family never receives guests, they are required to behave as though they were formal guests in these two rooms. In his workshop, with the help of his apprentice Finn, Philip designs and builds the toys he sells as well as his private collection of life-sized puppets. The room is off limits for other household members unless they are explicitly given permission to enter. Philip has built a stage in the room, where he presents his puppet performances. During his dramas, he not only manipulates the strings of his wooden creations, but also exerts considerable control over his audience, who clap enthusiastically for fear of the repercussions of not applauding the master's efforts. The toyshop and workshop are not only the literal foundation for the family's living quarters above, but they also provide a space where Philip can consolidate his power.

The floors above the basement and street levels include a dining room and kitchen and above that the bedrooms, a bathroom, and an attic on the top level. The dining room is

a formal room where decorum must be observed. The room holds a mahogany table among other pieces of heavy furniture, so many that "There was hardly room to move for large chairs and cupboards" (46). The way the furniture restricts movement is appropriate since one is expected to sit still at meals and not call attention to oneself. Philip presides over these meals, ensuring that everyone properly observes the dignity of the occasion. He requires a formality at meals so rigid as to be stifling. Like the heavy furniture, his dominance over the room discourages unnecessary movement. Although he sits silently, Melanie notices that his silence nonetheless has "bulk, a height and a weight" and "could crush you to nothing" (168).

What is most striking about Melanie, when we compare her to the two Winterson protagonists, is her naïveté. She is relatively oblivious to the rhetoric laid out in the rooms of Philip's house until she is given help in reading those spaces. Protected by the middle-class comfort of her childhood, Melanie is shocked on her first morning in her uncle's house to discover there is only one dirty bathroom, with a toilet that does not flush properly and no hot water for a bath. Trying to fend off dismay at her change of

circumstance, she is resolved not to "cry because of the state of their bathroom" (57). Instead, she goes down to the kitchen before anyone else is awake, makes herself some tea, and takes a piece of currant cake from the larder. Finn comes downstairs not much later and begins to teach her how to read Philip's house.

First, she must learn the dress code. Finn notices she is wearing pants and insists that she change into a skirt because Philip "can't abide a woman in trousers. He won't have a woman in the shop if she's got trousers on her and he sees her. He shouts her out into the street for a harlot. Ah, it's dreadful, sometimes" (62). In this house, women can be thrown out if they do not submit to the master's rules. By enforcing his rules even with his customers, Philip demonstrates how emphatically he is homogenizing the space of his house according to his conservative worldview.

When Finn gives Melanie a tour of the toyshop and the workshop below it, she learns more about Philip and his rule of order in the house. In the toyshop, she sees Philip's handiwork. The elaborate mechanical toys make it apparent that Philip is a master craftsman, although, as a naïve reader of space, Melanie does not yet make the connection

between his skill in manipulating objects and his skill in manipulating people. They do not stay long in the shop because Finn wants to take her down to the workshop "before it gets too late" (66). He warns her that if she is to see this room, they must be surreptitious. She is not supposed to enter the room without Philip's knowledge and permission. Although Melanie's visit to the workshop is an illicit act and a defiance of her uncle, it is important to note that she does not act independently. Unlike Winterson's characters, Carter's protagonist breaks the rules of a house at the prompting of a male character instead of on her own volition. Still unaware of the full implications of Philip's power over the household, she is not actively trying to interpret or to disrupt how power is consolidated within the rooms of the house. Accordingly, she is unnerved when she incidentally discovers an indication of Philip's attitude towards women. At one end of Philip's workshop is a theatre and behind its curtains is a crumpled puppet: "Lying face downward in a tangle of strings was a puppet fully five feet high, a *sylphide* in a fountain of white tulle, fallen flat down as if someone had got tired of her in the middle of playing with her, dropped her and wandered off" (67). Disturbed, Melanie

she sees herself in this doll, who is adorned with the same type of diaphanous fabric that Melanie used when she posed in front of her bedroom mirror and who has long, black hair like Melanie's. Indeed, its appearance foreshadows Philip's attempts to turn her into a puppet and force her into the roles he envisions for her.

This is one of the first moments when Melanie reads Philip's rhetoric and perceives how it applies to herself. Unfortunately, though, she surrenders to this rhetoric. Instead of resisting it, she breaks down in tears as she stands in his workshop and considers her fate. A gong calls them away from the room to go to breakfast where she meets her uncle for the first time. Because they are late and because Finn is still wearing his pajamas, Philip slaps him. This violence serves as her introduction to her uncle.

Despite Melanie's fear of her uncle, Carter makes it clear that she still needs help in reading Philip's house, particularly in understanding how to behave in the workshop/theatre when Philip holds one of his regular performances. When she hears that a puppet show has been scheduled, her first reaction is that it will be nice to have a change of pace, until her aunt earnestly warns her of how

important it is to Philip. On the appointed day, the family must deport themselves with the formality of guests. For the performance, the workshop is "extremely tidy" and four "upright chairs from the parlour" have been lined up for the family to sit in (126). Accordingly, everyone dresses in "Sunday trim" and files obediently downstairs, where "They took their seats with some ceremony, arranging their good clothes around them" (126). Clearly, their formal clothing and the "upright chairs" remind the family how they are supposed to carry themselves. Even the dog follows them "with the air of a dog doing his duty" (126). Nonetheless, Melanie still needs to be prompted about how she should respond to Philip's performance. Margaret helps her interpret Philip's expectations during his show. Carter depicts Philip as a skillful puppeteer who extends his control beyond the puppets and into the audience. Margaret dutifully responds to her husband's dramatic vignettes with enthusiastic applause. But she has to nudge Melanie to get her to join in the applause. At the end of the first short piece, when Melanie wonders aloud if the show is over, Margaret hands her a note pleading with her to look like she is enjoying the performance for the sake of herself and Finn,

who is assisting Philip with the puppets. With this prompting, Melanie puts a fake smile on her face.

During the second vignette, Melanie gets another lesson in Philip's power. Finn accidentally entangles his puppet with the one Philip is controlling, eventually ripping the puppet's strings in order to break it free. In revenge, Philip tosses him out of the flies onto the stage, leaving Finn permanently damaged emotionally and physically. Because Philip vows never to allow Finn to touch his puppets, he decides Melanie will have to play opposite a puppet at the next show. This is a pivotal moment in the novel, and it is no coincidence that it takes place in Philip's workshop/theatre. Philip's power within that space is at its highest, and with little resistance from Melanie, he appropriates her for his purposes.

When Melanie becomes Philip's puppet, Carter's metaphor is clear. One critic, Paulina Palmer, has analyzed how Carter's early fiction uses the figure of the puppet to depict a woman's desperate position in an oppressive society. She argues that the puppet is comparable to the coded mannequin, described by Hélène Cixous, "to represent the robotic state to which human beings are reduced by a process

of psychic repression" (Palmer, "From 'Coded Mannequin'" 180). In Philip's household, the idea of reducing women to puppets is carried to an extreme. He not only models his idealized versions of women through his puppets, but he also relishes the ability to direct their every move. By adding Melanie to his cast of puppets, he takes control of her body, commanding its movements through his verbal directions. He teaches her exactly how she should move within the space of his stage, which is a microcosm for the toyshop as a whole.

Completely at the mercy of the master of the house, who holds her fate in his hands, Melanie submits to Philip's will, which includes the scripting of her sexuality. Because she is economically dependent on him, he has the power to throw her out on the streets, so obedience to him is a survival strategy. He plans for her to play Leda as he re-enacts her mythical rape with his life-sized swan puppet. The performance itself symbolizes Philip's sexual dominance over her. In her study of castration in Carter's novels, Jean Wyatt notes, "Carter emphasizes that the closed space of the family doubles as cultural space by superimposing the myth of Leda and the Swan on Melanie's oedipal initiation" (557-58). Like Leda, Melanie discovers that her

"subjectivity is erased as she is inserted into the patriarchal order" (Wyatt 558). Philip's play, in other words, helps to ensure that Melanie's "oedipal stage which transforms an active girl into a passive object is always governed by the needs of a male-dominant social order" (Wyatt 557). Wyatt also comments that Philip's play helps perpetuate "the myths that sustain patriarchy" (558).

It is noteworthy that the play is staged in a room that functions both as a workshop where Philip creates his puppets and as a theatre where the family is required to behave formally. The workshop allows for the production of meaning, while the stage allows for the delivery of that message. The room's formality during the plays encourages Philip's audience to take the message seriously. Like "the closed space of the family," as Wyatt describes it, Philip's stage is a closed, finite frame, within which he can exert full control. His agenda, however, is different from the agendas of Winterson's characters. Wholly concerned with total, paternal dominance, he uses the workshop/theatre to consolidate his power over his family by assigning, for example, a new identity to Melanie.

As Philip's puppet, Melanie must not only listen carefully to the message he is scripting about his dominance over her, but she also must take her place on his stage and participate in the delivery of that message. She is momentarily absorbed into the space where Philip consolidates his power. The experience becomes overwhelming when Philip mounts his swan puppet on top of her to simulate Leda's rape. As with other forms of rape, she begins to lose her sense of identity: "She was hallucinated; she felt herself not herself, wrenched from her own personality" (166). Melanie's acting gives way to real fear, angering Philip, who accuses her of overacting. He slaps her after the scene is over, then praises the swan as if it were human. Even though Melanie is horrified by this experience, she does not react against Philip. She is markedly different from Picasso and Jeanette who react against the messages constructed within the parlors of their homes. Melanie has not developed the necessary sophistication to perceive where the gaps in Philip's power might be located or how she might challenge him through acts of subversion in the workshop/theatre. She lacks the experience in interpreting spatial texts that Winterson's characters have developed after years of studying

how their homes are designed to contain their sexuality. Melanie's childhood home was never as threatening to her as Philip's workshop is, so she is repeatedly surprised when space is so effectively organized against her.

Carter writes her protagonist as a passive character and assigns active rebellion to a male character, Finn. Prompted by Melanie's mistreatment, Finn finally rebels against Philip by destroying the most powerful prop Philip uses to subdue Melanie: Finn destroys the swan.²⁰ The power of Philip's workshop/theatre, then, is not absolute. By destroying the swan, Finn posits a different interpretation of masculinity, one that gestures toward a more equal relationship between man and woman. The destruction of the swan challenges the meaning of Philip's stage. Finn's rebelliousness is akin to Picasso's when she destroys the clock in the parlor. Both characters destroy a prop that represents male sexual privilege.

²⁰ By destroying the swan, Jean Wyatt maintains, Finn is symbolically castrating himself. After Finn chops up the swan, he conceals it under his raincoat to take it out and bury it. But pieces of it, including its rubber neck, keep popping out from under his coat, so he looks like he's exposing himself. Wyatt writes, "It is from his own body that the false 'phallus' pokes out, so in chopping it off Finn refuses the masquerade of masculinity: he acknowledges his own castration" and consequently "subverts the power relations of patriarchy" (562).

By contrast, Melanie is not yet empowered to take such a dramatic action, in part because she has not reached a level of spatial literacy that helps her understand where and how to strike against Philip's rhetoric. Without Finn there to take the lead, Melanie never participates in an act of rebellion. She depends on both Finn and Margaret to help her understand the house and how to behave in that space so as to avoid Philip's wrath. Melanie's naïveté throws into relief the high degree of spatial literacy held by the other characters discussed in this chapter. At the mercy of the men in her household, she is only saved from total objectification because one of those men refuses to participate in the rhetoric of male dominance. Melanie serves as an important point of reference that shows us that a young woman's degree of spatial literacy can make the difference between becoming objectified and achieving subjectivity. A character who reads space with sophistication is more active. Her desire to understand the implications of spatial rhetoric is the beginning of agency because it allows her to consider, and sometimes to confront, social prescriptions for people's behavior as well as the power structure those prescriptions are meant to enable.

Meanwhile, characters like Melanie face dire consequences by remaining passive objects of spatial rhetoric. Carter's *The Magic Toyshop* illustrates how a young woman, if she is not vigilant, can allow someone else's carefully written script to obscure her own image of herself.

***Nights at the Circus* (Angela Carter, 1984)**

For *Nights at the Circus*, Carter creates one of her most exuberant female characters in Fevvers, a winged woman who has won fame and fortune with her gravity-defying trapeze act.²¹ Fevvers has achieved emotional, economic, and sexual independence from men. By equipping this independent woman with wings, Carter represents Fevvers as a physiological anomaly, which is also a metaphor for Fevvers as a social anomaly, a new kind of woman. Her wings are also important, as Ricarda Schmidt points out, because they prevent Fevvers from being reduced to a passive object of men's gaze. Schmidt writes, "her wings ensure that she herself constitutes a formidable subject which others must react to" (68).

²¹ The name *Fevvers* is a corruption of *feathers*. In her infancy, Fevvers' anatomy was distinguished by a fuzziness around her shoulder blades that later developed into full-blown wings.

The novel opens with Fevvers and her foster mother telling the extraordinary story of Fevvers' childhood to an American reporter, Jack Walser, who hopes to expose Fevvers and her trapeze act as fraudulent. Fevvers tells Walser how she was raised in a whorehouse by her foster mother, Lizzie, who was the housekeeper for the madam and her prostitutes. Carter gives this whorehouse a feminist spin, portraying it as a tight-knit community of talented young women who study art, literature, music, as well as political philosophy during their free time. In fact, one point that Fevvers insists upon to Walser is that she is not ashamed of this upbringing in "Nelson's Academy" and that the women of the house were not exploited. When Walser comments that he has known whores fine enough to marry, Lizzie is indignant. She contends that marriage itself is a form of "prostitution to one man instead of many" (*Nights* 21), echoing a similar statement that Carter makes in her analysis of pornography, *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography*. In that book, Carter argues that prostitutes, unlike wives, are at least paid for their services with outright cash (9).

As she narrates her story to Walser, Fevvers points out that she herself never entered the profession. Instead, she

posed as a statue in the foyer of the drawing room where the women of the house met the men each evening. She was Cupid during her prepubescent years and the Winged Victory after her breasts began developing. Fevvers describes to Walser how she first learned to fly. He also hears about her early adulthood and the fame she won because of her wings. The end of Walser's interview with Fevvers closes out the first section of the novel. Carter continues with a section about Fevvers' adventures in Petersburg where she headlines in a traveling circus. Walser himself follows her, posing as a clown in the circus, still hoping to expose her as a fake. Walser's cover is blown after he is attacked by an escaped tiger. Fevvers herself narrowly escapes being captured by a wealthy Russian duke, who wants to add her to his collection of rare and precious objects.

In the third section, as the circus makes its way by train across Siberia, they are derailed by a group of convicts, who take most of the circus captive. Walser, having been overlooked by the convicts, begins wandering through the woods. An attack of amnesia causes him to lose not only his memory, but his ability to speak as well. Eventually, he is taken under the protection of a Siberian

shaman who makes him an apprentice and gives him hallucinogens. He emerges from the adventure as a more introspective and open-minded man. Meanwhile, Fevvers herself undergoes a series of trials. She loses the dagger she always carried as a good luck charm and as a weapon of defense, and she breaks one of her wings and must deal with this temporary disability.

By the time that Walser and Fevvers are reunited—and they have in the meantime fallen in love—they bring to the union new ideas about themselves and consequently about marriage and love. They consummate their relationship in the shaman's hut at midnight of New Year's Eve in 1899. Carter's ending suggests that they usher in the new century with a new concept of sexual relations between men and women.²² The implication is that they have balanced the power between man and woman so they can have a relationship based on mutual respect.

²² The novel does not entirely ignore homosexuality. A subplot tells of a young German woman who escapes a life of abuse by various men and finds love with the woman who trains and performs with the tigers. Another subplot describes a group of women prisoners who orchestrate an escape and decide to try to create an idealized community by establishing a separatist colony.

In the Drawing Room

So, with my wreath of roses, my baby bow of smouldering guilt and my arrows of unfledged desire, it was my job to sit in the alcove of the drawing-room in which the ladies introduced themselves to the gentlemen. Cupid, I was. (Nights at the Circus 23)

In *Nights*, Carter describes a number of intriguing houses and other structures. At least two are notable for my study of parlors and formal rooms: the whorehouse where Fevvers grows up and the palatial home of a Russian Grand Duke. Fevvers describes her childhood home, where Ma Nelson oversaw the community of prostitutes, as "one of those old, square, red-brick houses with a plain façade and a graceful, scallop-shaped fanlight over the front door that you may still find in those parts of London so far from the tide of fashion that they were never swept away" (25). She comments that it was built by the Age of Reason and that it remained, after that age was over, "like the germ of sense left in a drunkard's mind" (26). She characterizes it "a place in which rational desires might be rationally gratified" (26). This particular perspective on the house is the one she offers to Walser as she relates her childhood to him. Carter makes it clear that Fevvers and Lizzie are trying to maintain

as much control over the narrative as possible. Their opinions about prostitution influence the way they portray Ma Nelson's house, namely that the prostitutes are pragmatists who capitalize on the marketability of their sexualities.

Regardless of their efforts to influence Walser, Fevvers is initially unable "to interpret his shorthand" when she watches him recording her story in his notebook (21). Hoping to expose Fevvers as a fraud, Walser rewrites her words in his own language. Fevvers and Lizzie nonetheless put on a mesmerizing performance, recounting several fantastic adventures from their past. It soon becomes apparent that Walser is having problems translating their magical tale into his rational prose, and he soon finds himself hypnotized by Fevvers eyes, "as if each one opened into a world into a world into a world, an infinite plurality of worlds" (30). Carter clearly shows Fevvers pulling Walser into the narrative world she is constructing. Brian Finney has argued that *Nights* is a metanarrative and that Fevvers' success as a narrator points to one of Carter's most important themes: through narrative one is able to construct an identity for oneself. According to Finney, "*Nights at the Circus* takes as its subject the hypnotic power of narrative, the ways in

which we construct ourselves and our world by narrative means" (161). Carter's novel illustrates narrative's potential to change a person in very positive ways: "We remake ourselves by retelling our stories about ourselves better" (Finney 171). In other words, Carter suggests in *Nights* that skillful narrative is a form of agency.

Carter also shows that Fevvers' mastery of narrative reaches beyond storytelling. Within the "rational" house of her childhood, Fevvers develops her spatial literacy by undergoing a sort of apprenticeship of space. As Fevvers relates her childhood to Walser, she describes the drawing room where the women of the house introduced themselves to their customers. The room has several distinctly feminine qualities to it. The mantelpiece is held up by "A brace of buxom, smiling goddesses" (26), and every afternoon Lizzie would light a fragrant fire, making the fireplace "our very own domestic temple to Vesta," the Roman goddess of hearth and home (26). At the same time, Ma Nelson gives it the masculine air of a gentleman's club. She furnishes it richly with leather armchairs, dark red damask on the walls, lavishly framed oil paintings depicting scenes from mythology, and ironed copies of *The Times*. A grand marble

staircase, with a "flourish . . . like a whore's bum" (26), leads down into the room. As a child, Fevvers would slide down the marble banister, but only, she explains to Walser, before the clients arrive "because nothing put off respectable patrons like those whom Nelson preferred so much as the sight of a child in a whorehouse" (26).

Carter shows Fevvers making an important distinction here. Even as a child, Fevvers was learning to interpret the rhetoric of the drawing room. Its formality served the purpose of attracting respectable clientele and encouraging them to behave respectably when they visited the whorehouse. But Fevvers also understood that she did not have to submit to the room's formality when the clients were not there. Once business hours started, she would take up her role as statue and contribute to the atmosphere Ma Nelson was creating for the room. As with the parlor in *Oranges*, which Winterson describes as taking on greater formality during designated times (Sundays or when guests are there), Ma Nelson's drawing room is comfortable and informal for household members during the day, but it is presented strictly as a cultured space once the clients arrive.

By posing as Cupid and later as Winged Victory, Fevvers tells Walser, she earned her keep in the house. Several critics view Fevvers' statue-posing as problematic. Mary Russo, for one, includes it among the many "meretricious spectacles" that Fevvers performs throughout her life (137). Russo sees the Winged Victory as Fevvers' "static performance of her femininity" (141). Even though she describes the original statue as "magnificent" and "deservedly famous for its activation of the space around it" (141), Russo also points out that during the late nineteenth century, miniatures of the statue were commonplace, so the original, imposing, eight-foot statue is reduced to "Victorian bric-a-brac" (142). Consequently, Russo reads Fevvers' pose as representative of woman as commodity (142). Of course, since Carter argues that prostitutes engage in more straightforward economic transactions than wives do, the idea that Fevvers poses as a commodity might be in keeping with Ma Nelson's intentions. The customers are there to make a transaction. Women's bodies are the commodities being offered on loan for a night.

In contrast to Russo's reading, Sally Robinson interprets Fevvers' actions as subversive. Robinson draws on

Joan Riviere's concept of masquerade, particularly as it is used by Mary Ann Doane.²³ When women self-consciously re-enact traditional feminine gender roles, according to Doane, they are using the strategy of masquerade, and this strategy has subversive potential (qtd. in Robinson 118). Robinson also quotes Russo herself, who has written that "To put on femininity with a vengeance suggests the power of taking it off" (Robinson 120). Masquerade, as Robinson explains, "denaturalizes gender," and a woman who uses masquerade has agency because she is the creator of her self-representation (121). Robinson takes Doane's concept of masquerade a step further by claiming that in performing masquerade, a woman is also a spectator to herself "at least metaphorically, if not literally" (121). Carter's protagonist, then, "is both spectacle and spectator" (Robinson 122). To illustrate her point, Robinson points to the episode where Fevvers poses as Cupid: "Her winged body represents an exaggerated difference,

²³ Russo also cites Mary Ann Doane, but she argues that Fevvers' "pose reveals the constraints of the masquerade of femininity" (142). She writes, "The compromised circumstances of her pose within the topography of the 'house' (already a mock family space, headed by a Madame) contributes further to the irony of the *tableau*" (142).

and she plays it to the hilt, flaunting her 'freakish' femininity" (123).²⁴

Like Robinson's, my analysis also offers an alternative to Russo's interpretation. I contend that Fevvers derives several important benefits from posing as a statue. She understands the experience as an educational opportunity, referring to it as an "apprenticeship in *being looked at*—at being the object of the eye of the beholder" (23; Carter's emphasis). In learning how to be looked at, Fevvers also learned how to exploit the male gaze to her advantage. She later uses her stage presence to win fame and fortune as the headliner of the circus. While she posed as a statue, she herself became a part of the text of the drawing room. She learned not only how to interpret space as text, but also how to write a spatial text. Because of the "feathery buds" on her back, Fevvers is first enlisted to pose as Cupid. She describes herself to Walser as "the painted, gilded *sign* of love" (23; Carter's emphasis). Her phrasing suggests a self-consciousness about the performance, a recognition that

²⁴ Fevvers' freakishness, the excessiveness of her body, hearkens back to Farwell and her interpretation of excessive female bodies as lesbian. Even heterosexual female characters can represent queerness, argues Farwell, because their bodies disrupt the traditional narrative.

artistic representations of love are often romanticized or "gilded." By emphasizing the word *sign* and by modifying it with *painted* and *gilded*, Fevvers highlights the tension between appearance and reality, between signified and signifier.

This attention to signifiers further suggests that her experience posing as a statue has taught her how objects within a room are part of the text of a room. She has had the opportunity to observe a room from a perspective most occupants never have—as an unchanging element within the fabric of the room's rhetoric. As a part of the text of the room, she has a better perspective from which to observe how that text affects its occupants. So Fevvers has the opportunity to study how Ma Nelson's patrons are drawn into an economic exchange of money for flesh. Her role as object of the gaze notwithstanding, she has a certain amount of agency. Since those who enter the room will necessarily react in one way or another to that space and its text, she affects those occupants as much as or more than she is affected by the occupants in return. Carter has created a female character who self-consciously helps to write the

rhetoric of the room, rather than simply reacting to that rhetoric.

At the age of fourteen, Fevvers' wings break forth from her back as full appendages instead of just buds. That event, along with the development of her breasts and the onset of menstruation, prompt her to begin posing as Winged Victory instead of Cupid. In choosing this particular statue, Fevvers is writing a role for herself as a powerful and victorious woman. By giving Fevvers the ability to choose this role—among many others she chooses in the course of the novel—Carter creates a character with a higher degree of autonomy than any of the other three characters discussed in this chapter. Carter also deconstructs the female body in the statue scenes. A "*tableau vivant*" (23), as she describes herself, Fevvers exists as a warm, breathing, physical body, while at the same time, she represents cold, hard, stone. She represents the human (female) body as it has been idealized through art, while remaining Fevvers, a particular woman who exists in the material world.²⁵ The differences

²⁵ Even though Carter gives her character wings, Fevvers is far from ethereal. Her physicality is very much on display in the first section of the novel, where she is described as a "*big girl*" (7; Carter's emphasis). She has a hearty appetite, and she farts in front of Walser without embarrassment.

between real and ideal, between body and statue are subverted. Fevvers's own body is a sort of invisible presence as it stands in the alcove that frames her as a "statue." Within those brackets, the space of the alcove is a postmodern text, written by a protagonist who changes space proactively rather than reactively. By locating Fevvers' postmodern text in a drawing room, Carter challenges that room's traditional function of consolidating the public image of a household. Postmodern texts, with their investment in the play of meaning, stand in contrast to a rhetoric designed to consolidate meaning.

In the second section of the novel, which takes place in St. Petersburg, Carter provides us with an example of how Fevvers' spatial apprenticeship has paid off. When Fevvers visits a Russian Grand Duke in Petersburg she displays a keen ability to read the lavish rooms of his house. Instead of being awestruck by the rhetoric of the space, which is designed to advertise the Duke's wealth, power, and status, she reacts much more pragmatically. She begins calculating his net worth based on the value of the décor and furnishings of the foyer and the staircase leading out of it:

she priced the candleholders, the mirrors, the oriental jars—even the hot-house blooms within them. She made the progress of an auctioneer and, with every step, added a further sum to the price she'd already put upon whatever entertainment she might be asked to provide. (185)

Carter makes it clear, however, that Fevvers is not entirely motivated by greed. She and Lizzie have a political agenda. Characterizing herself and her foster mother as "Property Redistribution Inc.," who will "take away your diamonds" (185), Fevvers has no qualms about using men's fascination with her body, in particular her wings, as leverage for gaining access to their homes and consequently of relieving them of some of their wealth.

With the sensibility of "an auctioneer," Fevvers assesses the ostentatious display in the Duke's house in order to determine what price she might demand in exchange for her company. Even years later, her perspective is still informed by her education in Ma Nelson's Academy. She never lets his wealth intimidate her. Instead she notes that his palace halls exude "a sense of frigidity, of sterility, almost palpable, almost tangible in the hard, chill surfaces and empty spaces" (184). In concluding that "Money is wasted on the rich" (184), she readies herself to deprive him of

some of it. Her self-assurance begins to dissolve, however, as the evening progresses. For dinner, the Duke shows Fevvers to his study. As a private space where he can retreat, the Duke uses the room to consolidate male sexual privilege.

For the occasion of Fevvers' visit, the Duke decorates the study for a seduction. He displays an ice sculpture, a life-sized replica of Fevvers, wearing a dazzling diamond necklace. Once they are settled in, he knocks back 35 shots of vodka after arranging the shot glasses to spell out Fevvers' given name, Sophia. Unsure how he has learned her given name and surprised to see that he can drink so much and still be standing, she decides he may be more of a match for her than she had assumed. She initially had planned to use her sexuality to leverage gifts from him, like the diamond necklace worn by the statue, but she begins to question whether she can emerge safely after the transaction. Next she is unnerved by his life-sized automaton, depicting a musical trio comprised of a bird that whistles through its nose, a woman-shaped harp who plays herself, and a gong that rings apparently without being struck. In spite of her spatial literacy, the Duke gains an advantage over her in

this room. He clearly has consolidated his power within the space and is using every tactic he can to manipulate Fevvers.

The situation takes a decided turn for the worse as he takes her through the gallery where he displays his jeweled eggs. This space, designed to display his wealth and gentility, also reveals the narrative into which he hopes to insert Fevvers. He has commissioned a jeweled egg within which he plans to put Fevvers on permanent display, the ultimate proclamation of his dominance over her. Having struck a bargain that she can take an egg if he can look at her wings, Fevvers again finds herself out of her depth. The first two eggs, commissioned as tributes to her, give her a sense of foreboding as they continue through the gallery. To make matters worse, the Duke disarms her—quite literally. He finds a small sword she always keeps hidden in her corset and breaks it. Feeling defenseless, she unzips his pants and begins caressing his erect penis. The distraction helps her make a narrow escape. Just as they reach the egg that contains a miniature cage, presumably to hold Fevvers herself, she brings him to a climax, and escapes into another egg that houses a miniature of the Trans-Siberian express.

In the next moment, she is clambering aboard the real train, which is carrying the rest of the circus out of Petersburg.

Carter's use of magic realism during this crucial moment demands critical attention. Fevvers' escape defies all physical laws, and the episode seemingly undercuts Carter's interest in calling attention to the material circumstances that contribute to women's problematic social circumstances. I would argue, however, that the scene serves as a metaphor for Fevvers' vision and power over space, her highly developed spatial literacy. Fevvers' escape metaphorizes her ability to circumvent the many strands of the spatial rhetoric that pull a subject into her scripted position within the social order at a given moment. At this particular moment, the Duke has scripted a specific narrative for Fevvers. He wants to add her to his collection of priceless objects. By exhibiting her as a rare artifact and freak of nature, he advertises his ability to acquire seemingly unattainable possessions. To display her as his own would also signal his dominance over a powerful and exceptional woman. Fevvers, who has traded on her anatomical uniqueness to her economic gain, would be reduced to the Duke's own precious commodity. Fevvers, however, is not so

easily adapted to someone else's narrative. I contend that Carter uses Fevvers' surreal escape to make an argument for the possibility of agency. In spite of the Duke's powerful use of space, Fevvers finds a way to resist his rhetoric, distract him from his plans for her, and free herself.

Paulina Palmer celebrates the power of utopic moments such as this one. While Palmer contends that Carter's early works, including *The Magic Toyshop*, offer "a brilliantly accurate analysis of the oppressive effects of patriarchal structures," they also risk "making these structures appear even more closed and impenetrable than, in actual fact, they are" ("From 'Coded Mannequin'" 181). Palmer is encouraged by Carter's later works, particularly *Nights at the Circus*, which show women triumphing. Utopic moments, Palmer maintains, foster the hope that change is possible, and consequently, fiction that portrays utopias can lend momentum to political movements ("From 'Coded Mannequin'" 181). Of course, imagining the changes that are possible is precisely what Fevvers does each time she enters a room. Her high degree of spatial literacy allows her the agency that makes change possible. That level of spatial literacy is also a fundamental difference between herself and Melanie in *The*

Magic Toyshop. Fevvers understands how rooms are written. Consequently, she is able to manipulate a room to her advantage, whereas Melanie almost always is subjugated to the role laid out by a room's rhetoric. For Melanie, each room is the "closed and impenetrable" structure that troubles Palmer.

In his analysis of Fevvers' flight from the Duke, Brian Finney cites the passage that details the escape: the Duke's orgasm causes a few seconds lapse of his consciousness during which Fevvers runs down the platform and climbs aboard the train. In the next line, Lizzie is commenting on Fevvers' soiled and disheveled dress. Finney writes:

Before we as readers have time to protest over the impossibility of such an escape (it defies all the laws of space-time), the new strand of narrative has caught us up and hurried us on into a new self-contained world of fiction that is of course just as reliant on illusion as the last one.
(176)

He also contrasts how Fevvers distracts the Duke through "highly physical means," while the escape is "purely fictional" (177). This juxtaposition of physicality and textuality suggests the links between the world of fiction and the physical world. Finney's interest in the intersections between text and materialism echoes Valentine

Cunningham's theories. In his study *In the Reading Gaol, Postmodernity, Texts, and History*, Cunningham objects to theorists who argue that texts only point to other texts and that there is nothing outside of text, no context. The textual word and the physical world, Cunningham insists, are inextricably linked: texts inflect the material world, and the material world always leaves its traces in textual representation. The semen stains on Fevvers' dress that prompt Lizzie's remark illustrate the material world impinging on the fictional world.

Another critic concerned with materialism, Magali Michael, argues that the strength of many contemporary feminist writers, including Carter herself, lies in their willingness to address realistically how the material world affects women even while these authors simultaneously draw on postmodernist strategies through their use of fantastic elements, metatextuality, and language play.

The magic realism in this scene does serve as a metatextual element, reminding us that Fevvers' world is a fictional world, but the semen stains keep us grounded in material reality. The scene is an important example of Carter's ability to capitalize on postmodern strategies

without letting readers lose sight of the material world. Her interest in keeping the material world present for readers is tied to her interest in how rooms can consolidate power. To fully understand how power is scripted in a room, one must pay attention to material details: what is in the room, why is it placed there, and how is it being used.

It is certainly not coincidental that in creating one of her most independent female characters, Carter has also created one of her most spatially literate characters. Of the four characters discussed in this chapter, Fevvers displays the most advanced degree of spatial literacy. In a sense, she is not entirely comparable to the other characters because she is an adult when Carter tells her story, while the other three characters are just leaving home by the conclusions of the novels. The use of magic realism is also more pronounced in *Nights* than in the other novels, allowing for a winged woman. Fevvers' wings presumably cause her to have a very different experience of space, so perhaps it is not surprising that Carter depicts her as having a high

degree of spatial literacy.²⁶ Domestic space is not very confining or threatening to a woman who is not bound by gravity. Carter's representation of parlors and formal rooms in *Nights* also differs from the other novels. Fevvers grows up in a community of freethinking women. As the authors of their own parlor, these women do not have to feel threatened by the room. And even when reception rooms are used to consolidate male power, as in the Duke's palace, Fevvers' reads the spaces skeptically and cautiously, and she keeps her wits about her enough to get out when the Duke's rhetoric begins to have an effect on her. Moreover, as I discuss in the next section, in *Nights* Carter burns down one parlor and blows up another, suggesting her irreverence for the whole idea of the parlor in the first place.

²⁶ Winterson has created some female characters who have qualities comparable to Fevvers' ability to fly. In *The Passion*, the Venetian woman Villanelle is born with webbed feet which enable her to walk on water. Winterson portrays Villanelle as having a high degree of spatial literacy. She easily navigates the waterways of Venice even though it is the "city of mazes," where "You may set off from the same place to the same place every day and never go by the same route. If you do so, it will be by mistake" (49). Villanelle is also "skillful with the compass and map" (101), a talent that serves her well when she deserts Napoleon's army. Having been sold into prostitution by her husband, she joins up with two soldiers who leave Napoleon during his ill-fated Russian campaign. In *Sexing the Cherry*, Fortunata is described as being so light on her feet that she can defy gravity. Her sisters claim she can cut and retie a rope in mid-air, while she is climbing down it.

From the Parlor to the Attic and Beyond

I began this chapter with Jeanette Winterson's *Art and Lies*, because it offers an intelligible model of the concept of spatial literacy that I am developing. It also provides one of the best examples of a significant spatial movement evident in both Carter and Winterson. From the parlor, several characters ascend upward to the attic and then out of the house from that unlikely exit point. Particularly when we consider Picasso, whose family regards her as mentally ill, this exit from the attic suggests Charlotte Brontë's madwoman in the attic, Bertha Mason from *Jane Eyre*. Bertha sets fire to Rochester's house and throws herself from the roof after spending years imprisoned in a room at the top of his house. In their well-known reading of Brontë, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have pointed out how Bertha's appearances in Brontë's novel correspond with moments where Jane feels angry or is repressing feelings of anger. Gilbert and Gubar identify Bertha as "Jane's truest and darkest double: she is the angry aspect of the orphan child, the ferocious secret self Jane has been trying to repress" (360). For nineteenth- and twentieth-century women writers, who were struggling against the pressures of a male-dominated society,

"maddened doubles [such as Bertha] functioned as asocial surrogates for docile selves" (Gilbert and Gubar xi).

In post-war novels, the trope of the madwoman in the attic has evolved,²⁷ and by the time we see her in Winterson, she has a very different meaning. She no longer represents the writer's or character's repressed anger, and consequently she is no longer represented as a double relegated to a supporting role. Instead she is openly embraced as the heroine, like Picasso when she throws paint throughout the house, runs into the parlor naked, and then climbs to the attic to make her escape. Picasso, Winterson's own version of the madwoman, jumps triumphantly out of the window, rewriting the scene her father originally scripted when he pushed her out of the attic window. For Picasso, the attic is an escape, albeit an unlikely one, from her family. She now has the chance to start a new life with her lover,

²⁷ Most notably, in *The Wide Sargasso Sea*, Jean Rhys takes Bertha Mason out of the margins of Brontë's text and imagines her life before she is imprisoned in the attic.

Sappho.²⁸ Through Picasso's attic escape, Winterson is paying tribute to Charlotte Brontë, just as Carter does when she describes a fire engulfing Melanie's toyshop dwelling and the protagonists climbing out of the attic skylight in order to escape. Melanie's escape holds less promise for a bright future than Picasso's does, but it is certainly a step in the right direction, a release from Philip's oppressive regime, which has gone up in flames.

Carter alludes to Brontë once more in *Nights at the Circus*: Fevvers makes a memorable jump off the roof of her childhood home. When Fevvers is first testing her wings to learn if she can fly, she begins in the parlor. She tries jumping from the marble mantelpiece, but she bloodies her

²⁸ Although Winterson portrays Picasso's love for Sappho in very positive terms, in other novels she indicates that adulthood brings with it new sets of problems that complicate love. For example, in *Written on the Body*, the narrator begins with the lament, "Why is the measure of love loss?" (9). In that novel, the narrator's love for Louise, a married woman, is a troubled affair. When the narrator moves in with Louise and her husband, the domestic experiment fails. The house is not a suitable space for them because Louise and the narrator indulge their passion without regard for the husband's feelings. Although the narrator hopes to create "a quiet space beyond the reach of other desires" (77), where she can be with Louise, the real world intrudes on this space, particularly when Louise is diagnosed with cancer. Unrequited love and love that cannot be sustained are recurring themes in Winterson's fiction. In *The Passion*, Henri has an unrequited passion for Villanelle, who herself falls in love with a married woman who will not leave her husband. In *Sexing the Cherry*, Jordan loves Fortunata, but she will not leave her isolated retreat, where she has created a magical dancing school, to join him on his sailing expeditions.

nose when she falls straight down. After spending some weeks studying a mother bird and her young birds from their bedroom window in the attic, Lizzie concludes that she must push Fevvers off the roof in order to force her to learn to fly, and her strategy works. Fevvers goes on to capitalize on her acrobatic abilities and is rewarded with economic independence. Fevvers too, then, is a descendant of the madwoman in the attic, a woman who keeps her bedroom in the attic and then takes a triumphant leap off of the roof. Clearly, both Carter and Winterson are honoring Brontë by using this trope, but they are also rewriting the madwoman's fate. Fevvers survives her leap and can move forward to create better prospects for herself. Brontë's attic is transformed from a dark prison to a space where possibilities for women expand.

Although Winterson's character Jeanette never leaps from her roof, she too recalls Brontë. As Tess Cosslett has observed, "When Jeanette is imprisoned at home, and 'exorcised', she resembles both Jane in the Red Room, and mad Bertha in her attic at Thornfield" (25). Cosslett is referring to the scene in which Jeanette's mother, the preacher, and several parishioners imprison her in the

parlor. Jeanette survives this ordeal without compromising what she believes in. Nonetheless, like the other three characters I am discussing, she too must make an escape from her circumstances. Like the other characters, Jeanette moves beyond the parlor and its rhetoric when she leaves home. Her break with her mother is not final, however, and once she has established her independence, Jeanette returns home and picks up with her mother again where they left off, in the parlor, discussing her mother's evangelical work.

Ellen Brinks and Lee Talley argue that Jeanette's return home is a particularly important moment in light of how the establishment of a home can be elusive for many lesbians. Arguing that a social climate hostile to lesbians and non-traditional families means that "'home' is anything but secure for lesbians," Brinks and Talley are encouraged by Winterson's protagonist and her mother, who try to forge a new relationship and find a new way to be at home together. At the end of the novel, Jeanette's visit home may be upsetting for some readers because "imagining new families frequently proves unsettling" (168), but Brinks and Talley applaud Winterson's efforts to explore the theme of home and in the process "complicate the meanings of the lesbian home,"

instead of submitting to the social pressure to be silent about home (147). They cast Winterson as part of a movement to reclaim the home for lesbians.

If Winterson's *Art and Lies* offers an appropriate introduction to an analysis of parlors, Carter's *Nights at the Circus* offers a fitting conclusion to this chapter. Carter destroys at least two parlors over the course of her novel. Fevvers describes the end of her time at Ma Nelson's whorehouse to Walser. Because Ma Nelson leaves no will when she dies, the women are forced to leave her house. On their final morning in the house, they are gathered in the parlor when they decide to open the curtains and take a last look at the room. They discover, to their surprise, that "The luxury of the place had been nothing but illusion, created by the candles of midnight, and, in the dawn, all was sere, worn-out decay" (49). As they contemplate this, they begin to understand "the house had served its turn for [them], for the parlour itself began to waver and dissolve before [their] very eyes" (49). They decide to burn the house in order to cheat Ma Nelson's brother, who has laid claim to the house and is evicting them. Fevvers tells Walser, "And so the first chapter of my life went up in flames, sir" (50). As

Brian Finney points out, Fevvers here shows herself to be a superb storyteller, who "naturally shapes her life into digestible fictional chapters" (169). Moreover, as Finney notes, Carter here is self-referential because she ends her chapter at the same moment that Fevvers declares she has finished a chapter. The parlor's illusiveness and the metatextual moments in Fevvers' narrative point again to the idea that rooms themselves are discursive constructions. Through the parlor's destruction, Carter suggests that the power of spatial rhetoric is not absolute.

But Carter does not stop there. Through the image of the Trans-Siberian Express, Carter moves the parlor into the Siberian wilderness and blows it up. Drawing on the work of Wolfgang Schivelbusch, Rachel Carroll notes that the elaborate upholstery of railway cars masks the industrialism that makes wealth possible and allows the passenger to forget she is being shipped around like so many goods. Schivelbusch writes:

The opulent baroque and Renaissance fronts that cover the steel girders are nothing but, on a larger scale, the braided and tasseled upholstery cushions that render the true construction of the

armchair of sofa invisible and thus forgettable.
(qtd. in Carroll 191)²⁹

Pointing to the disorientation felt by travelers using this new form of transportation, Carroll also observes that ornate railway cars help to make passenger feel as if she has not left home. This is important since the train can inflict on its passengers "a 'jolt' of profound proportions: it initiates the human body into the modern era by its technological achievement, the 'annihilation of time and space' (Schivelbusch, p. 13)" (Carroll 191).

As Carroll notes, Fevvers herself experiences the irony of traveling through the alien Siberian wilderness while sitting in a car that reproduces the setting of a parlor: an "Empire drawing-room done up in white lacquer and enough plate-glass mirrors for a mobile bordello" (Carter 199). Fevvers comments to herself, "I hate it" (199). When the train is blown up and derailed, Carroll argues that it marks the narrative's entrance into the world of the unconscious. She comments that the train's latent force is revealed with

²⁹ This comparison between railroad interiors and the upholstery of parlor furniture echoes the work of Katherine Grier when she discusses how technology enabled the development of spring-seat upholstery. The ornateness of the outside of the furniture conceals the spring mechanisms that give the piece its unique feel.

the crash, "which shatters identity as well as time and space" (191).

Of course, the derailment also marks the destruction of one more parlor. Carter is evidently reacting against the use of the parlor to promote specific social agendas. Carter's understanding of this conventional use of the parlor is evident from a passage in *The Magic Toyshop*. When Melanie and Finn take a walk through a dilapidated, poor neighborhood that used to be "stately and solid streets, fat with money," the houses are described as they used to be: "homes for a secure middle-class with parlours in which its bustling daughters could play 'The Last Rose Of Summer' and 'Believe me if all those Endearing Young Charms' politely on rosewood pianos antlered with candlesticks" (98). As this chapter makes clear, parlors and other formal rooms all too often call for the containment of female sexuality and the assertion of male sexual privilege. Nonetheless, whatever social power the parlor holds, Carter clearly shows her irreverence for it. *Nights at the Circus* offers a triumphant response to the oppressiveness of the parlor: burn it down, blow it up.

CHAPTER III

MAKING MEALS, BREAKING DEALS: MOTHERS, DAUGHTERS, AND KITCHENS

In turning my attention now from parlors to kitchens, I will be making a consequent move from a domestic agenda primarily directed externally to one directed internally. Whereas the parlor's function is focused outward to project a familial image to guests who will carry it away from the house and into the public realm, the kitchen's function is focused internally on the family's daily needs, particularly bodily needs such as eating. If formal, public rooms—particularly the parlor—are spaces where an attempt is made to contain and repress the body and consequently insert it into a narrative that maintains the social order, then the kitchen is a room where the body's materiality is more clearly evident and more difficult to repress. Katherine Grier's terms, *culture* and *comfort*, introduced in the preceding chapter, offer yet another way of characterizing the differences between the parlor and the kitchen. Although Grier uses them to denote two different versions of the parlor, they can also be usefully applied to distinguish formal rooms from family rooms. She uses *culture* "as

shorthand for the cultivated worldview of educated, genteel, and cosmopolitan people whose habits of consumption (including furnishing a gala parlor) were intended to create an expressive façade," while she explains that *comfort* refers not only to the idea of physical contentment, but also "designates the presence of the more family-centered values associated with 'home,' values emphasizing domesticity, perfect sincerity, and moderation in all things" (2). The kitchen is typically a room of comfort, where many of the family's daily needs are foremost.

Although it is a utilitarian room, the kitchen nonetheless plays an important role in the production of social meaning. It is all but impossible to separate the kitchen from the gendered concept of homemaking. When women are assigned primary responsibility for homemaking—especially the work that is performed in the kitchen—the room can be used to perpetuate gender hierarchies. As I pointed out in the preceding chapter, Marion Roberts argues that the location of the kitchen in British council housing, traditionally near the back of the house, reinforces this gender hierarchy. Rooms associated with femininity and domesticity, Roberts notes, are relegated to the back of the

house, away from the public face (usually the parlor) presented to the street (27). Women's responsibilities in the kitchen help to anchor them in the home and perpetuate the culturally-defined binary that links women to domestic space and men to public space. Both Angela Carter and Jeanette Winterson play out these motifs of the kitchen in their fiction. In the four novels I am examining, we find women, especially mothers and daughters, inhabiting kitchens together, tending to the comfort of the family through their domestic chores.

Because the word *kitchen* has come to suggest the quotidian and the utilitarian, it seemingly takes us outside of myth and master narratives into the more immediate present, but the kitchen too has a master narrative that buttresses the social order. This is particularly true of the kitchens of the twentieth-century in households where the domestic labor is undertaken by family members rather than by servants. The kitchen is closely associated with the idea of domestic comfort: the smell of food cooking, the warmth generated by the oven, and the proverbial mother in her apron presiding over the preparation of the meal. Because the domestic labor women perform in the kitchen is both practical

and habitual, it can distract them from the social agenda being perpetuated within the space of the room. The kitchen's associations with comfort can also lull a young woman into submissiveness. When kitchen work has the aim of taking care of family members, it can be performed as a labor of love, so a young woman may not think about the larger social implications of this work being assigned almost exclusively to women. In the kitchen, therefore, one can be caught off guard, more vulnerable to the social narratives scripted for women. This vulnerability, however, is one of the reasons the kitchen is such a fertile topic for analysis. The kitchen can also be an intimate space, especially when contrasted with the parlor. Formality is not so rigidly enforced in the kitchen, so family intimacy is more likely, in particular the intimacy between mothers and daughters, who often work together to perform domestic tasks.

Since homemaking and food preparation are evocative of the mother, an examination of that social role and its ties to the kitchen is also relevant. Jessica Benjamin offers some important insight into motherhood as that role is constructed in Western thought. Benjamin discusses the psychoanalytic explanations for the tenet that power resides

with the father, but not the mother. Most notably, she discusses various versions of the theory that the penis is perceived as the object of envy for women and the sign of agency and power for men, but Benjamin argues that power does not reside in the penis or in the concept of phallic power. Instead, she contends, it is the social roles constructed for fathers and mothers that encourage the child to understand the father as an active, desiring subject and the mother as a passive one. The perception of lack that attaches to the mother is not her lack of a penis so much as it is her lack of subjectivity, while the father is perceived as the more stimulating parent, the one capable of subjectivity.

Benjamin's characterization of the mother's lack of subjectivity is particularly relevant for this chapter. She points out:

The mother is a profoundly desexualized figure. And we must suspect that this desexualization is part of her more general lack of subjectivity as a whole. Just as the mother's power is not her own, but is intended to serve her child, so, in a larger sense, woman does not have the freedom to do as she wills; she is not the subject of her own desire. (88)

Especially notable is Benjamin's observation that the mother's purpose is service. Taking care of children is

closely connected to the kitchen because feeding a child is one of the tasks that must be done several times in the day.

The mother's connection to the kitchen is even more obvious when Benjamin speculates why motherhood is idealized: "The idealization of motherhood, which can be found in both anti-feminist and feminist cultural politics, is an attempt to redeem woman's sphere of influence, the power of the apron strings" (92). The apron strings Benjamin conjures offer us another image of the mother tied to the kitchen in service to the care of others. Benjamin also discusses how women are damaged by this cultural investment in the idealized mother, which "preserves the old gender system, so that freedom and desire remain an unchallenged male domain, leaving women to be righteous, but de-eroticized, intimate and caring, but pleasureless" (92). These maternal qualities are reinforced by the kitchen, a space which plays a central role in caretaking.

Both Carter and Winterson exploit the thematic potential of the kitchen by taking the social conventions of the kitchen and working them to their advantage, sometimes by overturning what we commonly assume about the kitchen. At least three themes are apparent in the treatment of the

kitchen in the four novels this dissertation considers. Carter and Winterson use the kitchen as the setting for scenes of intimacy between women characters, especially intimacy between mothers and daughters who work together in kitchens, and they examine how that intimacy affects their young protagonists. Particularly in Winterson, this intimacy can be treacherous as the mothers try to encourage their daughters to emulate them; they effectively model roles for their daughters that curb their sexuality. The depiction of the maternal role and how that role is understood by the four protagonists is also salient. A second theme is domestic comfort. The way domestic comfort is produced within a household often reveals the power hierarchy of a family. Some members are primarily responsible for the labor required to produce domestic comfort, while other members are primarily the recipients of that comfort.

The third theme Carter and Winterson explore is the volatility of the kitchen. That volatility partly derives from the kitchen's associations with the body and its material needs, which are persistent. In the kitchen, the body cannot be entirely ignored or repressed, so the power of the mind over the body can falter, creating volatile

situations. The familiarity of the kitchen is another reason it is a volatile space. Routine and habit put family members at ease, but this very relaxation of formality allows for repressed emotions to surface. Finally, the equipment in the kitchen, from utensils to the oven, has the power to transform food from one state to another, which can be read as a metaphor for transformations in people. Due to these characteristics—as the following analysis illustrates—the kitchen’s volatility can sometimes culminate in metaphorical or actual violence.

Kitchen Knives/Kitchen Lies

Is that my mother, stalking me round the kitchen? Patiently waiting for me to drop my guard. All day she has punished me with her rosary of lies, one after the other She is silently chopping the meat. I am silently cutting the vegetables.

She pounces.

“I love you.” Straight at my heart with her little knife. She looks eagerly for the blood. I must pretend to feel nothing even though I am doubled over with pain. (Art and Lies 154)

In Jeanette Winterson’s novels, we find mothers and daughters inhabiting kitchens and playing out scenes of family intimacy as they attend to domestic chores. What

makes these relationships especially worthy of analysis is Winterson's portrayal of them as treacherous, particularly for the daughters. In *Art and Lies*,³⁰ the kitchen is a space of conflict between mother and daughter. Even though the family's wealth makes it possible for them to hire a live-in maid, Lady Hamilton is not exempted from taking on duties in the kitchen. Her husband, Sir Jack, flaunts his male privilege so effectively that his wife cannot imagine herself as independent from him. She instead is compelled to be as wifely as possible, and the kitchen and its domestic responsibilities offer one of the only ways she feels viable in the household. The time she spends in the kitchen with her daughter Picasso is especially important. Winterson depicts Picasso as demanding and messy during her infancy, a challenge for her overwrought mother when she feeds Picasso in the kitchen. As a young adult, when she spends time with her mother in the kitchen, Picasso resents any intimacy between them because her mother refuses to believe or even acknowledge the sexual abuse Picasso suffers at her brother Matthew's hands. For Lady Hamilton, on the other hand, their

³⁰ Chapter II offers an overview of the four primary texts and descriptions of the houses in those novels.

relationship is troubled because her daughter is unreasonable, and the kitchen itself becomes a prop for her self-appointed role as the family martyr. When she tells Picasso about the sacrifices she makes for her family, the kitchen is one of the rooms she conjures up to illustrate how hard she works for them, especially for Picasso.

Although Winterson characterizes Lady Hamilton as obediently conforming to her socially prescribed roles of wife and mother (essentially an engineer of domestic comfort for her entire family), she also highlights how unhappy she is. Lady Hamilton epitomizes the desexualized mother described by Benjamin. Her child, Picasso, who screams relentlessly as an infant, makes motherhood particularly difficult, and her husband, Sir Jack, neglects her and has a string of mistresses on the side. On top of that, she is miserable in the house where she is consigned to take on her domestic roles. Because it is in an unfashionable—in fact a poor-neighborhood, she is even afraid to go to the local shops. Her world is effectively narrowed into this bleak domestic prospect by her husband, who not only has chosen a house she dislikes, but has used her wealth to purchase it. As another character aptly notes, the economic advantage Sir

Jack gains from his marriage does not interfere with his image as a self-made man: "He had sold his wife's shares to do so [to buy the house], so his conceit that he was a self-made man was not strictly accurate, unless one counted his wife as his rib, which he did" (173). Treated as an annexation to her husband's identity, Lady Hamilton is just one more accoutrement of his wealth, a wife to install in his large house.

Within that house, Winterson depicts the kitchen as a place where Picasso and her mother spend much of their time during Picasso's childhood. For Lady Hamilton, the kitchen is the ideal stage for her exhibitions of the sacrifices she has made. Instead of sympathizing with Picasso, who is also victimized by the men of the house, Lady Hamilton cannot move beyond herself. She remains absorbed in self-pity, probably because she realizes no one else in the house will give thought to her unhappiness. The men in the family are too busy enjoying their privileged status to notice her situation, while Picasso is struggling to survive her brother's sexual abuse of her.

For Lady Hamilton, consequently, martyrdom offers a way to feel important, and she deliberately cultivates it with

memories of the trials of motherhood. Picasso is an obvious target for her pain and passive aggression because she is her husband's illegitimate daughter, left to their care as an infant by their Spanish maid, one of Sir Jack's mistresses. When Lady Hamilton thinks of Picasso's childhood, she sees herself in the kitchen as "young, kind, overworked, patient, neglected by her husband and abused by a silent toddler who would not understand that bananas are the only fruit" (41). The imagery of the bananas symbolizes her submission to phallic rule in the house, a rule which Picasso flouts, apparently flinging the bananas all over the floor since the image that follows is one of Lady Hamilton attending to the kitchen floor on her hands and knees.³¹

³¹ Fruit imagery also has symbolic resonance in Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry*, although it is used there to different effect. Set in the seventeenth century, the novel tells the story of the enormous Dog-Woman and her adopted son Jordan. As an exotic fruit that is just being introduced in England, the banana intrigues the young Jordan when he first sees it. He begins at that moment to envision sailing expeditions to explore different lands, and he later is able to realize his dreams of exploration and to introduce another new fruit to England, the pineapple. The banana operates as a catalyst for the freedom of movement that Jordan enjoys as an adult. However, within the text, Winterson destabilizes the banana as a symbol of the phallus by using its image to precede sections told by Dog-Woman. The novel's title refers to the process of grafting fruit trees, which results in a new species without parent and without seed that is sexed according to the sex of its parent trees. Laura Doan reads this grafting image as a powerful metaphor for homosexuality. She notes that grafting, like homosexuality, is condemned by the church as unnatural. The procedure creates a third sex that "poses a dangerous challenge to the comfortable dualisms (nature/culture, natural/artificial, female/male) upon which patriarchal hegemony—and the hybrid itself—is based" (152).

Winterson creates a layered image in this scene of the toddler and mother at odds with one another in the kitchen. When Lady Hamilton recalls their past time in the kitchen, she describes it to the adult Picasso as being all about her own suffering: "'I did everything for you,' she said, and suddenly, she was back on her hands and knees, and I, a grown woman, was back in the hated high chair, swinging impotent legs above a shiny floor" (41). As the toddler, Picasso is both impotent, helplessly confined to a high chair, and powerful, forcing her mother down on all fours to clean up after her. And yet this power is turned against the adult Picasso because she is again rendered helpless when her mother recalls the scene as a way both of buttressing her role as martyr and of making Picasso feel like a child even after she becomes an adult. The scene also offers an important contrast to those played out in the parlor. In the parlor, Picasso and her mother have a contest of wills and words over the issue of her getting her own bedroom. Their struggle is an emotional and mental battle. On the other hand, in the kitchen the contest has a physical component. When Picasso flings her food onto the kitchen floor, we see the physical messiness of everyday life that is expunged from

the parlor, which calls for the containment of the body in favor of promoting a cultured image of the family. The moments when life gets physically messy are reserved for the kitchen, away from the more public space of the parlor.

Although Lady Hamilton reluctantly accepts her domestic fate of overseeing the family's comfort, Picasso eventually finds enough emotional strength to leave the house and make a break with the family. The epigraph to this section describes the aftermath of Picasso's announcement that she is moving out. As they prepare a meal together in the kitchen, her mother tells Picasso that she loves her. Picasso understands the statement as a calculated attack, a strategy for manipulating her and undermining her decision to take a crucial step in healing the sexual and emotional abuse she has suffered. As a defense against her mother, Picasso is determined to show no outward emotional reaction, even though her mother's pronouncement of love feels like a knife in her heart. Winterson's image of the knife, a kitchen implement, reinforces the idea that the kitchen is a volatile space: there are sharp instruments at hand that incite violent mental pictures, if not actual violence. Her mother's strategy here buttresses her role as martyr: she loves her

daughter even though she believes Picasso to be "Heartless" and unresponsive to her offered love (154). Picasso, on the other hand, feels her mother "knows that there is still a piece of me unkilld by the loving hands of my family" (154), a piece of herself she desperately is trying to protect even while her mother tries to cut it out. Lady Hamilton emotionally undermines Picasso at every turn, and Picasso imagines her mother's abuse as violence, a knife in her heart that echoes the violence done to her by her brother, who habitually raped her, and her father, who pushed her off the attic parapet.

Through this scene, Winterson emphasizes how the kitchen can foster a treacherous intimacy between mother and daughter. Lady Hamilton models the role of martyr for her daughter in the hope that Picasso will also resign herself to that role. Essentially, she wants Picasso to be a willing victim. If she can convince Picasso to acquiesce to that role, she will feel she has a real companion in the kitchen, one who is sympathetic to her own pain, instead of a daughter who rebels against her and the entire family. Moreover, Lady Hamilton can legitimate her role as victim if she is successful in passing it on to her daughter. Aware of the

dangers of her mother's chosen path, Picasso resists her mother's manipulation, especially when they spend time together in the kitchen, a room that provides such an ideal setting for Lady Hamilton's agenda. With the depiction of this emotional clash between the women, Winterson shows how volatile a space the kitchen can be; as the knife imagery indicates, it is a room charged with emotion and the threat of erupting violence.

Winterson also uses the breakfast table to develop some of the same themes she iterates in the kitchen scenes, but here the imaginary violence is instigated by Picasso towards her father. At a family breakfast one morning, as they idly talk about the weather, Picasso imagines using the kitchen knife to stab her father. When he continues to butter his toast, she visualizes an even more violent scenario:

I pulled out the blade and rammed it through the second vertebra of his spine. I heard the bone splinter, the nerve twang like piano wire. Again I sank the carbon steel knife into the buttered flesh. My mother began to clear the table. (163)

The kitchen, invoked by the knife and the "battered flesh," is again linked to violence. The breakfast table with its associations of the quotidian and normalcy is inflammatory for Picasso because of her family's nonchalance.

Oblivious to the emotional trauma Picasso feels, the family calmly begins their day with a meal and fatuous conversation. Her distress is invisible to the family, but by showing readers the hostility Picasso is feeling at the moment, Winterson again emphasizes the volatility of the spaces associated with domestic comfort and family intimacy, spaces where habit rules and family members are comfortable in their familiar routines. Here, seemingly, there is no need to promote the family's social image to guests. The focus is directed internally, to the family's daily needs and interactions, and since the gender hierarchy is so firmly established within the house, Lady Hamilton automatically clears the table. By creating some of Picasso's most violent thoughts as being initiated at the breakfast table, Winterson suggests that the family's complacency with the internal hierarchy is almost more insidious than the concerted, deliberate effort in the parlor to produce an image of wealth and gentility. At the breakfast table, the rule of order is taken for granted, which is more infuriating to Picasso than when it is openly enforced. She would rather see an honest declaration of the family agenda than see it casually followed as if everyone is happy with it. The lack of a need

to enforce the family agenda is evidence of the hegemony of that agenda.

Picasso's hostility towards her family is also highlighted in another scene that takes place at the breakfast table. After a troubling night when Picasso's painting is described as seeping into the dreams of everyone in the house, including the extended family staying there for the holidays, the family members feel they have been "found out over night" (46). At the breakfast table the following morning, to protect themselves, "They wore their darkest clothes, their soberest expressions, they whispered like church wardens" (46). Picasso, nevertheless, envisions their guilt as erupting through these external surfaces in "patterns of infection" (46). Whatever facades they may put on in terms of formal clothes or serious expressions, Picasso instead sees them in terms of their abusive behavior. Her eagerness to see illness painted on her family's bodies is, at least in part, a manifestation of the anger she redirects at her family. She projects the damage done to herself, like the limp she acquired after her father pushed her out of the attic, onto those who have inflicted the damage. More than

this, though, the patterns of infection suggest their abusive behavior is as damaging to themselves as it is to Picasso.

In this surreal episode, the family's guilt resolves itself as a stain on the Christmas tablecloth when Lady Hamilton cannot control her trembling hands and drops the teapot, discoloring the white cloth with an inexplicable color of plum (instead of tea color) that startles them: "The family stared at the stain and the stain stared back" (47). Using her handkerchief to absorb the spilt tea proves useless: "She might as well have dipped it in blood" (47). Sending the rest of the family upstairs to the parlor, she dutifully tries to take care of the problem, but ends up ineffectually hanging the tablecloth outside in an orange rain, "with orange arrows tangling in her hair" (47). With this hallucinatory scene, Winterson draws on imagery of painting and color to depict Picasso's desires to make explicit the family's hidden abuse. The imagery of illness and blood also suggests that it is more difficult to repress the body in this setting because the breakfast table encourages familiarity and intimacy, even when a holiday adds a note of formality to the meal. The meaning of this volatile space is not stable. Although the family's domestic

comfort is ostensibly a primary function of the space, the production of that comfort, overseen as always by Lady Hamilton, is disrupted by the threat of the surfacing of hidden abuse and repressed emotions. Through the surrealism of the scene, Winterson also demonstrates that the breakfast table is a space where characters undergo the transition from the dream world of nighttime into the routine of the new day, although in this scene that transition is not complete, so dream images muddle the morning routine.

Through her skillful depiction of the kitchen and the breakfast table, Winterson develops several important points about the potential these spaces have to foster violence, even if it is only imagined violence. For Picasso, the way her family behaves in these spaces is infuriating: her mother exploits their shared intimacy in the kitchen to manipulate her, and her entire family takes comfort in the routine of breakfast as a way of remaining oblivious to her emotional distress. Another conclusion we can draw about Winterson's novel is that all of the domestic comfort produced in the household is primarily directed to the men in the family, to such a drastic extent that Matthew appropriates Picasso as his sexual toy and Lady Hamilton has to help the Spanish maid

inquire about an abortion when Sir Jack gets her pregnant.³² As a coping mechanism, Lady Hamilton plays the martyr and infantilizes Picasso through her refusal to show a sincere love and respect for her daughter.³³ The kitchen becomes Lady Hamilton's space of retreat where she can wallow in self-pity. Picasso, in her turn at coping, expresses her hostility by disengaging from her mother and imagining family intimacy in the kitchen and at the breakfast table in images of gruesome bodies and scenes of carnage. For both women, the kitchen and its related spaces take a central role in their emotional lives. Relegated there by their status as women in a male-dominated household, they share an intimacy in the kitchen that is emotionally crippling for each of them.

³² The maid, unable to get permission for an abortion from the Catholic priest/surgeon to whom Lady Hamilton refers her, gives birth to the baby (Picasso).

³³ In spite of the reprehensible way that Lady Hamilton treats her daughter, Winterson does show that Lady Hamilton is herself in an intolerable position. Although Picasso is able to leave the family and escape the abuse, Lady Hamilton never does. When their house is scheduled for demolition to make room for a cancer hospital, she is elated because they finally will be moving. Her own diagnosis of cancer, however, forces her to die in the same bed where she began her marriage, finalizing her entrapment in a house that represents a domestic hell for her.

In the Kitchen with the Lord

[The painting] was called 'The Lord Feeding the Birds' and my mother put it over the oven because she spent most of her time there, making things for the faithful. It was a bit battered now, and the Lord had a blob of egg on one foot, but we didn't like to touch it in case the paint came off too. (Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit 22)

In Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, the kitchen is again used to produce domestic comfort for the family, but that comfort is secondary to the mother's personal agenda, which can range from her evangelical work to her project of adding an indoor bathroom. Rather than feeling she is consigned to her domestic roles, as Lady Hamilton does, the mother in *Oranges*, depending on her schedule, chooses when she will act as a traditional wife and mother. This choice is available to her because she is the dominant figure in the household, and her husband readily submits to her will. Accordingly, she uses the kitchen as she needs it and when she has time for kitchen duties. She is nonetheless unwilling to relinquish any of those duties to her husband, who is not allowed to cook even when she herself does not have the time or inclination to make a full meal. By keeping him out of the kitchen, she preserves the kitchen

as a woman's space, but she also, as we shall see, redefines what women do in that space. In spite of her character's difference in attitude towards the kitchen, Winterson still develops several of the themes I have been examining. The kitchen in *Oranges* is important in the mother/daughter relationship, and it exhibits volatility because of its associations with the body and the body's physical demands.

Winterson portrays the young Jeanette as sharing an intimacy with her mother based on familiarity and mutual understanding. On Sunday mornings, their routine is an established habit, mother and daughter each taking up their assigned responsibilities to their faith and to each other. The morning begins with the mother in the parlor, praying and meditating alone. Waiting for her cue, Jeanette remains in the kitchen until her mother's prayers reach a certain point: "As soon as 'Vengeance is mine saith the Lord' boomed through the wall into the kitchen, I put the kettle on. The time it took to boil the water and brew the tea was just about the length of her final item, the sick list" (4). The precision of her timing shows how well Jeanette can read her mother.

When her mother joins her in the kitchen, they drink their tea, and after a short interlude of conversation—often

in the form of a Bible quiz for Jeanette—they tune the radio to the World Service, an update on missionary work for the week, while Jeanette takes notes so her mother can report the recent developments to their church. The outcome of the report determines whether Jeanette's mother will spend the rest of the morning listening to a devotional service (a bad report), forcing them to have boiled eggs and toast for lunch, or celebrate a good report by cooking a joint. The habits they establish on these mornings become a sort of shorthand for relating to one another. Although this shorthand allows them to share a genuine intimacy, because it is based on a routine, that intimacy runs along safe, predictable lines without an inordinate show of emotion. The kitchen, a room of habit and routine, is the natural setting for their relationship, which is grounded in habit.

The kitchen also fosters their intimacy in other ways. Because her mother does not go to bed until four a.m. each morning and her father rises at five a.m. for his factory shift, Jeanette can wander downstairs in the middle of the night and always find company. She often comes down to see her mother, who will cook them bacon and eggs, and teach her about the Bible. Through these more spontaneous moments

between mother and daughter, Winterson suggests that the mother is capable of more than her rigid Sunday routine. In the middle of the night, she is happy to cook for her daughter and include her in her Bible study. Of course, her accommodation of her daughter can also be attributed to the time of night. Her other projects and responsibilities are less likely to take precedence over the family during these late hours. During normal meal times, Jeanette and her father's chances of getting a hot meal are less certain, but for church functions the mother readily prepares "twenty trifles and her usual mound of cheese and onion sandwiches" (11).

Although Jeanette may occasionally feel neglected, there are certain advantages to be gained from her mother's inattention. Because she takes more responsibility for her own care, Jeanette develops a sense of independence early in life, a character trait that not only helps her earn a leadership position in the church, but also, ultimately, allows her to make a break with her mother by leaving home when it is necessary for her emotional growth. Meanwhile, her mother enjoys a certain independence as well because she does not feel obligated to attend to a long list of domestic

chores at the expense of her own interests. The power she derives from the church gives her a sense of righteousness that frees her from worrying too much about the quotidian concerns that the kitchen represents.

Winterson nonetheless shows the mother making good use of the kitchen, even when domestic duties are not her top priority. In such a small house, every room must be functional. The mother is particularly mindful that the kitchen reflects her religious beliefs. In the form of a painting created by Pastor Spratt, the Lord is brought into the kitchen, hung over the oven, and domesticated when Jesus gets a blob of egg on his foot. The radio, as we have seen, brings religious programs and music into the space, and if it broadcasts a program considered to be heretical, the station can be changed or it can be turned off.

Winterson emphasizes this point in the scene where the mother is appalled by an educational program about the family life of snails, which is an "Abomination" to her for several reasons (21). For one, both sex and slugs (snails without shells) are on her list of enemies. For another, the anthropomorphic image of a snail having a family is suggestive of evolution, or as Jeanette's mother puts it,

"it's like saying we come from monkeys" (21). Although Jeanette protests that her mother has misunderstood the intent of the program, her mother—after trying unsuccessfully to find the World Service—insists, "The Devil's in the world, but not in this house" (21). After asking Jeanette to leave, she closes the door, turns off the radio, and begins singing a hymn to herself. This scene, with its image of snails reproducing, introduces sex (albeit briefly) into the kitchen. Winterson later establishes more clearly that sex is associated with the kitchen, but for the moment, the mother is successful in squelching the insinuation of sex into this space she has made her own. The scene also illustrates the mother's ability to appropriate the kitchen as a private space. This appropriation happens regularly, allowing her to have time alone in a house where private space is at a premium.

Although the kitchen may serve as a haven for the mother in *Oranges*, Winterson develops a theme in common with the other novels I am analyzing: the kitchen is associated with sexuality and can be a volatile space. This is evident when the mother ushers Jeanette into the kitchen in order to discuss how she (the mother) "nearly came to a bad end" (86)

during her relationship with the Frenchman Pierre. Because she believes Jeanette has feelings for a young man from their church, she feels compelled to warn Jeanette that "what you think is the heart might well be another organ" (88). While her mother is "solemn" during her story, Jeanette is "enthralled" (86), titillated into speculating that she may not be adopted, but instead the product of her mother's indiscretion with Pierre. She is also fascinated that her mother is telling her about a sexual attraction. This is a subject that does not enter into their ordered way of relating to one another, so Jeanette wants to learn as much as she can about her mother's sexual experiences while she has the chance. When she admits to staying overnight with Pierre, her mother is "overcome with emotion," but Jeanette, captivated, begs her to continue, offering Royal Scots as an enticement. Using biscuits to coax her mother is appropriate since they are associated with another bodily pleasure, that of eating. Jeanette's mother concludes her story with the revelation that the giddiness and fizzing she had mistaken for feelings of love turned out to be a stomach ulcer. Then she points to "somewhere at the level of her apron pocket" and warns Jeanette not to let anyone touch her "Down There"

(88). This is another incidence of sexuality being conflated with the kitchen. Standing in for the woman's pubic area, the pocket is suggestive of the vagina. The image again juxtaposes the kitchen, represented by the apron, with sexuality.

The mother's choice of the kitchen as the room where she has this talk with Jeanette suggests her awareness of how this room has already fostered an intimacy between herself and her daughter, but also an awareness of the kitchen as a space associated with the body. If she must make reference, even obliquely, to sex and the body, she does not want to use the parlor, where decorum is preferred. Since the discussion also amounts to a confession about her own pre-marital sexual activity, she chooses not to taint the parlor with it. The informality of the kitchen offers her a way of preventing the confession from taking on more weight or seeming more public. Although their conversation is not casual, the room itself offers a casual setting of family intimacy instead of the more public forum of the parlor.

Winterson reiterates this theme later in the novel after Jeanette's mother discovers she is involved in a second lesbian relationship even though the church has broken up her

first relationship and extracted a promise of reform from them. When Jeanette's involvement with another young girl, Katy, is discovered, Jeanette notes that "the scene at home had been incredible. My mother smashed every plate in the kitchenette" (130). In typical fashion, the family's domestic comfort is secondary to what concerns the mother more immediately. She tells her husband there's nothing to eat because they have no plates. The scene also emphasizes the kitchen as a volatile space and as a room where family secrets can be confronted. The volatility of this domestic space derives partly from the room's status as a space for the family, rather than a public space where decorum is observed. Instead of having her violent reaction in the parlor, which faces the street and possibly allows someone outside to see into the room, Jeanette's mother retreats to the kitchen to vent her anger. She reacts against the space where she and Jeanette have been the closest.

The most interesting retreat to the kitchen that Winterson portrays, however, is the one the mother makes after Jeanette's birth mother has paid a visit. Before we turn to that episode, it is important to examine Winterson's representation of Jeanette's adoption. Couching it in

mythical terms, Winterson establishes early in the novel that Jeanette is adopted. Her mother understands Jeanette as a foundling she will dedicate to the Lord, "the next best thing" to an immaculate conception (3), but Jeanette's "birth" is also described like Athena's or Satan's birth: Jeanette sprang from her mother's head. Suggesting how strongly her mother wants Jeanette to be her disciple, the image of Jeanette being grown in her mother's mind, where she has formulated her religious doctrine, positions Jeanette as an outgrowth of that doctrine. Winterson's representation of adoption has been analyzed by several critics. Because she argues that stories of ontology are a central thematic concern for Winterson, Amy Benson Brown reads the adoption story as particularly significant. The introduction of this "fleshless, sexless, even intellectual begetting" (237) in the first chapter "initiates the novel's concerns with both origins and with story-making and interpretation" (236). Interpreting the image of Jeanette springing from her mother's head as an allusion to Milton's depiction of Satan's origin, Brown argues, "The rebelling spirit that later enables Jeanette's refusal of heterosexual expectations [the orange demon] is prefigured here in her mother's rejection of

bodily procreation for a begetting by mind and will instead" (237).

Pointing out that Jeanette's own mother is an orphan, disowned by her family for marrying down, Ellen Brinks and Lee Talley discuss how another orphan story plays into Jeanette's mother's formulation of family. They argue that Jeanette's mother builds her own family through the church and holds up a similar model for Jeanette by telling her a revised version of *Jane Eyre*, in which Jane does not discover her biological family and chooses a missionary life by marrying St. John. Her mother's revision of Brontë's text, they write, "gives Jeanette a precedent for liberating home and family from the biological, and therefore, heterosexual, models of family as opposed to those based upon choice" (153). They also argue that Jeanette's mother is "particularly invested in non-biological constructions of family because they allow her to have a family and to replace the one that disowned her" (153). Although these perspectives on family provide a positive model of choice for Jeanette, Brinks and Talley also point to some problems with these constructions. For one, the mother betrays Jeanette through deceptions like the revision of *Jane Eyre* and, more

dramatically, her lies about Jeanette's birth mother. When Jeanette discovers how her mother has distorted the story of *Jane Eyre* and when she discovers the adoption papers, the evidence of her mother's capacity to lie unsettles Jeanette's world order. Moreover, the mother's "disembodied fantasy" (153) of Jeanette's birth is a problematic rejection of the body. Brinks and Talley contend that "She denigrates motherhood when she cruelly describes Jeanette's birth mother as a 'carrying case'" (154).

Given what we know, then, about Jeanette's mother's deliberate construction of a bodiless motherhood, her retreat into the kitchen after a confrontation with Jeanette's birth mother could be interpreted as an admission of some of the shortcomings of that construction. The kitchen, as I am arguing, is closely tied to the mother's role in producing domestic comfort for her family. By locking herself in the kitchen during this highly charged moment, she could be trying to strengthen her claim on the role of mother. The kitchen is also the room where she later makes her only open admission of having had sex, and these associations with the body and sexuality may be another reason she is drawn to the room at this moment. She may feel that her mythology is

faltering and that she has missed an important experience of conception and giving birth.

Jeanette, meanwhile, faces her own emotional crisis during this episode. Pressing a glass against the wall to hear the argument between the two women, she listens as long as she can before she breaks down in tears. Her mother does not, however, offer any sympathy after sending the birth mother away. When Jeanette refers to the other woman as her mother, her (adoptive) mother strikes her so hard it throws her to the floor and reaffirms, "I'm your mother" (101). The blow is designed to reiterate who is master in the household. Because it is the only time her mother strikes Jeanette, it also suggests a desperation on her part. The challenge to her carefully constructed world posed by Jeanette's desire to meet her biological mother is too much for her to bear. Finally, the blow suggests how betrayed she feels by her daughter. She expects from her daughter the same unwavering loyalty that both of them show towards God. After striking her daughter, she withdraws into the kitchen, locks the door behind her, and hides away in a room that—as I have shown—is the space of their intimacy. With this scene, Winterson reiterates the theme of the kitchen's volatility. When

emotions run high, and particularly when the mother feels anxiety about sex and her body, the kitchen is the place she chooses to go. We might speculate that she would rather contain sex and emotion in the kitchen because of the room's associations with one's bodily needs. Moreover, the room's associations with comfort suggest another reason she would go there during an emotional crisis.

Of the four novels discussed in this study, *Oranges* treats the mother/daughter relationship with the most complexity and offers the most extensive examination of that relationship, giving readers the opportunity to see both its destructive and redemptive aspects. Winterson's skillful use of the kitchen scenes is central to her well-drawn depiction of Jeanette and her mother. In spite of all of her mother's shortcomings, Jeanette develops into a strong and independent young woman because of the way she is raised. Indeed, in the opening paragraphs of the novel, Jeanette declares, "I cannot recall a time when I did not know that I was special" (3). Through religious conviction and love (stern though it might be), Jeanette's mother instills confidence in her daughter, a confidence that ironically gives Jeanette the strength to leave home and build a different life for herself. This

ability to choose for herself has been modeled for Jeanette by her mother, particularly through the way she inhabits the kitchen. Her mother chooses when she will act maternally and take on kitchen duties, and she appropriates the space for her own use when she needs privacy. Jeanette emulates her mother when she strikes out to create a space for herself in a new home. She nonetheless returns home at Christmas because she cannot completely break the emotional ties that bind her to her mother, ties forged to a great extent through their interactions in the kitchen.

Laurel Bollinger, reflecting on female loyalty in the novel, writes that Jeanette's return home at the end of the novel "suggests that, for this text, maturity consists in the continuation, not the elimination, of mother-daughter relations" (Bollinger 364). According to Bollinger, "Jeanette, who constantly repeats her need for someone who will not betray her, chooses first not to betray; she does not desert her mother. Like [the Biblical] Ruth, she chooses female loyalty" (371). By including a tentative reconciliation between Jeanette and her mother, Winterson acknowledges how powerful the connection between mother and daughter can be. Linked together by the intimacy they forge

in the kitchen, Jeanette and her mother overcome their anger and frustration with one another and ultimately offer emotional support to each other. This model stands as a counterbalance to the emotionally fraught relationship forged between mother and daughter in the kitchen of *Art and Lies*.³⁴

The Smell of Bacon

Two stories below her room, the kitchen lay across the landing from the dining room. All the lights still burned. The music was coming from the closed door. It grew louder every moment. [Melanie] knelt down and put her eye to the keyhole, to see what she could see. (The Magic Toyshop 50)

In Angela Carter's *The Magic Toyshop*, the morning after Melanie indulges a fantasy by secretly trying on her mother's wedding dress, the smell of breakfast recalls her to reality: "Toast and bacon smells floated up from the kitchen. Life went on" (23). Because the nighttime adventure has ended with the inadvertent destruction of the wedding dress,

³⁴ In contrast to her interest in *Oranges* and *Art and Lies* in the kitchen as a setting for scenes between mothers and daughters, in *The Passion* Winterson depicts men as closely associated with the kitchen. Having enlisted in Napoleon's army, Henri is assigned to the kitchen. Although his first job is to wring the necks of the chickens, Henri eventually becomes Napoleon's private waiter. Villanelle's abusive husband, before he makes his fortune and marries her, also works in Napoleon's kitchen. His character is never given a name, but is instead simply referred to as "the cook."

Melanie is angry with herself. The kitchen smells prompt her to say "savagely to herself" that she is a fool (23). The night before, when she put on the dress, it is not only literally too big for her young body, but also metaphorically too big for her because, Carter implies, Melanie is not as ready as she imagines herself to be for adulthood, sexuality, and the cultural roles that define them. When she wanders into the garden, the night "snuffed out her daytime self at once, between two of its dark fingers" (17). The experience is exciting—because the night air and dew are sensual, because she is outside alone while everyone else is asleep, and because wearing the dress is an illicit act—but it ultimately overwhelms her emotionally when she concludes that the nighttime sky "is too big for her, as the dress had been" (18). She runs back to the house, seeking its comfort and safety, but she has locked herself out and consequently must drag the dress up a tree and hurl first the dress and then herself treacherously through her open bedroom window. By the time she reaches her bedroom, the dress has been shredded.³⁵

³⁵ The following chapter on bedrooms offers further analysis of the wedding dress episode.

The next morning, just as she discovers the extent of the damage done to the dress, the kitchen and its smells waft up to her room and mark the beginning of a new day, and she begins to understand her nighttime adventure as an adolescent indulgence in fantasy. By introducing the kitchen in this way, Carter sets a tone for how the room is initially interpreted. The kitchen and breakfast, Carter posits, mark the transition between the unconscious desires revealed in dreams during the night and the practical habits people return to once morning arrives. For Melanie in particular, the daily routine that begins in the kitchen represents reality and its accompanying responsibilities, which stand in stark contrast to her nighttime fantasy and self-indulgent behavior. In fact, responsibility is precisely what Melanie undertakes as a penance after her parents die. Convinced that her reckless night in the wedding dress has caused the death of her parents, she punishes herself by tightly pulling her hair into painful braids and working alongside her nanny, Mrs. Rundle, on the domestic chores. Melanie accepts Mrs. Rundle's assessment that she must now be "a little mother" to her younger siblings (28). Beginning with the bacon smells wafting up from the kitchen, Carter shows how Melanie has

been drawn out of the bedroom, where she has spent most of her time reveling in herself, and into the kitchen, domesticity, and a maternal role.

Carter's introduction of the kitchen in Uncle Philip's toyshop, however, gives a markedly different perspective on the kitchen. After their parents' deaths, Melanie and her siblings come under the care of their Uncle Philip and his wife Margaret, who was struck dumb on the day she married Philip. Margaret's younger brothers, Francie and Finn, who were orphaned before they were old enough to take care of themselves, also live with them, even though they are adults by the time Melanie and her siblings arrive. Melanie first sees the kitchen of her new home through an act of voyeurism. Unable to sleep in the unfamiliar surroundings, she follows the sound of music downstairs and peeps through the keyhole of the kitchen door to discover the Jowles (Melanie's Aunt Margaret and Margaret's two brothers) playing music together: Francie on the fiddle, Margaret on the flute, and Finn expertly dancing. Although she is enchanted by the scene, she does not feel at home enough to join them in the room. Instead she falls asleep on the landing and is later discovered and carried back to her bed. As a new member of

the family, Melanie will not intrude on the Jowles' intimacy but instead spies on the family when they are at their ease, in a room where their domestic comfort, not the production of a public image, is the primary aim. The scene is indicative of how much of an outsider Melanie feels. Although she has shared a meal with the family in the dining room, she does not join them in the more intimate room, the kitchen.

Her voyeurism is also suggestive of the kitchen as an entry point into the unconscious. When one peeps through a keyhole, it is usually to see something illicit, and the act is certainly revelatory of one's own desires. Melanie desires to find comfort and love in her new home, yet she is unready to admit those needs outright. Beyond these immediate meanings, Carter also sets up the scene to foreshadow later revelations about Melanie, about the domestic roles she undertakes, and about the Jowles. The introduction of the toyshop kitchen through a peephole is particularly appropriate because Carter gradually reveals the kitchen to be a space charged with emotion, sexuality, and repressed fears.

The scene also recalls "Bluebeard," a text that Carter directly references in this novel. Melanie's curiosity to

explore the house aligns her with the heroine of "Bluebeard" as does her act of surreptitiously peeking into the room. In "Pandora: Topographies of the Mask and Curiosity," Laura Mulvey notes the similarities between the Bluebeard heroine and Pandora and Eve.³⁶ Because women's sexuality has been repeatedly represented as veiled and mysterious, Mulvey reads Pandora's box as an emblem of her sexuality. Mulvey reinterprets Pandora's curiosity as a healthy desire to understand her own sexuality instead of a treacherous threat to mankind. Pandora's desire to look in the box is transgressive because Western thought has so heavily invested in the idea of female sexuality as enigmatic (Mulvey 66).

Through her voyeurism, Melanie exhibits a similar curiosity. A noise in the night wakes her and draws her into an act of spying that can be interpreted as a curiosity about sexuality. Illicitly watching people at night, after being woken by the sounds they are making, is evocative of someone

³⁶ Mulvey briefly mentions Carter, using "The Bloody Chamber" to make her point about these similarities. As Carter's retelling of "Bluebeard," "The Bloody Chamber" depicts a young woman trying better to understand her husband by actively reading the rooms of the castle to which she is taken after her marriage. Her exploration of the space eventually reveals the corpses of her husband's former wives. In a feminist revision of the original tale, Carter changes the ending: the protagonist's mother saves her daughter from a violent death at the husband's hands.

peeping through a keyhole to watch sexual activity. The scene also reflects Melanie's interest in Finn and the way he moves when she notices that his dancing "fulfilled all the promise of his physical grace" (51). Only a few years older than Melanie, Finn has already intrigued her when he showed her to her bedroom and unfastened her plaits. As the kitchen scene implies, she is drawn to him sexually, although she does not yet admit it. Even though her own desire for Finn is still veiled from her, Melanie's Pandora-like curiosity points to her eagerness to learn more about her sexuality.

Carter casts the kitchen differently in the light of morning, when it loses most of its sexual allure and becomes a more conventional setting: a room where one begins the daily routine with the meal of breakfast. Deciding to "adventure downstairs" to explore the kitchen alone, before the rest of the household gets up, Melanie seeks comfort from the kitchen and tries to assuage the alienation she feels on her first morning in the new house (58). She assumes the kitchen is a place where much of the family's living takes place. Desiring "to learn the new domestic geography" (58), she takes interest in the "secret history" of a scorchmark on the table cloth and "the mysterious unopened mail" on the

fireplace mantle (59). Carter's use of the metaphor of exploration is worth noting since it is the same metaphor she earlier uses to describe Melanie's interest in her developing body and budding sexuality. The metaphor suggests confidence and autonomy, two qualities Melanie hopes to preserve during this time of so many transitions, but more importantly Carter's use of it in the kitchen scene connects the room again to sexuality by echoing the exploration motif from the earlier scenes of Melanie gazing at her body.

Continuing her investigation of the kitchen, Melanie inventories the larder to assess what the family likes to eat and takes a piece of leftover currant cake. Her growing confidence, however, is interrupted when she is unnerved by one of Finn's uncanny paintings and also by the "grotesque inventiveness" and "deliberate eccentricity" of a cuckoo clock that she later learns is one of Philip's creations (60). The clock is particularly important because it allows Philip to maintain his presence in a room where he rarely spends much time. For those who spend more time in the kitchen, there is an hourly reminder of Philip, who is the unquestioned head of this household. Reading the clock as "an echo of Philip's own voice," Isabel Fraile notes that

"Punctuality. . . is one of his obsessions: there is a moment for everything in Uncle Philip's neat scheme of life, and it is perilous to break this orderly daily schedule" (242). The clock's effect of discomposing Melanie suggests not only that the comfort she seeks from the kitchen might not be forthcoming, but that Philip's rule over her will take on the relentless consistency of the clock's measurement of time. By keeping Melanie unsettled, Carter also keeps readers unsettled, not allowing us to make too many assumptions about the kitchen as a place of quiet domestic labor and the comfort of the household.

Highlighting the culture shock Melanie feels in her new home, Carter draws on kitchen imagery to reveal Melanie's class prejudices and her fear that she has permanently lost the wealth and comfort made possible by her father's success as a novelist. Melanie imagines the kitchen of her old house as the setting for a sentimental tableau of "'The Last Meal in the Old Home', like a Pre-Raphaelite painting, the three orphans and the grieving servant seated in melancholy around the old table, using the old knives and forks they would never use again" (53). She recalls the "lovely, old-fashioned kitchen" of her old house, a kitchen where her

mother her posed "in a frilly apron, mixing a cake" for a magazine feature about the wives of celebrities (54).

Through these images, Melanie turns the kitchen into an accoutrement of her former wealth. The first image, which highlights the servant faithful enough to join in the family's grieving, is a particularly romantic vision of her family enjoying everyone's adulation, even those paid to work for them. The second image, which highlights their kitchen as stylish enough to appear in the magazine, is revelatory of Melanie's understanding of her mother. She remembers her mother posing with cake batter instead of remembering any actual cooking done in the kitchen. Melanie's reverie about their final meal in the kitchen being "a kind of sacrament" is undone, however, when she recalls how Victoria, her sister, "had greased herself like an Eskimo with sausage fat, being too young for sentiment" (54). Reality keeps Melanie from becoming wholly engrossed in her fantasy scene, so she concludes her imaginative flight with "Well, good-bye to all that" (54). Since reality again imposes itself as a breakfast meat (first bacon, now sausage), the scene reiterates the idea that breakfast marks a transition from fantasy to reality.

Although Melanie dismisses this sentimental image, Carter shows her later resurrecting her nostalgia for a better kitchen when she writes a letter to her former nanny and imagines her reading it in the kitchen of her new employer, where there would be:

a refrigerator and a stove with automatic oven-control and an eye-level grill and gleaming plastic working surfaces and an electric blender and an electric coffee-mill, probably. They would have fresh-ground coffee in red lacquered pots in Mrs. Rundle's new house. (79)

The coffee in particular is important because Melanie feels her recently developed taste for it has given her a new sophistication. In the toyshop household, they only drink tea, and Melanie includes this habit in her catechism of qualities that make her new family more common than she is. The electric appliances also stand in contrast to the toyshop kitchen, which has no modern amenities, not even a refrigerator or hot running water.

Carter chooses the kitchen landing as the setting for Melanie's violent first meeting with her uncle. Because this is the same spot where Melanie peeped through the keyhole the night before, the kitchen entryway begins to take on significant symbolic weight and draws readers' attention to

the meaning of the room that lies beyond. The violence on the landing is a throttling that Philip gives Finn for showing up late for breakfast while still dressed in his pajamas. The informality of the pajamas infuriates Philip because it promotes an intimacy among family members that Philip discourages even in the kitchen. Finn sarcastically introduces Melanie to Philip just after he is assaulted: "Melanie, this is your Uncle Philip!" (69). At the ensuing meal in the kitchen, Philip lords over the table, directing the meal. He doesn't address Melanie or her siblings. When he leaves the room, there is a palpable change in the atmosphere, and the Jowles slip easily back into their quiet intimacy with one another, an intimacy that Melanie found fascinating the night before but which she finds embarrassing now that she is in the same room with them. Even though she feels lonely and the Jowles are clearly affectionate people, she is still unready to seek affection from these strangers, to whom she feels superior. She instead finds a way to ignore their intimacy:

She separated herself from their intimacy by putting the forks precisely away in a drawer, where other forks were. Then she dried and put away knives, and spoons, also. She was a wind-up

putting-away doll, clicking through its programmed movements. (75-6)

The precision and orderliness of her movements recall once again Philip's cuckoo clock and the order he imposes over the house, while the use of the word *doll* indicates that Melanie is already being reduced to another one of Philip's toys.

Paulina Palmer argues that Carter's use of the doll image, which often appears in her earlier work, is a trope for the oppressiveness of a male-dominated society and women's place in that society. Indeed, when Melanie recognizes that Philip's influence is affecting her behavior, she admits to herself that she has no "volition of her own" (Carter 76). Through Philip's assault on Finn and his overbearing presence, which have subdued Melanie, Carter reveals how violence has subdued her into a domestic role of undertaking kitchen chores to insure Philip's comfort, while her own comfort is of negligible importance.

While the doll image does make an important point about Melanie's role in the new household, Carter complicates the meaning of this kitchen scene in several ways. Melanie seemingly accepts her subservience and domestic duties as a continuance of the penance she began after her parents'

deaths, but there are some notable differences now that she is in her new surroundings. For one, she discovers that she can relinquish responsibility for Victoria. Instead of taking on the role of "the little mother" Mrs. Rundle had assigned to her, she recognizes that Aunt Margaret longs for a child and can be a mother to Victoria. Relieved of this worry, Melanie imagines running away to a job of her own and a one-room flat where she could brew "Nescafé on her own gas-ring" (78). This image of autonomy somewhat undercuts the idea that she is completely subdued by Philip's dominance. It also recalls Benjamin's analysis of the way that motherhood precludes subjectivity: it is not until Melanie relinquishes responsibility for a child that she can imagine agency for herself. Even though the image is one of herself performing another domestic chore, making coffee, it is undertaken for her own enjoyment, and because she only uses a simple gas-ring, she does not have the added burden of keeping an entire kitchen clean and ordered.

Carter also uses the toyshop kitchen scene to reveal that Melanie's feelings towards the Jowles are layered. As she dries dishes and puts them away, Melanie feels envious of the intimacy between the siblings and wishes she could be a

part of it. She temporarily recoils from that desire by reminding herself how "common" the Jowles are but then concludes, "in spite of all that, they were red and had substance and she, Melanie, was forever gray, a shadow" (77). In other words, the Jowles have bodies and a physical existence. Meanwhile, Melanie watches her arm hanging up cups as if it were not a part of her body: "She watched it with mild curiosity; it seemed to have a life of its own" (78). This robotic movement echoes the doll image used earlier and its social message about women's oppression, but it also illustrates Melanie's growing detachment from her adolescent body. The confidence and joy in her newly developed body that she exhibited in front of her old bedroom mirror is undercut by the three Jowle siblings, who have a physical easiness about them that is both baffling and titillating to Melanie.

Carter characterizes the Jowles' intimacy and physical easiness as most often on display in the kitchen. They feel particularly comfortable in the kitchen because Philip so rarely uses the room except during breakfast. When Philip is away from the house, they also play their music there. Because the house has no running hot water, the Jowles even

bathe in the kitchen, in a tin tub they fill with kettles of hot water. Their pragmatism about making the kitchen a multi-purpose space reflects an insistence on their part to take as much comfort as they can from the one space in the house that they try to make their own. Furthermore, by depicting the Jowles as bathing in a room where one does not expect bodies to be naked, Carter finds another way to direct readers' attention to their physicality. Throughout the novel, Carter portrays the Jowles as being emphatically physical. Melanie often notices the way they move, smell, and physically interact with one another. By linking the Jowles to the kitchen, Carter is drawing thematic connections between their physicality and the association between the kitchen and the body. The Jowles' interest in the room is also driven by Philip's lack of interest in it. As a space so closely related to female domesticity, the kitchen is, perhaps, beneath his notice. After all, the room seems to be a space where Philip has already asserted his dominance because Margaret has obediently fallen in line with the social prescriptions for the dutiful wife. Philip has subdued her into muteness, and she plays her wifely role to a fault; hence, he has little reason to notice what goes on in

the kitchen after he has taken his breakfast there each morning. The room is therefore given over to the Jowles.

Through the close identification of the Jowles with the kitchen, Carter suggests that they are content to stay in their "charmed circle" of hearth and home (123), rather than venture into the world outside the family. For Margaret, this isolation from the outside world becomes even more pronounced when Melanie comes to live with them, because Melanie takes over the duties of shopping, leaving Margaret at home with no reason ever to leave the house anymore. Even before Melanie's arrival, however, the Jowles have retreated into their nuclear family, defending themselves from Philip's tyranny by tightening their emotional bonds to each other even more securely. In the process, they lose the ability to develop relationships with others, which, I argue, is the reason that Francie and Margaret fall in love with each other and begin an incestuous relationship.

Carter also depicts the kitchen as the setting for a growing intimacy between Margaret and Melanie that develops into a kind of mother/daughter relationship. Before she learns about Margaret's incest with her brother Francie, Melanie understands Margaret as being wholly submissive to

her abusive husband, and Melanie, in her own turn, obediently takes her assigned position by Margaret's side, helping with the kitchen chores. They also spend their evenings in the kitchen, Melanie reading and Margaret trying to keep up with endless mending and sewing for the whole family. As they grow closer, Melanie feels both love and pity for Margaret. While they prepare a meal one day, Melanie feels "embarrassed pleasure" when Margaret chalks on the board, "I don't know how I coped before you came. It is lovely to have another woman in the house" (123). Their closeness in part derives from the labor they share as women who are responsible for taking care of the rest of the household. Once she feels she has been admitted into this intimacy with Margaret, and by extension with Finn and Francie, Melanie "threw her lot in with the Jowles" (123), expressing her love by performing domestic tasks like polishing Francie's shoes and mending his clothes.

No longer understanding domesticity as a penance, Melanie begins to take pleasure in this role, seeing it as a way to belong to the Jowle family and show her affection for them. Using Margaret as her model, Melanie embraces domesticity and the maternal role with new relish. Melanie's

choice appears to be her only way of taking refuge from Philip because rebellion against his power is not viable. By taking on a domestic role, one that Philip finds acceptable, Melanie can avoid his close scrutiny, while staving off her loneliness through a closer bond with the Jowles. Carter's depiction of Melanie retreating into the kitchen and celebrating hearth and home recalls the similar retreat that the Jowles have made. Because the social role of domesticity is essentially the only one available to Melanie in Philip's household, she finds a way to make that role palatable. The ability to take comfort from the kitchen and to use it to provide comfort to others offers her a chance at a happiness that has eluded her.

With thematic finesse, Carter presents a disturbing episode in the kitchen as the means by which Melanie achieves this intimacy with the Jowles and this celebration of domestic pleasures. One evening when Melanie is alone in the kitchen putting away silverware, she hallucinates a severed hand lying in the drawer, a hand with well manicured nails and wearing a thin silver ring: "It was the hand of a child who goes to dancing class and wears frilled petticoats with knickers to match" (118). The stump is ragged, indicating

that the hand has been removed with a tool that was not sharp enough, and it makes Melanie think of Bluebeard. The hallucination causes her to faint, and she is revived by Francie.

The solicitousness with which Margaret, Francie, and Finn treat Melanie as she recovers from this shock prompts Melanie to feel she has finally been admitted to their family circle, but the hallucination itself is a metaphor for the violence that has been used to make Melanie—as well as the Jowles—subservient to Philip. As Paulina Palmer has aptly noted:

Throughout the narrative, images of mutilation and castration (Melanie's fantasy of the severed hand, and Finn's bee-stung eye) advertise to the reader the elements of violence at the heart of the patriarchal family unit. They also highlight the violent nature of the myths which perpetuate its existence. ("From 'Coded Mannequin'" 184)

In this scene and elsewhere, Carter's reference to the particularly bloody myth, Bluebeard, underscores how dangerous the husband/father figure can be.

Because the hand suggests Melanie's detachment from her body, the bloody image also recalls Carter's earlier images of Melanie as a wind-up doll with robotic movements that do not seem to be her own. Through the hallucination, Carter

brings this detachment to a crisis and shows that in her submission to Philip, Melanie must forfeit her body and is therefore severed from her own physical existence. Furthermore, the hand represents how Melanie's comfortable middle-class existence has been truncated. As an emanation of her unconscious, the vision is certainly a projection of her own hand, even though she may not recognize it as such. She specifically sees a hand because she uses her hands to perform so many domestic chores. The beautiful, young hand could have belonged to Melanie in her younger years, but she now cannot care for herself with the same attention to detail that the manicured hand displays. The hand represents a young woman untroubled by domestic labor, who is instead focused on being beautiful.³⁷

Perhaps most importantly, though, the hallucination in the kitchen illustrates the emanation from her unconscious of what Melanie has repressed. She refers to the hand as belonging to a young girl, not to herself. Her failure to recognize the hand as a part of herself demonstrates the way

³⁷ Carter does not expect readers to be overly distressed by Melanie's lost wealth. Her class prejudices are one of Melanie's least attractive features. In fact, in an interview with Olga Kenyon, Carter calls Melanie "quite silly and overprivileged" (27).

her unconscious has transformed the original source of anxiety that prompted repression. That source of anxiety was her own body and her adolescent relationship to it, which became troubled once she came to live with Philip. Through this scene, Carter implies that one's body cannot be wholly contained or repressed, so Melanie's detachment from her body ultimately comes back to haunt her. Melanie's unconscious drags up a starkly physical image, complete with a soft plopping sound of blood dripping from the wound, to remind her that the body cannot be ignored.

In particular, the image signals that Melanie's sexuality cannot entirely be repressed, even if Philip's power over her has muddled the adolescent excitement about her body that she felt prior to her residence at the toyshop and prompted her to feel instead that her body is no longer hers to control.³⁸ From the adolescent who is curious about sexuality, she has become Philip's domestic doll and is being channeled into the desexualizing role of mother. Such a loss of control over her body ties Melanie thematically to Margaret, whose muteness came over her on the day she married

³⁸ When he plays the swan to Melanie's Leda, Philip's theatrical rape of Melanie is the ultimate example of divorcing Melanie from her body. See Chapter II for a discussion of the Leda play.

Philip. By staging the incident in the kitchen, Carter suggests that it is the room where Melanie has carried her detachment from her body to the greatest extreme. The vision of the bloody hand also anticipates the revelation of Margaret and Francie's incest because their sexual relationship also takes place in the kitchen. With the bloody hand, Carter introduces sexuality into the kitchen with a shocking image.

Before she learns of that incest, Melanie imagines Margaret in wholly maternal terms, assuming that her marriage to Philip was Margaret's only means of providing a home to her younger brothers when they were orphaned. To ensure her brothers' domestic comfort, Margaret is the dutiful wife to Philip and seemingly follows every rule of the house to a fault. She is willing to stay with Philip and suffer the muteness that struck her when she became his wife because Philip can provide for them economically. From Melanie's perspective, Margaret's muteness is the price she pays in order to protect her brothers.

Isabel Fraile, however, reads Margaret's muteness from an entirely different perspective by arguing that Margaret's refusal to talk is a deliberate rejection of Philip. Fraile

points out that Melanie describes Margaret as "garrulous" because she is always chalking remarks on her blackboards (Carter 48). This perception that a mute woman is actually talkative disrupts the binarism of dumbness and articulation (Fraile 244-45). She also notes that Margaret has a wordless means of communicating with her brothers, characterized by "a nakedness of expression" (Fraile 247), and that her way of relating to the young Victoria, who cannot yet read, is suggestive of Kristeva's concept of the semiotic, which challenges the male symbolic order by privileging the psychological and physical bonds between mother and child (Fraile 249).³⁹ In Kristeva's theory, the term *semiotic* describes the world inhabited by an infant before she goes through the psychological stage of separation, which enables

³⁹ Fraile also uses Cixous' concepts of the Realm of the Proper and the Realm of the Gift to contrast the Jowle siblings with Philip. Philip, she argues, inhabits the Realm of the Proper, where "there is a danger involved in the simple act of saying 'thank you'" since acknowledging you have received something leaves you vulnerable to the person who gives it to you (Fraile 241). Instead, Cixous writes, "you have only one wish, and that is hastily to return the gift, to break the circuit of exchange" (qtd. in Fraile 241). The Jowle siblings, on the other hand, inhabit the Realm of the Gift, which Cixous characterizes as an openness to others and "a readiness to give and to receive" (Fraile 246). While this comparison is interesting, especially when we think about the Jowles' association with the kitchen, a room devoted to nurturing the family, Cixous' essentialism in correlating the Realm of the Proper with masculinity and the Realm of the Gift with femininity is at odds with the thrust of Carter's writing, which rejects essentialism as a viable feminist strategy.

her to understand herself as an entity separate from her mother and the rest of the world. Fraile also argues, "[Margaret's] feelings and her attitudes towards life could never be expressed through the same medium [language] that serves Uncle Philip" (248). Margaret's muteness, Fraile concludes, "is not so much submissive as it is subversive" (247). As further evidence of her subversion of Philip's authority, Fraile points to Margaret's incest with Francie.

By concealing Margaret's incest until the close of the novel, Carter initially misleads her readers, who see Margaret through Melanie's eyes as the exemplary wife and mother figure whom Melanie feels compelled to emulate. As it turns out, however, Margaret is engaged in taboo behavior that disrupts the social order. This is revealed, with thematic consistency, during a gathering in the kitchen, while Melanie and the Jowles are celebrating Philip's temporary absence. Eventually, Margaret and Francie abandon the instruments they are playing and lock themselves in "a lover's embrace, annihilating the world, as if taking place at midnight on the crest of a hill, with a tearing wind beating the branches above them" (193-94), but the embrace actually takes place in the toyshop kitchen, which is

described as "full of peace" (194). As Melanie slips out of the kitchen with Finn, she notices that "Away from the kitchen, it was cold" (194). Through this imagery of warmth and peace, Carter deliberately portrays the incest as a positive alternative to Margaret's marriage to Philip. The relationship also undercuts the assumption that Margaret is Philip's helpless victim because it depicts her as expressing her sexuality freely and blatantly flouting her marital fidelity.

Most relevant to my analysis, however, Carter uses Margaret's actions to overturn the traditional meaning of the kitchen as the space where women conform to a socially-prescribed domestic role. Ostensibly, Margaret is preparing meals, washing dishes, looking after Victoria, and modeling her faultless domesticity for Melanie, but actually she can unabashedly and without remorse drop to the kitchen floor and make love to her brother in front of the sleeping Victoria. By embracing her sexuality, taboo though it may be, Margaret illustrates that Philip's rule is not absolute. The role of the desexualized mother described by Benjamin is effectively subverted when Margaret secretly claims sexual subjectivity for herself. Melanie, whose sexuality has been directed by

Philip since she arrived at his house, now has a model for reclaiming her own sexuality, although Carter's ending makes it unclear if Melanie will be able to fulfill this possibility. If she were to follow Margaret's example, Melanie could use domestic service in the kitchen as a bluff: by feigning submission to the phallic order, she could more easily escape notice when she pursues sexual pleasure for herself. Because society perceives homemaking as desexualizing, women who undertake it can raise themselves above suspicion of illicit sexual activities.

Carter's fiery conclusion to *The Magic Toyshop* begins at breakfast in the kitchen one morning with a Jowle rebellion against Philip that grows incrementally as the day progresses. Since Philip is absent, Finn usurps his seat at the table.⁴⁰ Later, he breaks the clock that Philip has made, which is a decisive blow against Philip's oppressive

⁴⁰ When Finn sits at Philip's place at the table and Victoria identifies him as "Daddy" (Carter 183), Paulina Palmer argues that he effectively becomes the house's new father, which makes him little different from Philip. Commenting on Carter's suggestion that Melanie and Finn's marriage is imminent, Palmer concludes that Melanie has no alternative but "to seek refuge from one man in the arms of another" ("From 'Coded Mannequin'" 187). Jean Wyatt, however, argues that Finn rejects the allure of phallic rule when he chops up the swan, an act that amounts to a symbolic self-castration since the swan's neck has been described as protruding from his coat like a penis. My own understanding of Finn leans closer to Wyatt's.

rule since the clock symbolizes Philip's watchfulness over the household and his insistence on order. They decide not to open the shop, and the kitchen takes on a party atmosphere with drinking and music playing. Melanie even puts on trousers, which Philip forbids for women, and Margaret and Francie give in to their passion. The entire day is given over to a renunciation of Philip, but the siblings' embrace in the kitchen is the ultimate catalyst for the destruction of the oppressive toyhouse because Philip, when he catches them *in flagrante delicto*, decides to set fire to the house with the object of trapping and burning them alive. Philip's rage makes clear how threatening the incest is to his power over the family.

With this final confrontation in the kitchen, Carter highlights the room's subversive potential as a haven for disruptive female sexuality. The image of the desexualized mother, a caretaker of the family, is linked to the kitchen and informs the social interpretation of the room. Furthermore, habit and routine keep the space so familiar that the kitchen discourages closer scrutiny, but that very familiarity makes the kitchen particularly attractive as a space for enacting subversive behavior: it is the last place

where one might suspect subversion. Carter also shows us that we cannot assume the daily routine will proceed indefinitely without change or interruption; repressed emotions erupt into the space of the kitchen. For Melanie, the routine in the kitchen is accomplished by a repression of her sexuality that ultimately resurfaces as a hallucination. With the image of the fire, Carter represents the volatility of the kitchen, a space which can explode with passion and even violence. Melanie's voyeurism and her hallucination of the bloody hand have pointed readers towards this conclusion that the kitchen is charged with emotion, sexuality, and violence, but Melanie must see for herself the example set by her aunt/foster mother of how a woman can challenge the power of the male head of the household before she can understand the full potential of the kitchen. When the mother begins to take on sexual agency, she disrupts the social perceptions of motherhood and of the kitchen, the space to which the mother is socially assigned. Through Margaret, a re-sexualized maternal figure who has illicit sex in the kitchen, Carter invites readers to re-examine our assumptions about the kitchen.

Life without a Kitchen

The dressing-room was fully equipped for making tea; there was a brass spirit stove in the cupboard beside the fireplace and a japanned tray on which lived a chubby brown teapot and thick, white, pot mugs. Lizzie set a match the small flame and reached in the cupboard again for a blue bag of sugar and for milk. (Nights at the Circus 42)

As central as the kitchen is to the narrative in *The Magic Toyshop*, kitchens are all but absent in Carter's *Nights at the Circus*. Through her fame as a winged woman and an aerialiste of unparalleled skill, Fevvers has achieved a life of economic independence that does not require her to take on homemaking and the keeping of a kitchen. By ordering out, using room service, or dining with rich admirers, Fevvers has little need for a traditional kitchen. Instead of baking for herself, Fevvers puts her name on a baking powder, which promises customers that their cakes will rise "up in the air . . . just as [Fevvers] did" (8). Fevvers has evidently reached a point in her success when she can peddle domesticity rather than practice it.⁴¹

⁴¹ Of course, as Carter later reveals, Fevvers' financial gains are invested in a subversive, socialist political movement, so the end result of peddling domesticity may not be as socially conservative as one might assume.

The scarcity of kitchens in the novel suggests whole new possibilities for women, beyond domestic labor and homemaking. Harriet Blodgett reads *Fevvers* as a parody of the Victorian ideal of the angel in the house, the woman who selflessly serves others. Blodgett notes how Carter literalizes the image of the angel by giving *Fevvers* wings and also how she "revitalizes her as an inspiration for all women, in the person of a female who is good to herself" (52). Indeed, *Fevvers* has moved outside of the house and become a public spectacle, to her economic advantage. In the process, she opens up new roles for women. Although *Fevvers'* ability to do this may not seem so remarkable for contemporary readers, Carter's 1899 setting for the novel makes *Fevvers'* escape from domesticity a more notable accomplishment. In the context of this dissertation, her escape is also notable because *Melanie*, *Picasso*, and *Jeanette*—who all live in twentieth-century households—discover how hazardous domestic space can be for a young woman who is coming into her sexuality and how difficult it can be for her to leave the house and make her way on her own.

Even though Carter keeps Fevvers out of the kitchen, an examination of the spaces that stand in for the kitchen is worthwhile. Since Fevvers' trapeze act often keeps her away from home, she and Lizzie find ways to feel at home in the spaces available to them. Carter shows that the kitchen's function of producing comfort is important enough that characters, particularly women, will reproduce aspects of the kitchen in other spaces when a traditional kitchen is unavailable. Two spaces in particular take on kitchen functions during the course of the novel: Fevvers' dressing room, where she and Lizzie entertain Walser; and Fevvers' Petersburg hotel suite, where she takes care of Mignon after she has been beaten and cast out by the ape trainer. As we shall see, each of these spaces is used for the production of comfort, especially the comfort provided by food. Nonetheless, however homey Fevvers and Lizzie contrive to make a space, they are selective about whom they allow to share in their domestic comfort. For Walser, Fevvers' dressing room is disconcerting because Fevvers and Lizzie deliberately use the space to beguile him. To Mignon, on the other hand, Fevvers shows maternal attentiveness and uses

whatever resources the hotel can offer to ease her pain and unhappiness.

Carter draws Fevvers' dressing room as a daunting space for Walser because the room is so completely dominated by Fevvers, from her own huge frame (more than six feet tall) to her silk stockings, which—when Walser dislodges them from the mantelpiece—slither over him and infuse the air with “a powerful note of stale feet, final ingredient in the highly personal aroma, ‘essence of Fevvers’, that clogged the room” (9). When one notes the use of the words “ingredient” and “aroma,” the language here is already suggestive of cooking. In fact, in addition to the costumes, cosmetics, dressing furniture, and bathtub that fill the disorderly space, the dressing room is “fully equipped for making tea” (42). This domestic touch, along with Fevvers' repeated ordering of food which she ravenously consumes, suggests how the room substitutes for a kitchen when Fevvers and Lizzie are kept away from home by Fevvers' life as a celebrity trapeze artist. As a substitute kitchen, the room shares at least two elements with other kitchens discussed in this chapter. First, as Walser discovers, the room is closely associated with the body, particularly Fevvers' relentless physicality,

which is on grand display in the dressing-room scenes; and second, Fevvers and Lizzie show a sincere mother/daughter intimacy that they indulge unselfconsciously in front of Walser.

Carter uses the dressing-room scenes to introduce Fevvers to readers. The space is an intimate one that certainly has characteristics of a bedroom since its function is for dressing, but Carter's depiction of it evokes a kitchen when Fevvers and Lizzie ply Walser with food and drink. The room also encourages the informality and intimacy of a kitchen because of the way Fevvers deports herself. She does not stand on formality or exhibit any of the reserved behavior dictated by a parlor, dining room, or other room for receiving guests. In fact, one of the most memorable images of the dressing-room scenes is how comfortable Fevvers feels about her body. A pungent aroma of body smells permeates her dressing-room, and the space is littered with discarded undergarments, but Fevvers is not the least embarrassed about conducting her interview for Walser among all of these bodily trappings. Furthermore, Fevvers speaks with an "Extraordinarily raucous and metallic voice" (13), she yawns "with prodigious energy, opening up a maw the size of that of

a basking shark" (52), and she belches and farts nonchalantly.

Most relevant to my examination of kitchens, though, is the way Fevvers indulges her appetite. Her nonchalant way of stuffing herself suggests a kitchen rather than a dining room because she feels no inclination to display proper table manners in front of Walser. The satisfaction of her hunger—her bodily comfort—is her primary aim. Carter portrays her as a glutton, with a palate for everything from champagne to "the earthiest, coarsest cabbies' fare" (22). The champagne she uncorks with her teeth, and she later agitates the bottle "until it ejaculated afresh" (12). Here again, as with the toyshop and *Oranges* kitchens, sexuality insinuates itself into a room that is about comfort and food. When her meat pies, potatoes, and peas are delivered, "She gorged, she stuffed herself, she spilled gravy on herself, she sucked up peas from the knife; she had a gullet to match her size and table manners of the Elizabethan variety" (22). Later during the nightlong interview, Lizzie steps out to buy greasy bacon sandwiches, which Walser declines to eat, imagining them as "for dire extremities of hunger only" (53), but which Fevvers eats with relish.

Carter achieves several objectives through the eating scenes. The masculine references, ranging from the ejaculating champagne to Fevvers' preference for cabbies' fare, distance Fevvers from traditional femininity and, consequently, from the domesticity associated with the kitchen. Carter notes that Fevvers' eats with "rented cutlery" (22), a marked distinction from Melanie's experience of endlessly washing and putting away the dishes used at each and every meal. Fevvers, by contrast, can leave all the dirty dishes under a napkin until they are taken away to be dealt with by someone else. The relish with which Fevvers devours her food is also notable because it implies that she can enjoy food more if she does not have to prepare the meal herself and clean up afterwards. The focus for Fevvers is on consumption rather than production of food, and this intensifies the delight she takes in eating.

Mother/daughter intimacy is the second element that Fevvers' dressing room shares with other kitchens. Fevvers and Lizzie know each other so well that they can interrupt each other and finish the other's sentence without missing a beat in the story they are narrating to Walser. They are unabashedly affectionate with one another. Lizzie's

ministrations to Fevvers, removing her makeup and brushing and coiffing Fevvers' hair, are carried out with maternal tenderness. When she wipes Fevvers' cold cream away, she caresses her, and when she brushes her hair, "Fevvers' head went back, her eyes half closed, she sighed with pleasure" (19). These images show the pleasure they take from physical contact with one another, a pleasure that derives from the sincere love and respect Fevvers and Lizzie feel for each other. Carter develops this relationship as a positive representation of a mother/daughter bond. For Walser, however, the intimacy between the women is just one more factor contributing to the uneasiness he feels.

Walser's discomfort is not coincidental; rather, the women deliberately orchestrate a series of ambushes to keep him off-balance, more easily manipulated. Carter makes clear that however much the dressing-room substitutes for a kitchen, the social agenda of the dressing-room is quite different from that of a typical kitchen. The women's comfort is undeniably an objective of the room, but by using their own comfort to make Walser uncomfortable, they reveal that their agenda is self-promotion. By keeping the upper

hand over Walser, they hope to retain control over the press that Fevvers receives.

Their strategy is effective on several levels. The room itself is a "mistresspiece of exquisitely feminine squalor, sufficient in its homely way, to intimidate a young man who had led a less sheltered life than this one" (9). An erotically charged space, the room is filled with titillating garments that emphasize Fevvers' sexuality. To compound the effects the space has on Walser, they use alcohol to make him more pliable and consequently to be more accepting of their stories. They keep his champagne glass full even though he tries to put the glass out of reach in order to prevent them from refilling it. Fevvers' display of her gluttonous appetite, Walser suspects, might be designed to "drive him away" (22), and Lizzie holds "a glass of wine like a weapon, eyeing Jack Walser as scrupulously as if she were attempting to assess to the last farthing just how much money he had in his wallet" (13). The women disorient him further by creating the illusion that Big Ben strikes midnight each hour, as if time were standing still, and the stories they relate about Fevvers' life are so incredible that they seem to be baiting him to challenge their verity. Aroused by

watching Fevvers stretch and yawn, Walser convinces himself that a moment away from this space, when he could breathe air that is not permeated with Fevvers' smells, will allow him to recompose himself, but his attempt to step out of the room for a bathroom break is thwarted by Fevvers, who insists that he "Piss in the pot behind the screen" (52). In this way, Fevvers retains her sexual power over Walser by keeping him within her space and directing how he should carry out a private bodily function. Sexuality is as much a part of this room as it has been in the other kitchens discussed here, and in this case, it is exploited to the advantage of the women. Essentially, Walser becomes the women's hostage for the course of the night within a space controlled by women in the service of women.

In the Petersburg section of the novel, a hotel room serves as another substitute kitchen, where Carter demonstrates that Fevvers can bestow maternal comfort as well as receive it. When Walser brings a beaten and bedraggled Mignon to Fevvers and Lizzie's hotel, their appearance brings out a maternal side to Fevvers, and Mignon easily slips into the role of the child—and even an infant. When Fevvers feeds Mignon a chocolate, Carter describes Mignon's "pale pink

mouth that opened like a sea-anemone to engulf it" (128). The infantile image indicates that Mignon has never fully developed emotionally, having landed in the arms of one abusive man after another since her early adolescence. When Mignon disrobes in front of everyone, Carter also describes her body as child-like, as though the repeated abuse "had beaten her back, almost, into the appearance of childhood" (129).⁴²

After sending Mignon off for a bath, Fevvers orders room service: champagne for everyone and a tureen full of "bread and milk for the abused child, a maternal touch" (132). Fevvers sweetens the mixture with sugar and wraps a napkin around the vessel to keep the contents warm. The motifs of warmth (the food as well as a fire in the hearth) and of comfort being offered by a motherly figure are suggestive of the kitchen, but once again, Fevvers does not have to undertake the domestic labor associated with these comforts.

⁴² Magali Michael argues that Carter's feminism is strengthened by her use of postmodern/surreal elements alongside realistic presentations of women's material circumstances. She points to the exposure of Mignon's body as one of the moments where Carter uses a material image to good effect: "Mignon's body itself, with its skin that was 'mauvish, greenish, yellowish from beatings' and showed 'marks of fresh bruises on fading bruises on faded bruises' ([Carter] 129), testifies to the horrifying violence that daily ensures male dominance" (*Feminism and the Postmodern Impulse* 188).

She simply keeps the food warm because room service delivers it before Mignon has finished with her bath. The bath itself has been drawn by Lizzie, Fevvers' own foster mother who is responsive to Fevvers' wishes even though both women are in a bad temper when Walser and Mignon arrive.

Carter contrasts the image of Fevvers as mother to Mignon's memories of her real mother, one the strongest of which is the image of her mother's hands: "hands moist with soapsuds; hands that took things away from her" (130). Poverty, Carter demonstrates, colors motherhood in a very different way. The fact that soapsuds predominate in Mignon's memories of her mother points to hours of labor performed over the kitchen sink. If Fevvers' hand pops chocolate in Mignon's mouth, it is because her economic success has freed her from other domestic duties and also because she only has to be a temporary mother-figure to Mignon. She has not been drawn into full-time motherhood with all of its demands. Furthermore, Fevvers is not desexualized by the maternal comfort she offers Mignon. After taking care of Mignon's needs, she commands Walser to kneel, grasps him with her thighs, and removes his clown wig and make-up. Locked between her thighs, which are abnormally

strong because she is a trapeze artist, he experiences "a sudden access of erotic vertigo" (143). He is also excited because he recognizes her rough handling of him is an indication that she is jealous of his apparent involvement with Mignon. Even when she plays the role of mother and uses her hotel room to provide the comforts of a kitchen, Fevvers can still effectively use her sexual allure. This is not true for women like Mignon's real mother. For all of Fevvers' power as an independent woman, Carter will not let readers forget the other possibilities for women, particularly women like Mignon's mother who are without the economic means to choose a path other than marriage, motherhood, and the resulting domestic labor performed relentlessly, especially labor in the kitchen.

Carter's passages describing a poor Russian grandmother (baboushka) make a similar point about poverty and the endless domestic labor needed to produce comfort for a household. During the circus' stay in Petersburg, Walser (who has gone undercover as a clown to gather more information about Fevvers) is housed with a poor Russian woman and her grandson. In the kitchen, the grandmother works in such an exhausted state that she does not have the

breath to tell her grandson a story. As she pumps bellows to rekindle the charcoal under the samovar, she begins a tale about a pig that goes to Petersburg to pray. Distracted and breathless from her labor, she leaves off the story, prompting her grandson to ask what happened. She abruptly ends the tale by saying a wolf ate the pig. The grandmother then genuflects in front of a religious icon in an automatic physical response, but is too tired to pray.

Carter's point here about how endless and exhausting the production of domestic comfort can be is far from subtle. In fact, the narration of the scene launches into an analysis of the meaning of the woman's actions. The pumping of the bellows is compared to the motion of hands being brought together for a prayer, but which separate again before the prayer can be said, "always, at the very last moment, as if it came to her there was something else about the house that must be done first" (95). Domestic demands, in other words, take priority over all other concerns, so the woman is constantly interrupted if she pursues an activity unessential to her role as homemaker.

Carter also describes what the repetition of the baboushka's pumping symbolizes:

a kind of *infinite* incompleteness—that a woman's work is never done; how . . . all the work, both temporal and spiritual, in this world, and in preparation for the next, will never be over—always some conflicting demand will occur to postpone indefinitely any and every task. (95-96; Carter's emphasis)

As the scene illustrates, the breath that the grandmother needs to tell the story is deflected instead into the energy she uses to pump air from the bellows. Stoking the fire in order to make tea for Walser takes precedence over the child's need for attention. Tea is a material comfort, while the attention the child demands is more abstract. Herself unable to pursue more abstract pleasures, the grandmother can relate better to a desire for tea than a desire for a story. Preparing food is so routine that she does it without thought, but the story requires an imagination that has been squelched from her by the monotony of her life. When she pours the tea, she is able to dismiss the child because she orders him to take it to Walser. Then Carter closes out the scene by describing the baboushka asleep, snoring, on top of her stove. Compelled even to sleep in her kitchen, this impoverished woman is so tied to her domestic duties that she does not even leave the room to seek rest.

By providing such a dramatic range between, on the one hand, the experiences of Mignon's mother and the Russian baboushka, and Fevvers' experience on the other, Carter posits both an oppressive social agenda and an alternative to it. For women like Mignon's mother and the baboushka, maternal responsibilities lock them into domestic roles where kitchen chores are inevitable and never-ending. For Fevvers, however, economic independence allows her to choose the level of responsibility she wants to take for providing comfort to herself and others. Despite this range of experiences, the production of domestic comfort is nonetheless left entirely in the hands of women. Women still dominate both the traditional kitchen and the rooms that substitute for it. Carter suggests that wealth may loosen the tie between a woman and the kitchen but that the kitchen is still valuable because of its ability to provide comfort. The absence of men undertaking kitchen chores also suggests that it is more likely that a woman will be able to separate herself from the feminine role of domesticity than it is that a man will undertake such a role. That is, Western culture devalues the roles that are traditionally assigned to women, so one might expect a woman to want to escape such roles, but it is harder

to imagine that men would want to try out those roles. Moving out of the kitchen is a step up the social hierarchy, so women have a motivation to make that move. Their ability to return to the kitchen, Carter shows us, reflects a flexibility they develop as the sex which has less social power.

The Absence of Birth Mothers in Carter's and Winterson's Fiction

All of this attention to kitchens and the mothers and daughters who inhabit them throws into relief a striking absence of birth mothers in Carter's and Winterson's fiction. Their writing is instead littered with foster mothers and adoptive mothers. In fact, of the four protagonists discussed here, none of their birth mothers figures predominantly in the narrative. In Carter's *The Magic Toyshop*, Melanie's mother dies in a plane crash. Even before her untimely death, she and Melanie's father are on an extended trip overseas, leaving their children in the care of a nanny. In *Nights at the Circus*, Fevvers describes her birth as a mythical event. She was found as an infant, with the broken pieces of a shell lying around her, and raised by

Lizzie. When we turn to Winterson, we find that Jeanette in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* is adopted and Picasso in *Art and Lies* is her father's illegitimate daughter.

Why are there virtually no birth mothers in either Carter's or Winterson's fiction? This question, I argue, goes to the heart of their individual positions as feminists and consequently informs their depiction of the kitchen. In Carter's writing, there is clearly a reaction against the feminist use of the maternal body to celebrate women's closeness to nature and their biological ability to bear and feed children. Her own rejection of the maternal body is a symptom of this.⁴³ In particular, Carter's study of pornography, *The Sadeian Woman* (1979), protests against a number of so-called empowering depictions of women, including images of maternity: "All the mythic versions of women, from the myth of the redeeming virgin to that of the healing,

⁴³ Although I argue that Carter's depiction of foster and adoptive mothers serves an important thematic function, Nicole Ward Jouve finds Carter's rejection of the maternal body problematic: "No other writer I can think of has so repeatedly and passionately jousted against what feminists call 'biological essentialism'" (156). Jouve speculates about why Carter's rejection of the mother is so passionate and what fears that rejection reveals in Carter: "Indeed, to refuse to explore . . . the mother-daughter relationship—is to perpetuate an ancient repression, refuse one's own womanhood. Is this what Carter does, at least up to *Nights at the Circus*? Does she, in her rejection of the mother, produce another form of suppression?" (162-3).

reconciling mother, are consolatory nonsenses; and consolatory nonsense seems to be a fair definition of myth anyway" (5). To avoid mythic versions of women in her own writing, Carter firmly grounds her analysis of sexuality in history and socio-economics. "Flesh comes to us out of history" insists Carter (*The Sadeian Woman* 11).

Even when she became a mother herself, Carter was unwilling to allow social prescriptions to dictate how she would relate to her son. In "Notes from a Maternity Ward," she describes her own introduction to motherhood:

The midwife shows me how to put the baby to the nipple. 'Look deep into his eyes,' she says. 'It helps with the bonding.' Good grief! Aren't we allowed any choice in the matter, he and I? Can't I learn to love him for himself, and vice versa, rather than trust to Mother Nature's psycho-physiological double bind? And what of his father, who has no breasts? (30)

In understanding herself as a mother, she resists the impetus to play an essentialist role of the nurturer. Her depictions of kitchens make a similar point by challenging traditional images of motherhood and the comfort mothers provide through their domestic labor. Moreover, through her portrayals of Aunt Margaret and Fevvers, she points to a re-sexualized mother, who can inhabit a kitchen and still exercise sexual

agency.⁴⁴ Such a figure provides an answer to the problem Benjamin articulates of the desexualized mother. Carter's removal of the biological ties between the mother and her child may be the first step in representing a mother able to express a sexuality.

For Winterson, however, the question of motherhood is harder to contextualize, particularly when we consider how many differences there are between the fictional mothers in *Oranges* and *Art and Lies*. By applying Teresa de Lauretis' theories about the formation of lesbian sexuality, we may be able to shed some light on Winterson's reticence about the maternal body. In *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire*, de Lauretis takes issue with interpretations of lesbianism that use the bond between mother and child to describe lesbian sexuality. To understand lesbian desire as being akin to the pre-Oedipal,

⁴⁴ Carter's portrayal of these characters echoes her interest in Sade's depiction of the mother. Sally Keenan offers an astute examination of *The Sadeian Woman*, where Carter discusses Sade's portrayal of a mother who, raped by her libertine daughter through the use of a dildo, faints at a moment just before she might have climaxed. Carter argues that Sade allows her to faint instead of climax because of his fear of the sexualized mother. Keenan makes an observation about Sade's decision: "The eroticized mother is dangerous, signaling as she does a transgression of the ultimate taboo because she implies change, a shift away from the moral absolutes of vice and virtue on which the Sadeian system depends" (53).

mother/child bond, she insists, infantilizes lesbianism in a problematic way. The pre-Oedipal bond is prephallic and pregenital, "whereas the term *homosexual* takes its meaning within the understanding of sexual difference brought about by the Oedipus [sic]" (de Lauretis 51). That is, without passing through an Oedipal phase, which requires a child to confront the biological differences between the mother and the father, a woman's desire for another woman cannot be understood as her preference of one sex over the other because she would not be initiated into the world of sexual difference between men and women.

In such a formulation, lesbianism remains an infantile attachment to another woman, based on the pleasures bestowed by the mother. Furthermore, the use of the maternal bond as a metaphor for lesbian desire, de Lauretis warns, is dangerous for women in part because "reducing female sexuality to maternity, and feminine identity to the mother . . . erases a history of women's political and personal struggles for the affirmation of a difference of and between women" (198). The dearth of birth mothers in Winterson's fiction can be read as her way of resisting this simplification of women as a whole and lesbian desire in

particular. Like Carter, Winterson removes the umbilical cord from our formulations about motherhood. The severing of this biological tie between mother and child forces Winterson's characters to find other ways of relating to one another, and as we have seen, they forge their relationships by spending time together in kitchens.

By removing the birth mother from the plot of their narratives, both authors privilege constructed families over the ones founded solely on the biological nuclear family. Carter and Winterson emphasize that the complexities—sometimes even the dangers—of family life can arise from relationships other than biological ones. For them, nurture is always more important than nature, which may explain why a room designed to provide nurture and comfort, the kitchen, becomes such a powerful thematic tool for each of them in their analysis of the construction of family relationships. They understand gender, sexuality, history, and culture as authored by society rather than as arising naturally as essential truths. Their rejection of essentialism allows them to examine how social practices are constructed with a specific agenda in mind.

When they turn their attention to kitchens, these authors acknowledge the social agenda that relegates women to the kitchen, but they also recognize the kitchen as a potentially volatile space that does not retain a stable function of providing comfort for the family. Because women are given primary responsibility for domestic chores, there is sometimes an assumption that the kitchen is a non-threatening, female space, a room that is primarily inhabited by the family and used for the family for innocuous, routine activities. The idea that the kitchen is non-threatening is a side-product of the social agenda for the room. The nurturing mother is kept at home, in her kitchen, where she generates warmth and food. What this social construction fails to consider is what happens when women spend so much time together in the room. As Carter and Winterson show, the familiarity of the kitchen prompts mothers and daughters to let their guard down in the kitchen, and the results are often explosive. From their use of violence, real or imagined, to the claiming of sexual agency for themselves, these characters tell us that the kitchen is anything but innocuous.

CHAPTER IV

BEDTIME STORIES: ASSAULTING SEXUALITY IN THE BEDROOM

My analysis has moved from the public space of the parlor, through the family space of the kitchen, and now looks into the privacy of the bedroom. Excepting its companion room, the bathroom, the bedroom is ostensibly the most private room in the home. Here is where we anticipate the sexual act will be housed, although, as we have already seen, that act takes place in several other rooms in the house as well. Traditionally, the bedroom is the room where people retreat when they are sick, where they go to sleep, where they seek safety for their bodies and minds. In other words, the bedroom is a space people inhabit when they are particularly vulnerable.

As an important cornerstone of the institutions of marriage and family, the bedroom represents a space that is particularly invested in channeling sexuality into the reproduction of the family. In his analysis of the relationships between sex and architecture, Mark Wigley examines how the structure of a house functions in the production of these institutions. He draws from two accounts of architecture: Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* from the fifth

century and Leon Battista Alberti's *On the Art of Building in Ten Books* from the fifteenth century. Because reproduction requires shelter and because marriage is defined as a man and woman living in the same house, Xenophon examines how architecture functions as a component of marriage. As Wigley elaborates, "Marriage is the reason for building a house. The house appears to make a space for the institution. But marriage is already spatial. It cannot be thought outside the house that is its condition of possibility before its space" (336). The house, in other words, makes marriage a possibility by providing the space that man and woman can occupy together so reproduction can occur. That space, I argue, can be interpreted as an early concept of the bedroom.

When he examines Alberti's treatment of architecture, Wigley is interested in how sexuality becomes increasingly veiled when it is demarcated by a private space in the house. Alberti describes separate bedrooms for the man and woman with separate entrances but with a shared door between them so each can enter the other's bedroom without anyone knowing. Wigley stresses that "Alberti's design should not be understood as the privatization of a preexisting sexuality. Rather, it is the production of sexuality as that-which-is-

private. The body that is privatized is newly sexualized" (346). According to Wigley, Alberti's concept of the bedroom helped to formulate a modern concept of the family, with the physically and psychologically protected sex life of the married couple at its center (Wigley 342).

Elizabeth Collins Cromley has examined the more recent social history of the bedroom in her account of American bedrooms from the late nineteenth century through the first part of the twentieth century. Like Wigley, she is also interested in the issue of privacy and points out that, for the middle class, the bedroom was "an essential property of a home" because it provided "a private place in which to do it" (120). However, privacy was not equally implemented among all classes. In rural homes and low-cost housing, as Cromley notes, a bedroom was often located on the main floor and opened into other rooms, like kitchens, entrance halls, and reception rooms. As people increasingly sought to segregate the bedrooms by putting them on a separate floor and making entrance ways to them more private, the location of the bedroom became an indication of class: "This movement [of the bedroom's location] seems linked to the family's desire to present itself as middle class or as rising on the social

ladder by making a show of privacy" (123). Another development of this period was the practice of giving children their own bedrooms when they reached preadolescence. Cromley speculates that the child's "emergent sexuality . . . may have motivated parents to find separate rooms for their growing boys and girls" (126). Here again we see the practice of privatizing sexuality by assigning the newly developing body to its own room, although there is also a suggestion of anxiety about sexuality in the parents' desire to keep girls and boys away from each other in case they learn too much about the opposite sex and become too curious about sexuality.

When privacy is a defining characteristic of the bedroom, the space seemingly brackets sexuality off by limiting intrusions from the outside world and closeting it from observation, but Carter and Winterson insist that sex cannot be divorced from its context, from the family's belief system about sex to the social narratives that tell people how to experience sex. Privacy itself is one of those narratives: as Wigley illustrates, sex is socially constructed as a private act. Private spaces for sex, however, also make illegitimate sexuality possible, as Wigley

aptly notes, and this requires it to be regulated through social pressures: "Theoretical texts and religious institutions must take over the responsibility of supervising a space whose openings are no longer visible" (347). While Wigley is here discussing the regulation of sexuality within marriage, he also points out that unmarried girls have been a source of anxiety for centuries. Ancient Greek culture shows notable evidence of this concern—"The word for raising a female child being literally that for 'surveillance'" (Wigley 338). Such a concern carries over into Carter's and Winterson's depictions of twentieth-century adolescent characters, whose developing sexualities create uneasiness within their families. Accordingly, these characters' bedrooms, which afford them at least a marginal amount of privacy, are a source of anxiety for those who want to direct sexuality into the channels that preserve the power arrangements of the family and the overall social status quo.

In Carter's and Winterson's novels, this anxiety about sexuality is evident in characters who practice surveillance over the bedrooms of adolescents. The vigilance of that surveillance can be better understood via the concept of panopticism as defined by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and*

Punish: The Birth of the Prison. Foucault describes the panopticon as it was conceived by Jeremy Bentham. This prison structure allows for a central tower with the individual cells surrounding it and opening towards it, so that every cell in the facility can be observed from the tower. Foucault argues that the purpose of the Panopticon is "to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action" (201). This system, Foucault contends, compels prisoners to internalize surveillance; that is they learn to maintain surveillance over themselves. The panoptic mechanism of this building, Foucault continues, can be applied to other social systems because it is not so much a building as it is a "diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form" (205). This is true, he argues, because the mechanism "is a type of location of bodies in space, of distribution of individuals in relation to one another, of hierarchical organization, of disposition of centres and channels of power" (205).

Using the practices of the military as an example, Foucault also discusses how discipline functions in society. As a method of categorizing, discipline depends on partitioning of space, such as army barracks or the arrangement of soldiers in military formation, as a way of controlling bodies: "It individualizes bodies by a location that does not give them a fixed position, but distributes them and circulates them in a network of relations" (146). Foucault identifies a historical movement, beginning in the seventeenth century, that saw the gradual increase in the use of discipline as a power mechanism applied throughout the social body. As this "disciplinary society" arose, it depended on "a generalized surveillance," that is, the application of the panoptic mechanism throughout social institutions (209).

If we use Foucault's ideas to examine domestic space, we can see how individual rooms help to set up specific relationships in the family and direct one on how to deport one's body in those spaces. For example, the parlor requires a certain amount of bodily modesty, while the kitchen allows the body to be more relaxed and provides the means for the production of food, which gives bodily comfort, but both

rooms buttress the hierarchy of power because each member's status in the family is determined by his/her relationship to that space: in the parlor, one is either the subject or the object of the consolidation of the family image, while in the kitchen, one is expected either to produce domestic comfort or simply to enjoy it. Foucault's panoptic mechanism is most useful for an understanding of the adolescent bedroom, where privacy can be revoked at any given moment by an adult figure. The resulting unpredictable modulation between privacy and surveillance encourages Carter's and Winterson's young women to conform to the household strictures about sexuality since they do not know the moment when surveillance will actually occur.

Taken alongside Foucault's concepts of panopticism and discipline, several theories posited by the architectural critic Leslie Kanes Weisman are useful to an examination of bedrooms. Weisman argues that girls "are taught to occupy but not to control space" while boys are taught "to be spatially dominant" (24). For example, Weisman notes differences in body posture that require girls to sit in reserved, ladylike postures while boys can "spill over the sides of chairs" and consequently take up more space (24).

Also, girls are encouraged to stay closer to home, while boys are encouraged to explore their surroundings. Moreover, she contends, "girls learn to keep their self/other boundaries permeable" because later in life they will have to accommodate so many interruptions—from children, husbands, and/or male coworkers (24). These social prescriptions for women ultimately teach them "to expect and accept spatial limitations" (24).

Young women are consequently more likely to submit to surveillance because society discourages them from claiming space and privacy for themselves. Furthermore, the boundaries of spaces they inhabit are like their self/other boundaries: they are permeable, making surveillance easier to implement. This permeability solves the social dilemma, identified by Wigley, of how to regulate the enclosed space of the bedroom, which is meant to be private. In Carter's and Winterson's texts, as we shall see, the permeability of bedroom walls and doors is an important theme. Both authors examine how bedrooms and other places where a girl makes her bed can be treacherous spaces for adolescents because their ostensible privacy and protection are so easily penetrated by other members of the household.

Bedside Manners

[Melanie] stayed at my house once, and my mother very carefully made up the camp bed in my room.

'We don't need it,' I told her.

'Yes you do,' she told me.

Early in the morning, about two a.m., when the World Service closed down, we heard her come slowly up the stairs to bed. I had learned to move quickly. She stood by my door for a few moments, then suddenly pushed it open. I could just see the braid at the bottom of her dressing gown. Nobody moved and then she was gone. (Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit 102)

In Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, Jeanette's working class family lives in a modest terrace house, so her first bedroom is one she shares with her parents while her mother is building an indoor bathroom for them.⁴⁵ The room is apparently never overcrowded since her parents' sleeping schedules are at odds, but neither Jeanette nor her father feels the room affords any actual privacy. Lingering in the outdoor toilet is their only recourse to time alone, but even this attempted privacy has its limitations: "My dad and me always seemed to be in the toilet, me sitting on my hands and humming, and him standing

⁴⁵ Chapter II offers an overview of the four primary texts and descriptions of the houses in those novels.

up, I supposed. My mother got very angry" (16). Keeping a close watch on the amount of time they spend in the toilet, the mother warns, "You come on in, it doesn't take that long" (17). With this passage, Winterson emphasizes how zealously the mother, a fervent Evangelist, monitors her family for possible illicit behavior. Her vigilance is a form of surveillance. By insisting that their visits to the toilet be brief, she exhibits an anxiety about controlling their relationships to their own bodies, an anxiety about the possibilities the bathroom affords for sexual pleasure.

Indeed, Jeanette escapes to the toilet whenever she becomes titillated. For example, she goes there to speculate about her mother's characterization of school as "the Breeding Ground," where Jeanette could get led astray of her Evangelical upbringing (16). Although she is unsure exactly what her mother means by this phrase, she understands it as "a bad thing, like Unnatural Passions,"—another mysterious euphemism her mother uses—and shows a decided curiosity about it (16). She also runs to the toilet when she learns that her mother, who had planned to educate her at home, has been ordered to send her to school: "I whizzed into the toilet and sat on my hands; the Breeding Ground at last" (17). She is

excited because school is a forbidden space, one which may offer information about whatever it is her mother considers illicit, and the toilet, which also seems illicit because of her mother's close observation of it, is an ideal space for her reflections. Absent a bedroom, Jeanette gains as much privacy as she can from these escapes to the toilet.⁴⁶ These childhood escapades serve her well because they are her first attempts to avoid her mother's notice. When Jeanette later starts her first sexual relationship, she has to develop more sophisticated strategies for escaping her mother's surveillance.

Her mother's vigilance over Jeanette, nonetheless, does not extend to a concern for her daughter when she is sick.

Winterson depicts the mother as routinely missing from

⁴⁶ The outside toilet is also the subject of some attention in Winterson's collection of non-fictional essays, *Art [Objects]*. Since *Oranges* is semi-autobiographical, it is perhaps unsurprising that in one of the essays from *Art [Objects]*, Winterson recalls childhood strategies for taking advantage of the outside toilet that are similar to her character's strategies. The only books in Winterson's childhood home were two copies of the Bible and three or four other books. She writes that "I found it necessary to smuggle books in and out of the house and I cannot claim too much for the provision of an outside toilet when there is no room of one's own" (153). She had a Saturday job, and she used her income not only to buy books, but also batteries for the torch in the toilet since, she explains, "My mother knew exactly how long her Evereadys would last if used only to illuminate the gap that separated the toilet paper from its function" (153-54). By replacing the batteries, Winterson managed to keep up the appearance that she was not using the bathroom in any way that her mother would consider untoward.

Jeanette's bedside during times of crisis. When the swelling of Jeanette's adenoids causes a temporary deafness, she must resort to a self-diagnosis. The mother's religious devotion causes her to assume Jeanette is in a state of rapture, full of the spirit, when she stops talking or responding to people. She is therefore dismissive of her daughter's attempt to alert her that something is wrong, and Jeanette is forced to put herself to bed and verify for herself that she is actually deaf. Propping herself against her pillows, she tries unsuccessfully to detect some sound by playing her recorder. Left alone in her bedroom with the knowledge that she is deaf, she is convinced there is nothing else she can do until morning. Once morning arrives, however, she finds herself in an empty house, her mother having gone to the hospital to pray over someone else's sickness.

Subsequently, during Jeanette's own hospitalization, her mother only stays by her bedside long enough to write her a letter and leave her with a bag of oranges.⁴⁷ By contrast,

⁴⁷ In her analysis of this novel, Keryn Carter notes that an orange is "distinctly breast-like" (17). Since the mother gives Jeanette oranges, "at all kinds of inappropriate moments," Carter argues, "We might speculate that the mother feeds oranges to her daughter in an attempt to satisfy the child's demands: in other words, she gives oranges instead of herself" (17).

her elderly friend from the church, Elsie, visits Jeanette regularly, showing concern for her recovery. Essentially, her mother leaves Jeanette alone in bed only when she least wants to be alone. Jeanette's physical distress is not enough to draw her mother to her bedside, especially since illness makes it less likely that she is doing anything illicit while she is in bed. It is therefore only the suspicion of sexual activity that makes the mother interested in what happens to Jeanette in bed.

After her mother provides a separate bedroom for her daughter, Jeanette's privacy in her home is only marginally increased. Winterson's description of the room as a "half-room" created by the use of a "partition" is particularly suggestive of the limitations of Jeanette's new space (16). As a structure less solid or soundproof than an actual wall, the partition recalls the permeability of boundaries that, according to Weisman, girls are taught to keep between themselves and others. The episode, cited in the epigraph above, when Jeanette's first girlfriend, Melanie, spends the night with her also demonstrates that the room does not afford Jeanette much privacy. Even though Jeanette protests that they will not need it, her mother sets up a camp bed to

make sure the girls sleep separately. The mother's action could be read as a form of Foucauldian discipline, assigning bodies to their own spaces.

Jeanette's mother also retains the prerogative of unannounced entry into the room, although Winterson makes it clear that Jeanette finds ways to protect herself from her mother's surveillance. On the night Melanie stays over, Jeanette's mother comes upstairs in the middle of the night and suddenly opens the bedroom door, but Jeanette moves out of Melanie's bed as quickly and quietly as she can, so she can be in a separate bed by the time her mother can check on the girls. Winterson also uses the episode to emphasize that Melanie's overnight stay happens "Once," indicating perhaps that Jeanette is unwilling to risk discovery by inviting her to the house on a regular basis. As I discussed in Chapter II, Jeanette prefers staying at Elsie's house, where she does not have the sense that she is being watched or judged. In fact, Elsie offers a friendly type of surveillance: as Winterson reveals later, Elsie is aware of what the girls are doing. Practicing surveillance as a protective measure, Elsie watches to make sure no one else discovers that Jeanette and Melanie's relationship is sexual. Sensing the

safety Elsie offers, Jeanette only resorts to inviting Melanie to stay with her in her own bedroom when Elsie is hospitalized and cannot host them.

During this first sexual relationship, Winterson shows Jeanette making her bed elsewhere instead of at home. In addition to sleeping at Elsie's house, there are other beds where they retreat to explore their developing sexuality. They initiate their sexual relationship at Melanie's house, while Melanie's mother is out of town, and after their relationship is made public and is condemned by their fellow parishioners, they spend a tearful night embracing each other at Melanie's relatives' house. Understanding how the privacy she seeks in bedrooms is a source of anxiety for the adults around her, Jeanette plays this game of musical beds, which speaks to her skill at circumventing, as much as possible, the surveillance trained on her by her mother.

The experience of that surveillance also helps her in other peoples' houses where she might be closely observed. When the relationship is discovered, Jeanette surreptitiously arranges a final meeting with Melanie by lying to her mother that she wants to sleep at the church and then asking a sympathetic parishioner, Miss Jewsbury, to drive her to the

relatives' house where Melanie is staying. Once there, she instructs Melanie on how to avoid detection, asking her to leave the door open so she can sneak upstairs while Melanie pretends Jeanette is leaving. She also arranges for Miss Jewsbury to pick her up early the next morning so she can leave before they are discovered. These strategies for gaining some privacy for herself are a reaction against her mother's control over space, a temporary escape from the house where her mother practices such rigid surveillance. Nonetheless, she is well aware that surveillance can be practiced in other houses, too. Her awareness of the anxiety the community feels about teenage sexual activity, and especially about lesbian sex, keeps Jeanette on her guard whenever she enters a bedroom with a lover.

During her second relationship, with a young woman named Katy, Jeanette is equally careful not to be observed, but the delight of the prospect of spending a week together at the Morecomb guest house makes the two of them careless about securing their privacy. Just at a moment when Katy is pulling Jeanette into bed, they are discovered. Jeanette feels responsible for this lapse of caution:

I forgot to lock the door. . . . I noticed a thin shaft of light staining the carpet by the edge of the bed. My neck prickled and my mouth went dry. Someone was standing at the door. We didn't move, and after a moment the light disappeared. (129)

Winterson accomplishes several goals through this bedroom episode. The scene is ominous in its description of Jeanette, who is so upset about the repercussions of discovery that she has a physical reaction—prickly neck and dry mouth. The description of the “thin shaft of light staining the carpet by the edge of the bed” depicts light negatively as a stain and a threat to the relationship, which must be kept in the dark, closeted from the public's eye. A stain also suggests permanence: the image and the fear it evokes will remain in their memories. Through these images, Winterson reinforces her theme of surveillance and establishes that it can extend to other bedrooms, beyond Jeanette's room at home.

Finally, the episode highlights a stark contrast between Jeanette and her mother. When Katy and Jeanette face the frightful consequences of discovery, Jeanette protects Katy by lying: she tells the woman who saw them that she was in bed with Melanie. As a result, Katy faces no consequences from their tryst, while Jeanette faces the wrath of her

mother and other church members. This plan of action is arranged in bed, after the moment of discovery. Lying together in the guest house bedroom, Jeanette comforts Katy with a squeeze of the hand and a promise to work out a way to help her. Jeanette instinctively comforts Katy in her hour of need, and her compassionate manner stands as an alternative to her mother's bedside manners, which range from indifference to Jeanette's illnesses to surveillance of her incipient sexuality. Jeanette's compassion also suggests that she can reclaim some sense of the bedroom as a space where love can still be expressed.

As I discussed in Chapter II, Winterson portrays Jeanette's mother as having her own illicit sexual attraction. She is enamored of Pastor Spratt, the dashing preacher who first converted her to her evangelical denomination. In fact, Pastor Spratt enjoys a prominent place by the mother's bedside. On the table next to her own bed, she keeps a picture of him, "surrounded by black men with spears" (8). Because it is a picture of a preacher on a mission, she can arguably claim that it has more to do with her devotion to missionary work than her attraction to Pastor Spratt, but the exotic setting of the photo and the men with

spears also eroticize the pastor. Besides sleeping next to his photo, however, she finds other ways to take Pastor Spratt to bed with her. During a missionary trip to Morecomb, Jeanette returns to their guest house and finds her mother "lying propped against the pillows reading her new book from Pastor Spratt" (116). All of this takes on greater significance when we consider how differing schedules prevent her and her husband from sharing a bed very often. She clearly prefers Pastor Spratt to her husband, whom she habitually describes as "not one to push himself" (8). As a refrain to this description of her husband, she always adds, "Bless him" (8), a sentiment displaying her affection for her husband, but which could also be interpreted as her gratefulness that he does not ever "push himself" on her in a sexual way.

In spite of all the souvenirs of Pastor Spratt that the mother keeps in her bedroom and elsewhere in the house, she shows no compassion when she scours Jeanette's bedroom for anything related to her love for Melanie. Glandular fever, Winterson writes, leaves Jeanette lying "shivering in the parlour," a purifying space where Jeanette has been confined before in attempt to exorcise her demons. Meanwhile, her

mother takes "a toothcomb to [her] room and found all the letters, all the cards, all the jottings of [her] own, and burnt them one night in the backyard" (112).⁴⁸ The relentlessness of her search, evident in the metaphor of the toothcomb, amounts to another form of surveillance. For Jeanette, this betrayal represents a turning point in their relationship. Any privacy Jeanette has been granted is revoked by her mother's action, and Jeanette is devastated that her mother can be so unfeeling as to destroy her personal things.

A later scene, after Jeanette's second relationship is discovered, echoes this one. Having been ordered upstairs by her mother, Jeanette lies down in her "narrow bed" (131). The narrowness of her single bed, which is designed for one person and does not allow much space for sexual activity, is

⁴⁸ The scene parallels an episode from Winterson's life described in *Art [Objects]*: "anyone with a single bed, standard size, and paperbacks, standard size, will discover that seventy-seven can be accommodated per layer under the mattress. But as my collection grew, I began to worry that my mother might notice that her daughter's bed was rising visibly" (154). The phrase "rising visibly" is pivotal here because it demonstrates how her secret is safe until it takes up too much space and actually becomes spatially legible. She also describes her experience of books in spatial terms: "Inside books there is perfect space and it is that space which allows the reader to escape from the problems of gravity" (157). Books literally and metaphorically lift her up. Unfortunately, though, Winterson recounts that her mother eventually did notice her bed rising and that she burned her daughter's collection when she discovered it.

another way that discipline is enforced to keep adolescents in bed alone. While in bed, Jeanette imagines the sign from God that her mother is praying for: "Certainly the pastor arrived, but glad as she was, I think she would have preferred something a bit more spectacular, like for me and my bedroom to be consumed with flames while the rest of the house escaped" (131). This image of conflagration illustrates how Jeanette now interprets her bedroom. The anxiety her mother feels about her sexuality overwhelms any other ways of enjoying her room as a space where she can be herself and express herself. Jeanette decides the bedroom and the house as a whole are no longer viable spaces for her. Unable to reconcile with her mother, she is compelled to take a room of her own. Her decision shows how much she values space because she is willing to work two part-time jobs in order to have a bedroom where her privacy is more protected.

Although the rigor of surveillance practiced by the mother is comparable to the panopticism described by Foucault, Jeanette never completely internalizes that surveillance. She has moments when she does submit to the discipline of space, such as when she lies in her bed waiting for judgment from the pastor and from her mother: she feels

"unable to forgive myself, unable to forgive her" (131).
Ultimately, however, she understands surveillance and discipline as threats and tries to avoid submitting to them.

The shrewdness she develops about surveillance can perhaps be traced to an episode that Winterson offers readers just before the section describing Jeanette's first meeting with Melanie. Curious to learn more about life than her mother is telling her, the young Jeanette hides in the dustbin to eavesdrop on the neighbors' conversation. She hears an earful about marriage and men, but she also hears an important piece of information about the women who run the paper shop. Her mother has already forbidden Jeanette from patronizing their shop after they offered to take Jeanette to the seaside with them. As she later learns, her mother's objection to the women is that they deal in "unnatural passions" (7), although, as before, Jeanette does not recognize this as a euphemism for homosexuality. The neighbors' conversation offers Jeanette some additional information about the women when one neighbor worries that people will think that her daughter, who has no boyfriend and spends much of her time studying with a female classmate, is like the women at the paper shop. The neighbors gossip that

the paper shop women have been seen buying a double bed and debate whether or not the women do anything in that bed. As Jeanette learns from their conversation, two women sharing one bed is a source of anxiety in the community. The conversation also demonstrates that surveillance is practiced widely, with neighbors watching each other's actions to see if they conform to social expectations. The community is curious about other peoples' bedrooms and watchful about what might be happening in those spaces. Once Jeanette herself begins to share a bed with another woman, she is cautious about where and how she carries out her love affair.

Torpedoes and Targets

Until I was fifteen, my brother used me, night after night, as a cesspit for his bloated adolescence. That place [Picasso and Matthew's bedroom] is sealed now. My own narrow stair stops outside the door and begins in a new direction. My mother's staircase sweeps past the door without stopping. There is no door there, she says, no room beyond. (Art and Lies 42)

In Winterson's *Art and Lies*, Sir Jack's illegitimate daughter Picasso screams relentlessly as an infant, to the vexation of the rest of the family. Picasso's early refusal

to submit to the rules of her wealthy, genteel family prefigures her later rebellion against them, but it also prompts the family to initiate their surveillance of her from an age earlier than typical. They want to ensure that she learns to act with the same reserve as they do. Before she ever reaches adolescence, they are already apprehensive about the baby who refuses play "dead"—that is, she refuses to exhibit the reserve and gentility they feel is appropriate to their social station. They surreptitiously watch her in her bedroom: "At night when they crept by her room in their black clothes, they peeped through the keyhole to check that she was dead. She was not dead and they feared her" (159).

With this image, Winterson stresses that Picasso's refusal to conform to their social agenda immediately puts the family on alert. In fact, the decision for Matthew and Picasso to share a bedroom can be interpreted as a symptom of the family's anxiety about her, their rationale being that if at least one family member is with her at all times, then she has fewer opportunities to register her dissent from the family agenda. By staying in the same bedroom with her, Matthew, who already conforms to family's agenda, has the opportunity to "kill" Picasso so she can be "dead" like them.

The shared bedroom gives Matthew ample opportunity to use Picasso "as a cesspit for his bloated adolescence" (42). His sexual abuse of his sister stems not only from his sense of male privilege, but also from a desire to break her will, essentially preventing her from rebelling against the social image the family is cultivating. Winterson highlights how thoroughly he dominates his sister when Picasso catalogs the injuries she has suffered at his hands: "Ten years of Matthew's love embraces and I knew better than to fight. He had twice broken my wrists, once dislocated my hip, and the last time, two years ago, fractured my collar bone" (156). This represents a particularly brutal example of a young woman being taught to keep her self/other boundaries permeable: the less she fights his penetration, the fewer injuries she sustains. He routinely rapes her, but even when she begs her priest for help by presenting her bruises as evidence of the abuse, the priest returns a verdict of "horseplay" and explains that he will not interfere in family problems of that sort (84). He advises her instead to talk to her mother about it.

The blind eye that the family and church turn on Matthew suggests that boys are not subject to surveillance in the

same way girls are. Matthew's behavior is ignored and tolerated precisely because he is a young man. His sexuality, expressed as abusive and heterosexual, falls within social expectations for young men, particularly young men in the Hamilton household, and consequently does not challenge the status quo in the same way that a young woman's sexuality can, especially a young lesbian woman's sexuality. Matthew's abuse of Picasso, therefore, serves his own desires while it simultaneously reinforces the social hierarchy by keeping Picasso under the watchful surveillance of a male member of the household who shares a bedroom with her. While she is subjected to his abuse and his close observation of her, she is not likely to express her own sexuality.

Through her depiction of the master bedroom, Winterson demonstrates that Lady Hamilton is also given lessons in the importance of sexual submission of women to men, although she is reminded of the social order without the use of physical violence against her. Instead, Sir Jack decorates their bedroom with "a large collection of Victorian sentiment paintings; moral anecdotes of the fallen woman in her red skirt clutching the upright chair; the doctor, gravely attending to the dying girl" (160-61). These "expensive

walls" remind Lady Hamilton that she is expected to demonstrate sexual fidelity and wifely submission to her husband (160), even while he carries on with his mistresses. The Victorian paintings offer a caveat about the destructiveness to self and family brought on by a woman who is unfaithful to her husband, and their presence suggests another way that surveillance can be implemented in the bedroom. The tales of despair keep Sir Jack's worldview omnipresent even when he is not physically in the bedroom, and they encourage Lady Hamilton to practice self-discipline, lest she share the terrible fates of these fallen women.

At the same time, the paintings suggest that Winterson is parodying Sir Jack because the artwork also can be interpreted as hyperbolic in its presentation of the dire consequences of the fallen woman's sin. The Victorian trope of the fallen woman does not necessarily reflect the social reality of that period, according to Nina Auerbach, who points to Victorian thinkers who understood the prostitute as an economic victim of capitalism rather than someone guilty of a moral failing. In their research, these Victorian scholars document prostitutes who were eventually able to marry. The myth of the fallen woman, "the titanic outcast,

doomed and dooming," Auerbach suggests, "seems to have been like Marley's ghost, an undigested morsel of the Victorian bad conscience, familiar social reality cast into phantasmagoric and avenging shape" (33). She also argues that literature and art often portray the woman's fall as powerfully transformative for her. According to Pamela Garrish Nunn, in 1858 the first exhibit of one of the most famous depictions of a fallen woman, Augustus Egg's triptych *Past and Present*, was "provocative" for its Victorian audience and succeeded in "engaging public and critics alike in a lively debate" (56).

As these critics suggest, Victorian interpretations of the fallen woman were not naively monolithic. When Sir Jack hangs paintings of fallen women on his walls without any recognition of them as untenable, mythic versions of life, Winterson is perhaps caricaturing him a little. Putting these sad women in his bedroom is probably titillating for Sir Jack because it reinforces his self-image as a man powerful enough to reduce a woman to such a dire fate, while he himself can practice infidelity without any serious consequences. To be able to see these women while he has sex with his wife also serves to remind him of his own fallen

women, his mistresses who provide him with sexual satisfaction above and beyond that which he is able to achieve in his bedroom at home.

Winterson's caricature of Sir Jack carries over to Lady Hamilton, whose unquestioning acceptance of Sir Jack's worldview points to an almost childlike simplicity in her thinking, a simplicity which is noticeably evident in the way she understands her children's bedroom. Matthew exploits his mother's naïveté when she hears unusual sounds coming from the room. Matthew knows that she will accept his explanation of the noise as child's play because, for her, the space evokes the nursery and the innocence of childhood. As Elizabeth Collins Cromley has pointed out, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, young children of different sexes sharing a bedroom/nursery was not uncommon because they were not yet considered to have a gender, although they were separated into individual rooms before adolescence began (126). By retaining an image of the shared nursery, Lady Hamilton understands her children's bedroom as de-sexualized, even as they grow to adolescence. Her curiosity about what they are doing is easily mollified when Matthew evokes a child's game to deceive her:

'What are you two doing in there?' Mother's voice at the door.

'Torpedoes and Targets,' answered my brother, with his hand over my mouth and his cock between my legs. (153)

Even though Matthew's choice of this particular game is sexually suggestive and offers a hint as to what they are really doing, Lady Hamilton cannot see through Matthew's deceit because she protects herself from the disturbing truth with memories of when "her children used to play together like puppies, even fall asleep in the same bed" (43). By retaining her understanding of the bedroom as a nursery, she can continue to imagine them as pre-adolescent and as sexually innocent.

Lady Hamilton's idyllic vision of the nursery reveals how simply she dichotomizes the security of home and the dangers of the outside world. Her home, she is convinced, is the safest place for her children, but "the outside world is a wicked place" (153). She feels no need to practice surveillance with any vigilance when her children are (ostensibly) playing together in their bedroom because she cannot imagine danger or wickedness taking place in "the safety of their own home" (153). Lady Hamilton's understanding of the children's bedroom, although naïve,

shows her investment in the room as a place to be cherished, a setting for picture-perfect moments of her children at play. Imagining loving children playing together in their bedroom allows her to believe she at least is a good mother, even if the rest of her domestic prospect is bleak. Because she is so unhappy, she needs this image of the bedroom to fill an emotional hole in her life.

Even after Picasso has her own bedroom, Winterson describes Matthew as a continuing threat because he still finds opportune moments to assault her. On one occasion, Picasso slips as quietly as she can past her brother's bedroom on her way to clean her paint brushes in the bathroom. When he assaults her, dragging her into his room to rape her once again, the scene highlights not only his vigilance in monitoring her movements in the house, but also his strong sense of ownership of her body. Picasso describes his feelings about her: "The challenge had gone, but not the familiar pleasure of ownership. These were his acres, my body, my blood. I was his liege-land. He inspected me" (156). As he attacks her, Picasso notices the Mickey Mouse clock by his bed, an object that underscores Matthew's stunted emotional maturation. The privilege of dominance

accorded to males in this household precludes a need for him to develop emotionally since he always gets what he wants, and he suffers no repercussions for his treatment of Picasso. Winterson uses the clock to emphasize Matthew's status as a spoiled child inhabiting the body of a man. As a prop of the nursery, the clock also helps him foster his mother's version of the innocence of his bedroom. Finally, the clock is the child's version of the clock in the parlor that Picasso destroys because it promotes Sir Jack's orderliness in the house, announcing male sexual privilege with the appearance each hour of the drummer boy with an erection.

Winterson depicts this bedroom incident as the catalyst not for surveillance of Matthew, but for an even more rigorous surveillance over Picasso. Because Picasso again tries to document her abuse by marking him with the paint brushes she is carrying, Matthew—in typical child-like fashion—tells on her, explaining to Sir Jack that she has gone mad. The episode culminates with Sir Jack pushing Picasso off the roof when she threatens to go to the police. By characterizing Picasso's fall as a suicide attempt, Sir Jack succeeds in having Picasso institutionalized. Picasso's room at the asylum can be read as the prototypical adolescent

bedroom for a girl because it openly sanctions surveillance of its occupant. The rules of the asylum, in fact, require that observations made during surveillance of the patient be officially recorded in the patient's file. For Picasso, who attempts to hide in her room, the reports read "Withdrawn," "Uncommunicative," "Not fully socialized," and "No progress" (155). Through this series of labels, Winterson emphasizes how those who carry out surveillance expect young women to welcome observation. By withdrawing from her observers, Picasso behaves in an unfeminine manner. She avoids the penetration of their gaze and their analysis by setting up emotional walls when the physical walls fail to give her a moment's privacy. Ironically, though, Picasso's new bedroom at least offers her physical safety. Permeable though they may be for the doctors observing her, the asylum walls do not admit her brother the rapist.

Picasso's adult response to the surveillance and abuse she endured is to re-imagine the space of her family home. In her mind, she seals off the room where Matthew abused her, which allows her to imagine a "new direction" for herself. Winterson indicates that Picasso is beginning to repair some of the damage done to her in that bedroom by renouncing the

space of her victimization and consequently finding ways to redefine herself. The image of a sealed room also stands in sharp contrast to Weisman's ideas about girls maintaining permeable boundaries. As a victim of rape, Picasso has already experienced how an unwanted penetration of her body can be profoundly damaging, emotionally and physically. The image of the sealed bedroom implies that Picasso is also going to seal off her body, refuse permeability of any kind. Although it is significant that Picasso is mentally rejecting the cultural impetus that she must have permeable boundaries, the image also suggests a troubling possibility—that Picasso will not find a workable balance between opening herself to a lover and protecting herself with emotional walls. Winterson's ending suggests that Picasso and Sappho have the opportunity for happiness, but the book's emphasis on Picasso's abuse and its emotional consequences for her implies she has emotional problems to work through.

Meanwhile, Lady Hamilton remains unaffected by Picasso's experiences, and in Picasso's re-imagined house, Lady Hamilton cannot even see the bedroom door that Picasso has sealed: "My mother's staircase sweeps past the door. There is no door there, she says, no room beyond" (42). Picasso

understands her mother as accepting Matthew's deceptive image of the bedroom instead of Picasso's experience of the space. By refusing to acknowledge the bedroom as the setting of Picasso's abuse, Lady Hamilton can hold on to her alternate image of the children's bedroom: the nursery where her children played. To her, the space of abuse does not exist.

Perhaps with a sense of poetic justice, Winterson subjects Lady Hamilton to a painful death from cancer, played out in her bedroom. If she is unwilling to see the truth of what happens to Picasso in her bedroom, Winterson implies, then Lady Hamilton will at least face her own physical pain and eventual death in the master bedroom. Another character from the novel, Handel, describes a similar fate for his own mother, who also dies slowly in her bedroom. Winterson's decision to subject two mothers to painful deaths as they lie obediently in their marital beds is worth noting. Their deaths suggest the psychological deaths women face when they

completely submit to an oppressive sexual hierarchy.⁴⁹ As the site of the marital bed, the master bedroom, where both women die, is symbolically—and most often literally—the seat of the generation of the traditional family. Usually the largest and most private bedroom in a house, it protects and sanctifies the heterosexual union that makes the family possible. As we have seen reflected in the Victorian art that Sir Jack hangs on his bedroom walls, the woman's fidelity to that union is a subject of social debate, while the man's fidelity is of negligible social importance.

Having watched her mother die in such a bedroom, Picasso has even more reason to seek alternatives to her mother's choices. The marital bedroom, Picasso can observe, holds almost as little promise of happiness and safety as her childhood bedroom, and neither room is a space that would

⁴⁹ These deaths may also indicate some residual hostility that Winterson herself feels for the mother figure. Although *Oranges* ends with a tentative mother/daughter reconciliation, *Art and Lies*, published nine years later, does not allow the mother this same happy ending. Nonetheless, Winterson shows that the hatred Picasso feels for her father and brother is not equally applied to her mother. Underlying her frustration with her mother is perhaps a realization that her mother, too, is subjected to surveillance and emotional abuse, even if they are not applied to Lady Hamilton in the same degree as they are to Picasso. Ultimately, the mother/daughter relationship is not irreparable although it is troubled. Both women face similar problems, and even if Picasso's responses to her problems are more proactive and admirable than Lady Hamilton's, Winterson does not altogether preclude sympathy for the mother.

allow her to embark on a sexual relationship with another woman. To take her alternative course, Winterson implies that Picasso must leave her actual house and figuratively reject the house as the space that sanctifies marriage as a heterosexual institution.

Mirrors and Peepholes

The spy-hole was neat, round and entirely premeditated. Someone had made the spy-hole. Why? Presumably to watch her. So she was not only watching but being watched when she thought she was by herself, when she was taking her clothes off and putting them on and so on. All the time, someone was watching her. All the time she had been in the house. They had not even let her keep her own loneliness but had intruded on it. (The Magic Toyshop 109)

Like Winterson, Carter shows an interest in surveillance, particularly when it is trained on activities in the bedroom, but she also develops another theme in *The Magic Toyshop* with her treatment of the bedrooms in Melanie's childhood home. Carter's description of Melanie's nighttime activities parodies Freudian theory. She begins by taking a playful stab at the Freudian concept of the primal scene and its effect on a child. In his essay "On the Sexual Theories

of Children," Freud argues that children who inadvertently witness their parents having sex "arrive in every case at the same solution. They adopt what may be called a sadistic view of coition" (160). He continues by explaining that the child always interprets the stronger partner as dominating the weaker one. Because, he argues, "In many marriages, the wife does in fact recoil from her husband's embraces," the child perceives specific gender roles in the sexual act: the man as the aggressor and the woman as the object of violence (161).

In Carter's version, however, Melanie wanders into her parents' bedroom and imagines sex between her parents instead of witnessing it, and she cannot seem to rid them of their clothes:

Leaning over the wicker heart which formed the bedstock, Melanie tried to imagine her parents making love. This seemed a very daring thing to think of on such a hot night. She tried hard to picture their embraces in this bed but her mother always seemed to be wearing her black, going-to-town suit, and Daddy had on the hairy tweed jacket with leather elbow-patches which, together with his pipe, was his trade mark. (9-10)

Carter's humor targets Freud. The amusing image suggests a stereotype of the psychotherapist with his jacket and pipe. Moreover, this imagined version of sex, when sex does not even happen, does not have deep psychic implications, and it

does not suggest anything so universal or mythical as to warrant the label "primal scene." By satirizing the authority of Freud's pronouncements, scenes like this one highlight what Carter calls the "demythologizing business" of her work ("Notes from the Front Line" 38). Since Freud's theories so often posit women as passive, deflating them is a feminist strategy that is particularly important in the context of the bedroom, a space where women's passivity and permeability is socially encouraged.

Carter's interest in Freud is even more apparent in an episode that begins in the parents' bedroom and ends in Melanie's. Through Melanie's wedding dress adventure, Carter takes up Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex and literalizes it. In "Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes," Freud theorizes that the Oedipus complex in girls arises from their envy of the penis. According to Freud, the young girl begins to equate the penis with a child and transfers her affection from mother to father in the hope that her father can give her a child to make up for her lack of a penis. She concurrently begins to feel jealous of her mother's relationship with her father. Once she reaches this stage,

Freud argues, "The girl has turned into a little woman" (312). In other words, having given up her desire for a penis, she accepts the passive, feminine role that Freud defines as normal female sexuality.

On the night Melanie wanders into her parents' bedroom, she usurps her mother's position when she tries on her wedding dress. Enamored of her own reflection, she wanders out into the garden, which Carter describes in Eden-like terms as "untrodden by the foot of man, untouched by his hand" (16), but having locked herself out of the house, she is forced to climb an apple tree to regain entrance into her own bedroom. The next morning, when she learns that her parents have been killed in a plane crash, she is convinced it is her own fault for trying on the wedding dress, which she has destroyed in the process of reentering the house. Melanie's donning of a real wedding dress (the fantasy of the girl wanting to marry the father), followed by the actual death of her mother (the fantasy of wanting the mother dead in order to take her place), literalizes Freudian theory as a way of deflating its authority. The psychological phenomena manifest themselves physically and become ridiculous in the process. Moreover when Melanie climbs the apple tree,

symbolizing the Edenic tree of knowledge, she must remove her clothes and ascend naked in order to regain entrance to her own bedroom. Carter here satirizes Christian tenets about the Edenic fall by reversing the myth: instead of becoming ashamed and having to cover herself after her encounter with the tree of knowledge, Melanie removes her cultural trappings and returns to a state of nakedness.⁵⁰

Carter's description of Melanie's return to her bedroom after the adventure reveals her desire to return to a state of innocence. As she climbs the apple tree to reach her bedroom, she feels relieved that her "window was wide open on Edward Bear and *Lorna Doone* and silver-backed hair-brushes" (22). As the props of childhood, these objects provide an emotional anchor for Melanie, even though they represent an identity she has outgrown. Her bedroom is evocative of the nursery, which, as we have seen, is perceived as a de-sexualized space. She nestles into her blanket, "Clutching Edward Bear" (22), which symbolizes a childhood innocence to

⁵⁰ Robert Clark also sums up the episode in the context of Western mythology and modes of thought: "The next morning [Melanie] wakes to hear that her parents have died and considers herself the symbolic cause, rightly so in that she has usurped her mother's past, torn her hymeneal garb and climbed the phallic tree of knowledge to enter her father's house" (44).

which she yearns to return. What takes place the morning following this sexual adventure also has resonance for an analysis of bedrooms. When she hears about her parents' deaths, Melanie lashes out at herself by breaking her wardrobe mirror—the one in front of which she has posed naked for her own delight—in what Anja Müller has called a “symbolic suicide” that “initiates the loss of subjectivity later on imposed upon her in her uncle's house” (57). As Müller indicates, Carter uses the scene to emphasize that Melanie's period of self-celebration and joyful sexual curiosity cannot be sustained because it has depended so much on narcissism. Grief-stricken, Melanie also destroys her parents' bedroom, the site of the sexual curiosity she has enacted. By lashing out against the space where she has fantasized about adult sexuality, Melanie is again yearning to return to a state of innocence.

After her parents' deaths, Melanie and her two younger siblings, Jonathan and Victoria, go to live with their Uncle Philip, his wife Margaret, and her two brothers, Francie and Finn. In contrast to her childhood home, where Melanie feels comfortable enough to rummage through the personal belongings in her parents' bedroom, Carter describes Melanie's Uncle

Philip's house as having a number of doors which remain closed and mysterious. Although Melanie knows the rooms behind the doors are probably bedrooms, she frightens herself by imagining the house as Bluebeard's castle and the rooms as holding chopped up corpses or "some clockwork horror rolling hugely on small wheels, some terrifying joke or hideous novelty" (82). These images of bedrooms are particularly significant since Melanie has used the bedrooms in her old home to begin to formulate her sexuality. The note of horror that bedrooms take on in Uncle Philip's house suggests that her sexuality is not as easily understood as Melanie first imagined. Moreover, Carter shows Melanie as coming under surveillance of various types in Philip's home. From the moment she arrives, Finn begins watching her in a sexual way, while Philip's surveillance is established by his absolute rule over the household.

Carter introduces Melanie's toyshop bedroom with a scene of sexual tension played out between Melanie and Finn. Significantly, their conversation begins with Melanie excusing herself to Finn while she takes Edward Bear out of her suitcase and places him very deliberately on her pillow in another attempt to distance herself from her developing

sexuality. Watching her as he "loll[s] against the chest-of-drawers" and lights a cigarette, Finn remarks that she is a little old for such toys. She feels uncomfortable when he comments on her appearance: "It was as if he had put on the quality of maleness like a flamboyant cloak" (45). Almost hypnotized by his presence, Melanie allows him to take her hair down and comb it out, although once he becomes absorbed in the task, the sexual tension subsides. Now that maleness has a body, Carter demonstrates, Melanie is less sure of herself. In her first bedroom, she was able to project her own sexuality onto her fantasy groom, but in her new bedroom she encounters an embodied sexuality outside of her control, a man who can be predatory, like a lion "stretching out his lordly paw and playing idly with her" (45). Although Melanie has been both object and subject of her own gaze in her old bedroom, Carter shows us that in her new house, she no longer controls how the gaze is directed at her.

Carter describes Melanie's new bedroom as "a long, low room papered with fat, crimson roses" (44). On her first morning, this wallpaper startles Melanie because she is so unfamiliar with her new surroundings. Wondering "who has planted this thick hedge of crimson roses in all this dark,

green, luxuriant foliage with, oh, what cruel thorns" (53), Melanie awakens disoriented and realizes she did not notice the night before that there were thorns in the pattern of the wallpaper. The lushness of the foliage and the sense that they are encroaching on her is suggestive of her developing body and her emergent sexuality, while the thorns are an emblem of penetration. Melanie's failure to notice the thorns the night before is another indication of her naïveté about sexuality. Also notable is the fact that the room has no mirror, an object that has played a central role in her self-understanding up until her parents' deaths. As Anja Müller argues, the absence of mirrors in Philip's house suggests that she cannot depend on her old formulations of her identity.

Meanwhile, Melanie's younger brother Jonathon has a very different introduction to his new bedroom. While Melanie and her young sister Victoria share a room, Jonathan is assigned his own bedroom, "a high, airy attic, freshly whitewashed, with a little iron bed with a cover made of knitted squares sewn together" (43-44). Not only does he enjoy more privacy in his bedroom, but he is also able immediately to relate to the space and personalize it for himself. Drawing on his

favorite hobby of building model ships, he thinks of his new bedroom as a crow's nest on a ship and begins unpacking at once because "He loved his room" (44). Carter's contrast between Jonathan's and Melanie's experiences of their new bedrooms highlights how privacy can make a person feel at ease. Melanie felt the same contentment Jonathan here displays when she had her own bedroom in her old house.

In the new house, by contrast, Melanie's privacy is all but revoked. The surveillance Melanie is subject to is particularly insidious because it is so difficult to predict. Melanie finds herself under Philip's watchful eye in situations and in rooms where she least expects it. For example, when Finn invites her to his bedroom to rehearse her Leda role, she imagines they are enjoying a private, intimate moment. What she does not realize is that Finn brings her there to rehearse at Philip's request. Even though he is not in the bedroom with them, Philip acts as their puppet master until Finn realizes how he is being manipulated and explains it to Melanie: "You see . . . he wanted me to fuck you" (151). For Melanie, this bedroom moment is a startling contrast to the phantom bridegroom she used to imagine when she posed in front of her mirror. She is agitated by Finn's

use of the word "fuck" in reference to herself: "her phantom bridegroom would never have fucked her. They would have made love. But Finn, she acknowledged with a sinking of her spirit, would have. She could tell by the way he ground out his cigarette on the floor" (151-52). Carter's passage reveals again Melanie's class prejudices about Finn, but more importantly, the scene emphasizes how Melanie's fantasies of sexuality and her experience of it continue to be at odds. The bedrooms in Philip's household continue to reveal new information about sexuality because in these spaces, Melanie must contend with other people who are defining her sexuality.

For example, in this same scene, as Finn continues his explanation of Philip's motives, Melanie learns how a seduction and possibly a pregnancy would vindicate Philip for the disdain that Melanie's father felt for Philip. During their ensuing conversation, Melanie takes Finn too literally as he explains how class differences fuel Philip's anger. Finn refers to her family using fish knives and to Melanie shaving her armpits. Because these activities require money and the luxury of time, they distinguish the family as more refined than the lower class. In both cases, she protests

that his statements about their behavior are not true, and he has to remind her that he is just using "a manner of speaking" (153). Her literalness in these scenes derives from her incredulity about the motives of both Finn and Philip. Finn's blunt way of speaking offends her, and Philip's insidious plans are baffling to her. The shock of the moment renders language completely opaque to her, and she cannot analyze it with any sophistication. Melanie's naïveté is persistent, as Carter indicates in this scene, which makes her less able to avoid Philip's surveillance. The fact that he is nearly successful in acting as her puppet master, even in Finn's bedroom, where Finn ostensibly is controlling the space, suggests that Philip's rule over the household is particularly effective.

Meanwhile, Finn himself has been watching her through a peephole in her bedroom wall, another example of a girl's permeable boundaries: "The spy-hole was neat, round and entirely premeditated. Someone had made the spy-hole. Why? Presumably to watch her" (109). Melanie's discovery of the peephole is described as a moment when she feels violated, but Carter puts an interesting twist on the situation by having Melanie appropriate and reverse Finn's gaze when she

peeps into the "terra incognita of the brothers' bedroom" (108). As Paulina Palmer notes, Carter's reversal of the gaze illustrates that "despite appearances to the contrary, the roles adopted by men and women are, in fact, flexible. They are open to change" ("From 'Coded Mannequin'" 185). Although she covers the hole, Melanie cannot resist looking through it again. Her desire to watch Finn in this illicit way illustrates her growing, albeit unsettling, attraction to Finn. On sleepless nights, she watches him as he paints an allegory: Finn, Francie, and Margaret each full of arrows like St. Sebastian. On another night she observes the brothers ritually burning parts of a doll dressed like Philip. These activities fascinate Melanie perhaps because they offer another understanding of the bedroom: Finn uses the space to express a surreptitious rebellion against Philip.

The episode also suggests that Melanie still has a tenuous claim to subjectivity. By covering the hole, she closes off some of the permeability of her bedroom and manages to secure a little more privacy for herself. Her disregard for Finn's privacy, however, is a little problematic. Although she values her own privacy, she is

nonetheless willing to intrude on someone else's privacy. Her role reversal suggests how a victim can become a perpetrator.

The peephole, however, is just the beginning of their insinuations into each other's bedroom. By the end of the novel, Finn chastely shares Melanie's bed with her for a night. The scene culminates a progression Carter has been tracking in the novel, a progression that begins with Melanie's early scenes where she imagined a "phantom bridegroom," while sharing her actual bed with Edward the Bear, and continuing when Melanie becomes an object of two different forms of male observation through Philip's surveillance and Finn's voyeurism.

By the time Finn climbs into bed with Melanie, she has formulated a radically different vision of sexuality and marriage than her adolescent musings about it:

They might have been married for years and Victoria their baby. Melanie had a prophetic vision as Finn sat beside her in his outrageous jacket, unclean in the clean sheets, yawning so that she saw the ribbed red cathedral of his mouth and all the yellowed teeth like discoloured choirboys. She knew they would get married one day and live together all their lives and there would always be pervasive squalor and dirt and mess and shabbiness, always, forever and forever.

And babies crying and washing to be done and toast
burning all the rest of her life. (177)

This vision, far removed from the vision of her phantom
bridegroom, accounts for the domestic labor that marriage
entails, especially the labor traditionally done by women.
When she imagines it, she cannot even picture herself as
staying abreast of the chores, so there is "dirt and mess,"
"babies crying," washing to be done," and "toast burning."
Moreover, Melanie can no longer dismiss the man in order to
revel in self-absorption as she does in her childhood bedroom
when she entertains a phantom bridegroom. Finn is
emphatically present, "unclean in the clean sheets," and his
physical presence prompts her to consider the material
reality of a possible future with him.

This revelatory moment echoes the ideas about sexuality
that Carter espouses in *The Sadeian Woman*, where she points
out how differently poor women and rich women experience
sexuality and childbirth. She writes, "rich women are more
in control of the sequence than poor women and so may
actually enjoy fucking and childbirth, when poor women might
find them both atrocious simply because they are poor and
cannot afford comfort, privacy and paid help" (12). She also

notes that "sexual sophistication . . . may not be pursued in a room full of children" (11). The image echoes Melanie's vision of her marriage to Finn, where there are always babies crying, and is suggestive of the ways that Melanie's sexual pleasure might be curtailed by her socioeconomic situation. In other words, Melanie's future bedroom, the one implied by the novel's ending when Melanie and Finn are left alone with "a wild surmise" (200), may be a space that dramatically limits her sexual pleasure because of its lack of comfort and privacy. The vision of her marriage to Finn suggests she is learning that she may be required to keep her self/other boundaries permeable, at a heavy cost to her own happiness.

When the Panopticon Fails

Without her clothes on, she looked the size of a house. She was engaged in washing herself piece by piece in the pot of water drawn from the samovar while Walser, naked but for his beard, waited on the Shaman's brass bed. He saw, without surprise, she indeed appeared to possess no navel but he was no longer in the mood to draw any definite conclusions from the fact. Her released feathers brushed against the walls; he recalled how nature had equipped her only for the 'woman on top' position and rustled on his straw mattress. (Nights at the Circus 292)

In *Nights at the Circus*, Carter challenges the social impetus of the surveillance of female sexuality when she portrays women convicts who escape from a prison designed after Jeremy Bentham's panopticon. Her character Fevvers, the winged aerialiste, also challenges that impetus by broadcasting her sexuality instead of trying to avoid the surveillance of it. Fevvers moves female sexuality into more public spaces. She makes her bed everywhere since her fame often keeps her on the road, and she consummates her relationship with Walser in one of the most unlikely places imaginable—in a shaman's bed in a hut in the middle of Siberia. Carter uses this improbable space to unsettle some common assumptions about the bedroom.

Carter devotes a chapter to the story of Countess P's asylum for women who have, like the Countess herself, killed their husbands. This asylum, designed as a panopticon, is set in Siberia, a remote location that intensifies the isolation of the women. The episode is relevant to an understanding of bedrooms because the partitioning of the cells of the panopticon creates an individual space for each woman that functions as a bedroom: its only furnishings—a simple bed and a toilet pail—suggest the bedroom, and it

reproduces the privacy of the bedroom by isolating each woman from the others. Their privacy, however, is subject to a continuous surveillance as each of them sits "in the trap of her visibility" (211).

The prison for women is the brainchild of the Countess, who believes she can use intense surveillance to produce repentance in her inmates. It is significant that Carter shows this panopticism being applied to women who have disrupted the sexual order. Like the other characters discussed in this chapter, these prisoners are subject to surveillance because someone has an interest in directing their sexuality into channels that preserve the sexual hierarchy. Having flaunted marital fidelity by killing their husbands, these women now occupy cells that become their new bedrooms. Because the Countess undertakes sole responsibility for surveillance of these women, she is herself trapped by her own obsession to be always watching, effectively becoming a prisoner in her own right. She stays in a room in the center of the prison, from which vantage point she can watch every prisoner. Her eagerness to take on this role suggests her desire for power and for maintaining the social order, but, at the same time, it suggests her

enthrallment with women who act illicitly. By watching the women all day as they occupy their cells, the Countess exhibits a curiosity that belies her stated agenda of the reformation of her prisoners. She seems to want to catch the women in some private act that might reveal something sexually titillating.

Several critics have brought interesting observations to bear on Carter's panopticon episode. Joanne Gass, for example, sees panopticism as a controlling metaphor for the novel because its mechanism is evident in the whorehouse and the circus as well as the actual prison. She argues that these "defining arenas" allow society to contain its disruptive elements and to categorize them as a way of defusing their threat to society (71, 73-74). Gass's argument parallels my own, and Foucault's, by suggesting that panopticism is not limited to literal prisons but instead is dispersed throughout society as a means of protecting the social order.

Two other critics focus on the gaps in the panopticon's power in their discussions of the strategies the prisoners and guards develop for secretly communicating with each other. Magali Michael argues that the prisoner who first

initiates contact with a guard and begins exchanging notes with her "literally writes herself into subjecthood" ("Engaged Feminism" 516). Brian Finney makes a similar point, discussing how this communication "enables [the prisoners] to narrate their own lives" (175). As these critics make clear, the Countess' panopticon does not preclude the possibility of agency for the prisoners. They may be the object of the Countess' gaze, but they are never completely objectified because they begin to express themselves. Reclaiming some of their subjectivity, they begin plotting with the guards and eventually succeed in an uprising against the Countess and an escape from her prison. Thus the Countess' panopticon, which enables the most intense form of surveillance imaginable over the privacy of a cell/bedroom, fails to discipline them.

Through the failure of the panopticon, Carter suggests that the surveillance of female sexuality is not an inevitability, that women can create other possibilities for themselves. Each prisoner now paired with a guard who is her lover, they plan to establish an idyllic community of women. Because this will be an all-female community, they ask a passing man to donate some sperm, which they conveniently are

able to freeze because of the extreme Siberian cold. In this way, they hope to assure a future population for their "little republic of free women" through the artificial insemination of community members (240). Their plan of action is ridiculed by Lizzie, who wonders, "What'll they do with the boy babies? Feed 'em to the polar bears? To the *female* polar bears?" (240-41; Carter's emphasis). Magali Michael notes that Lizzie's comments represent an important counterargument to the idea that a utopic female community can be established through separatism ("Engaged Feminism" 517), while Brian Finney argues that Lizzie's "blistering Marxist critique of this particular fantasy of forming an all-female society" serves as an example of Carter's attempt "to exclude specific interpretations of her text on which she launches preemptive strikes" (175). In other words, Carter's novel refuses to give an outright endorsement to utopic answers to social problems. The women's escape from the panopticon is certainly promising, but Carter intimates that alternatives to an oppressive social order will encounter their own set of challenges, particularly since a separatist community of women operates on a principle similar to the panopticon, which separates bodies. While these women are no

longer trapped in their individual prison bedrooms where their sexuality is surveyed and contained, we never learn what their alternate bedrooms will look like or if those new spaces will permit a liberating expression of their sexuality.

Along with subverting the power of the panopticon, Carter also gives us a new perspective on the bedroom when Fevvers and Walser consummate their relationship in a shaman's hut in the middle of Siberia. Through this episode, Carter attempts to write a new cultural script for heterosexual relationships by dramatically changing the bedroom and the way her characters experience it. By displacing their sexual union to a setting so far removed from their familiar surroundings, she locates them in a new space, one that is less saturated with the social scripts that direct them into typical gender roles. Moreover, she unsettles her protagonists, shaking them free of the identities with which they feel comfortable. Walser suffers from a bout of amnesia and is taken in by a shaman who feeds him hallucinogens, while Fevvers, who has broken one of her wings and whose dyed hair and feathers are returning to their natural colors, feels lost without an audience. By the time

they reach the hut and decide to consummate their relationship, they are newly-made people.

Carter's attempt to strip as much as she can of the social context from her characters' union recalls her remarks about sexuality in *The Sadeian Woman*. There Carter argues that we always bring our social circumstances to bed with us: "We may believe we fuck stripped of social artifice; in bed, we even feel we touch the bedrock of human nature itself. But we are deceived" (9). She continues, pointing out that:

no bed, however unexpected, no matter how apparently gratuitous, is free from the de-universalising facts of real life. We do not go to bed in simple pairs; even if we choose not to refer to them, we still drag there with us the cultural impedimenta of our social class, our parents' lives, our bank balances, our sexual and emotional expectations, our whole biographies—all the bits and pieces of our unique existences. These considerations have limited our choice of partners before we have even gotten them into the bedroom. (9)

Although she can not—nor does she wish to—erase her characters' identities completely, Carter hopes to lessen some of the cultural influences that channel heterosexuality into a marriage, where the woman all too often is subjected to her husband's rule. With fewer social influences, both in their understandings of themselves and in the space of an

unfamiliar bedroom, the possibilities are greater for Fevvers and Walser to set up a relationship that does not replicate the social order of women's sexual submission to men.

The consummation scene is also important because of the spatial arrangement they use to have sex: Fevvers' wings dictate that she must assume the top position. The significance of Fevvers' sexual position is glossed by Carter's discussion in *The Sadeian Woman* of society's allegiance to the missionary position. Adhering to the missionary position, Carter writes, assures us that "sex is really sacred" because the Christian church sanctifies that position (7-8). She also discusses the mythic implications of the position: "it implies a system of relations between the partners that equates the woman to the passive receptivity of the soil, to the richness and fecundity of the earth" (8). When Carter creates characters who, by necessity, must invert this position, she is posing a challenge to mythic and essentialist definitions of men and women.

Moreover, male sexual privilege is metaphorically subverted when Fevvers assumes the top position. Indeed, Walser, who speculates about this sexual arrangement as he

watches Fevvers bathe, is mildly discomfited by the thought of it: "Her released feathers brushed against the walls; he recalled how nature had equipped her only for the 'woman on top' position and rustled on his straw mattress" (292). As the one who waits uneasily in bed for the lover to come to him, Walser resembles a timid bride, while Fevvers takes on a masculine role of spatial dominance because her wings take up so much space that they touch the walls. By filling up space, Fevvers claims the space of the bedroom for herself.

In her depiction of the woman on top, Carter's allusion to Leda gives the act even further symbolic resonance. Anne Fernihough discusses how nineteenth-century artists' anxieties about the New Woman, a figure who threatened the sexual order by resisting marriage and claiming new freedoms for women, are evident in their depictions of the myth of Leda:

Many artists expressed through the swan's rape of Leda a fascination with what was perceived to be the new, degenerate woman's lasciviousness, as well as a desire to return woman to her 'true' position of abject submission to male authority.
(97)

In *Nights at the Circus*, however, Carter offers a revision of the Leda myth that satires male appropriations of that myth.

Fernihough describes how Walser is feminized by his position on bottom, and when Fevvers covers him with feathers, he becomes "the passive Leda figure" (98). In this scene, Fernihough understands Carter as directly alluding to *The Magic Toyshop* as well as to the male appropriations of the Leda myth.⁵¹

Carter's ability to recast the Leda myth in *Nights* is indicative of her belief that cultural imperatives about sexual behavior are not immutable, but her insistence on revisiting the Leda myth more than once shows us that those cultural imperatives deserve close attention. Because such oft retold stories affect society powerfully, she argues, a failure to analyze them carefully leaves people—particularly women—vulnerable to the myths' power to direct their lives. Moreover, by staging this revision in a bedroom, Carter suggests that the New Woman, whose resistance to marriage also implies a resistance to the domestic spaces that produce and fortify it, can return to a bedroom without sacrificing her freedom.

⁵¹ As I have already discussed, Carter draws on the Leda myth in *The Magic Toyshop* to illustrate Philip's overwhelming authority and the violence he uses to direct Melanie's sexual development.

The consummation scene is also significant because it is the moment when Walser is bewildered to learn that Fevvers is not a virgin. Fevvers' deception about her sexual experience has an important thematic function, according to Rory P. B. Turner, who sees it as a subversion of the traditional story of romantic love. In the traditional version, Turner writes, "virgin and hero struggle. They are united. They get married. They live happily ever after. But that sort of fiction always reduces the woman to a symbolic role, as virgin, as wife" (58-9).

In Carter's version, however, Fevvers shakes off her identity as virgin and thus avoids being slotted into a confining social role. Fevvers also shows an aversion to the role of wife. In fact, when she argues with Lizzie about the wisdom of starting a relationship with Walser, Fevvers points out, "here we are far away from churches and priests who'll speak of marriage" (281), to which Lizzie responds, "I daresay you'll find these woodsmen amongst whom your young man has found refuge uphold the institution of marriage as enthusiastically as other men do" (281). Later, during the consummation scene, Carter's use of the terms *wife* to describe Fevvers (293) and *husband* to describe Walser (295)

recalls this conversation about marriage. Since no wedding ceremony has taken place, the terms cannot be understood literally. Carter dissociates them from their usual significations in order to suggest this union will not replicate a traditional marriage. Rather, it represents a new conception of marriage for which she must use the old signifiers because as of yet there exist no new ones. Furthermore, as I discuss above, Fevvers and Walser each take on aspects of the other gender. Although Walser may be called a husband, he acts a little like a timid bride as he waits on the bed for Fevvers. In this alternative bedroom, as Carter shows, cultural scripts for gender roles are being revised.

In her conclusion to the novel, Carter describes "The spiraling tornado of Fevvers' laughter" as it sweeps across the globe. Overjoyed that Walser believed in her fictional virginity, Fevvers quips, "It just goes to show there's nothing like confidence" (294). Her reference to confidence indicates not only her confidence in her self, but also her mastery of the confidence trick, which she and Lizzie use both to entertain and to subvert the social order. More importantly, though, the infectiousness of Fevvers' joy

offers an alternative to surveillance. In the shaman's hut, a positive model for heterosexual relations is broadcast through Fevvers' raucous laughter. Projecting her sexual joy outward from the bedroom, Fevvers assumes agency of her sexuality and offers it as a model to others.

As her laughter travels across the globe, Fevvers opens up the space of the bedroom, turning the entire world into a bedroom. Instead of remaining a passive object, subject to the social surveillance trained on her when she enters a bedroom, Fevvers reverses the direction of the powers that prescribe her sexuality so they emanate from her in an outward movement instead of issuing towards her, directed by those trying to preserve an oppressive social order. Her ability to accomplish this monumental task derives from her experience in profiting from spectatorship. Through her circus act, she invites voyeurism, and by seeking out the gaze, she assumes the agency necessary to exploit that gaze to her advantage.

In the austere Siberian landscape where both the panopticon and the shaman's hut are located, Carter offers an image that powerfully inflects the last section of her novel. The snow presents the characters with a "blank sheet of fresh

paper on which they could inscribe whatever future they wished" (218). The utopic gestures of the final section bear out the optimism of the image. The panopticon fails, and Fevvers undermines any surveillance trained on her bedroom by broadcasting her own version of female sexuality. As several critics and I have discussed, however, Lizzie offers a counterpoint to these gestures towards utopia. She questions the practicality of the separatist community envisioned by the women convicts, and she needles Fevvers with objections to her planned union with Walser. Through Lizzie, Carter keeps readers unsettled. Although she presents us with alternatives to an oppressive sexual and social order, Carter encourages readers to continue their social analysis. Once an oppressive system is subverted, Carter argues, one must be particularly vigilant to ensure that an alternative system does not produce comparable—or even worse—social problems. Carter's new model of the bedroom is one alternative she considers, but it is not the only or the final solution for reforming the existing models for the bedroom.

Where She Makes Her Bed

Fevvers' Siberian sex brings us full circle back to Jeanette, whose strategy of making her bed elsewhere than her home resembles Fevvers' own bedroom strategies. So this chapter is framed by two women who can forego the traditional bedroom and move sexuality into other spaces in an opportunistic way. Mark Wigley's analysis of the relationships between sexuality and the house offers an interesting perspective on women like Jeanette and Fevvers: "The woman on the outside is implicitly sexually mobile. Her sexuality is no longer controlled by the house" (355). By finding alternative spaces for their sexual activities, these characters begin to claim some sexual subjectivity for themselves.⁵² Jeanette continues a lesbian relationship, despite the condemnations of her mother and their fellow parishioners, while Fevvers begins a relationship with a vision of equality between herself and her partner.

⁵² Several other sexually mobile characters turn up in Winterson's fiction. For example, in *Written on the Body*, the narrator and Louise initiate their love affair when they climb to the attic of Louise's house and make love on a bed referred to as "The Lady's Occasional" (83). Fortunata, in *Sexing the Cherry*, and Villanelle, in *The Passion*, demonstrate sexual mobility through wandering the world and making love where they wish.

Moreover, their sexual mobility subverts the marital bedroom, the space that generates and protects the traditional family. As Wigley tells us, historically the house is the structure that enables marriage by bringing the husband and wife together in one space. These early concepts of the house hold that its "primary role is to protect the father's genealogical claims by isolating women from other men" (336). When they move sex outside their houses and choose their own bedrooms, Jeanette and Fevvers are rejecting the concept of the house as a space that protects marriage by isolating women. Refusing to stay in one space, one bedroom, they avoid being drawn into the traditional union of marriage. Because they realize people are never as socially isolated in their beds as they would like to believe, Fevvers and Jeanette understand the importance of carefully considering the spaces where they express their sexualities. They push the social boundaries to see how far they can stretch. Even so, there are always reminders of those boundaries: Fevvers has Lizzie to remind her that marriage to Walser might curtail her freedom, and Jeanette learns that even outside her home, there are people eager to subject her to surveillance.

The other two characters, Picasso and Melanie, find it harder to establish alternative beds for themselves and consequently learn painful lessons about keeping their self/other boundaries permeable. In Picasso's harrowing experiences of sexual abuse, we see the most vivid illustration of how damaging the cultural precept of girls' permeability can be. Melanie, who takes advantage of the privacy of her first bedroom to explore her developing body, discovers that bedrooms in Uncle Philip's house are more frightening because they are less private, more permeable spaces. She learns from her visit to Finn's bedroom how others in the house are scripting her sexuality, and her vision of marriage to Finn suggests that the permeability of her body and her privacy will only increase as she gets older. In both these characters, we see evidence of the bedroom as a space of physical assault from the incestuous rape Matthew visits on Picasso to the scripted seduction that Philip plans between Finn and Melanie.

The bedroom can be a space of emotional assault as well. Even Jeanette, who has more sexual mobility, is subject to her mother's sudden intrusion into her bedroom at night as well as her mother's search and destroy mission of cleaning

out any reminders of Jeanette's love for her girlfriends. When parents and siblings have right of entry into a bedroom, girls can pay a price. It encourages them to internalize this surveillance and learn the social lesson Weisman describes of occupying rather than controlling the spaces they inhabit. Even though Carter and Winterson document the bedroom's dangers, they do not portray it as inevitably destructive for young girls. As I have demonstrated at the beginning of this dissertation, a high degree of spatial literacy can help girls interpret space. A clear understanding—or astute reading—of the power arrangements in the bedroom gives young women all the more incentive to find their own rooms, imaginatively or actually. Melanie imagines herself in a one-room apartment, where she can define how space is used according to her immediate needs, as when she imagines brewing coffee on a gas-ring. Picasso, although she gets a room of her own within the Hamilton household when she turns fifteen, realizes that leaving her family home is the only way she can find a space where she can set the agenda.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, Winterson draws on folklore to make an important point about space. She discusses the chalk circle as an effective tool for learning how to make space work to one's advantage:

It's gone out of fashion now, which is a shame, because sitting in a chalk circle when you feel threatened is a lot better than sitting in the gas oven. . . . It works because the principle of personal space is always the same, whether you're fending off an elemental or someone's bad mood. It's a force field around yourself, and as long as our imagining powers are weak, it's useful to have something to remind us. (141)

Personal space, described here as a protective shield that can deflect impinging forces, can perhaps offer a model for buttressing oneself against the abusive sexual politics of domestic space, but it requires quite a bit of mental effort since it cannot be accomplished if one's "imagining powers are weak."

Winterson also emphasizes space when she describes how wizards learn how to use magical powers: "They push out their power bit by bit, first within their hearts, then within their bodies, then within their immediate circle. It is not possible to control the outside of yourself until you

have mastered your breathing space" (141). The wizard, when he has reached his full powers, can be read as a metaphor for the master of the house.⁵³ To become adept enough at using space to equal the power of the wizard, one first has to learn how to master space at a basic level, Winterson illustrates, a small space. Such a mastery requires confidence in oneself before one tries to wield power over larger spaces. The space of a room could be a starting point for such a skill because it represents a finite area into which one can project her confidence.

Several characters illustrate models for negotiating the space of the room with confidence. Fevvers, as a trapeze artist, wields the most power over space and, in the scene in the Siberian hut, she takes ownership of the bedroom space by filling up the space with her wings, taking the top position during sex, and projecting her confidence through laughter. Jeanette also shows a number of effective strategies for negotiating the space of a room, including her ability to

⁵³ In fact, in the story that follows Winterson's description of the wizard and his powers, a young woman is tricked by a wizard into becoming his apprentice. He holds a thrall over her for years before she decides to leave. The story is an allegory of Jeanette's relationship with her mother, who adopted Jeanette in order to train her as a missionary.

avoid the surveillance of her sexual activity and her power of visualizing the room's irony, as she does when she conjures an orange demon to perch on top of the crocodile, a gift from Pastor Spratt to her mother. Picasso shows skill in challenging the power of a room's rhetoric by smashing the parlor clock, running naked and painted into the parlor, and imaginatively sealing off the bedroom where Matthew raped her. Picasso's spatial skills, however, are reactionary, while Fevers and Jeanette show a proactive appropriation of space. Melanie, finally, shows little of these spatial skills, aside from covering the peephole she finds in her bedroom. She does not make many deliberate choices to attempt to read or negotiate space, and she consequently has fewer options at the end of the novel. Her departure from the toyshop is not by choice, but by necessity, after the house burns down.

In creating characters who understand how space works and how to make it work for them, Carter and Winterson provide a model for agency. As Brian Finney argues, narrative is a way of constructing oneself that frees one "from those inherited stories of the past that serve to inhibit and constrain us" (173). If Carter and Winterson can

narrate a world where characters begin to claim some agency for themselves, then that suggests that agency might be possible in the real world. They examine how material space is translated into a rhetoric of space that buttresses the social order by producing material effects on the people that rhetoric seeks to control. So we move from the material world into the textual world and back into the material world. If meaning can flow between the material and the textual worlds, then that suggests that Carter's and Winterson's texts can make an impact on the real world. As feminists, this is certainly what they hope to accomplish.

Although the trope of the house is particularly effective for conveying feminist themes, it can also be used to make a wider point about society, as Winterson does in *Art and Lies*. As Picasso rides a train, she looks out at the suburbs, identical houses lined up as though made by cookie cutters:

Through the train window Picasso saw the cemeteries of the Dead. The box houses in yellow brick, each fastened against its neighbour. In the cold air the sulphurous walls steamed. There was no sign of life. If she could have looked in what would she have seen? Rows of scuffed couches identically angled towards the identical televisions offering, courtesy of the bold white satellite dishes, 45 different channels of

football, news, comedy, melodrama, and wildlife documentaries. Her own mother and father were no better, only their sofa was leather and their television was concealed behind a sliding panel in the wall. (83)

The scene, with its image of yellow steam and its implication of decay, recalls "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," where T. S. Eliot describes London with images of fog discolored yellow by pollution and of human isolation.

In Winterson's version, however, the suburbs amplify the desolation by the monotony of the identical houses, which do not allow for any individuality, and the deadening effects of the television, which offers a window into other spaces, but which encourages people to stay planted in their own living rooms rather than to venture out themselves in search of new vistas. Picasso speculates about how this way of life affects people and concludes that everyone is now dead to any real emotion, which results in a phenomenon she has read about in a magazine: the "marriage junkies" or "the serially monogamous," who move from one divorce into another marriage because they are searching for meaning. Pondering the phrase "till Death us do part" from the wedding vows, Picasso decides that "Death did part them; dead to feeling, dead to beauty, dead to all but the most obvious pleasures, they were

soon dead to one another and each blamed the other for the boredom that was theirs" (83). This episode depicts social narratives being carried to such an extreme level of homogeneity that everyone is reduced to the same fate, a pleasureless sexuality without the possibility of love. Winterson reminds readers that everyone, not only women, can be damaged by the house and the social agenda it promotes.

However grim Winterson's prospect of the suburban home is, the final problem is that the house is necessary. Human beings require shelter as is evident in the fairy tale near the end of *Oranges* that describes the difficulties of traveling through the wilderness to get from one inhabited area to the next. Winnet, the character in the tale who is an allegorical representation of Jeanette, has trouble when she leaves home: "Soon she ran out of food and spare clothes, then homesickness struck her, and she lay unable to walk for many days" (153). Domestic space, for all its problems, does provide shelter and comfort, which everyone needs.

Carter acknowledges the comfort of the house in *The Magic Toyshop* when Melanie locks herself out in the middle of the night. She is frightened by a shadow in the tree that turns out to be their cat, whose purring offers Melanie, "a

domestic sound, unexpected and reassuring" (20). Of course, Carter's meaning here is complicated by the fact that Melanie experiences a domestic comfort while she is outdoors.

Moreover, the domestic sound is not one that is associated with the house, itself, i.e. its architecture, but a sound made by a living animal that occupies the house. Ultimately, one can conclude, it is the occupants of the house who make it a comforting or threatening space. Because society can create it as both reassuring and oppressive, the house is a provocative trope. Carter and Winterson recognize this and seize on it in order to unsettle assumptions about the house, prompting readers to look more closely at those spaces around them that are most familiar.

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