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Resisting Marriage: Defying Expectations in Three Lesbian Novels

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## **Resisting Marriage: Defying Expectations in Three Lesbian Novels**

In this thesis, the category of lesbian novels will be explored through three particular novels' protagonists in order to study and analyze their unique views on marriage. These novels are *Odd Girl Out* by Ann Bannon, *Rubyfruit Jungle* by Rita Mae Brown, and *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* by Jeanette Winterson. The protagonists in each of these novels, Laura, Molly, and Jeanette respectively, each have their own personal views on marriage both as an institution and how it pertains to them. These works were all published between 1957 and 1985, and as a result, these novels appear within a post World War II, Anglo-American culture.

These novels were all received well by the world they were published into, with both *Rubyfruit Jungle* and *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* winning awards and being critically viewed. While *Odd Girl Out* is considered a pulp novel, and therefore not seen as a valuable piece of literature, it was sold widely reaching a wide general audience. These novels all came out in a time when homosexuality was something taboo and unspoken. However, all three of them were viewed well, and they are seen as novels that pave the way for other novels with lesbian themes for the future.

The scope of this thesis will incorporate the three novels, and explore the conflict that each of the three protagonists has with marriage within the plot. This includes how the women feel about marriage personally, how they perceive marriage from observing other people, and what they think of marriage as an institution. Often marriage is something that is expected of each of the women in the novels, and it is expected that they will both marry a man and have children. However, because each of these protagonists is a lesbian, marriage to a man is not in her future. The views on marriage do differ between each character, since they are each at different ages throughout the novels, in different time periods, and in different environments.

However, the conflict with marriage is one concept that is thought about by each protagonist at various points throughout each of the novels, with some protagonists focusing on it more heavily than others.

The main method that is employed in this thesis is close reading. The work of close reading is one of the most basic and essential tools in the work of analyzing literature. Close reading at its core is meant to find the bulk of the information directly from the text itself. As such, using this method the main resources of this thesis will be the three novels in question. This allows for a more detailed look into the literature to gain reasoning for any particular argument, rather than relying on secondary sources to back up a claim that is made. The work of close reading rewards the reader with a deeper understanding of the text, and the ability to use this knowledge to make a claim that is central to the idea of the novel. That is why close reading will be the most important method used in this thesis; it will allow for the novels and their characters to be presented in a way that is true to the novel while also making its own distinct claim.

The other method that is important to this thesis is in reference to secondary sources that examine lesbian novels. These sources come from various places, but each is a scholarly work that deals with the specific topic and collection of lesbian novels at hand. Examples of this research will be books that have been written on lesbian novels or the particular novels individually, a film that deals with lesbian novels and how they work, and articles found in academic journals that present their own argument on these lesbian novels or works that present relevant theory and critiques surrounding the topic. The scholarly work will contain arguments about queer/feminist theory, along with literary history to provide context to each of the three novels. I will look to works that add onto the novels including the chapter “The Woman-

Identified Woman” from the book *For Lesbians Only* written by Radicalesbians, Catharine Stimpson’s article “Zero Degree Deviancy: The Lesbian Novel in English,” the film *Forbidden Love: the Unashamed Stories of Lesbian Lives* directed by Lynne Fernie and Aerlyn Weissman, Teresa De Lauretis’ article “Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation,” the book *The Safe Sea of Women: Lesbian Fiction 1969-1989* by Bonnie Zimmerman, and various other works that are relevant to the topic. These sources will add upon the work of close reading as a way to gain knowledge about the novels and the time period that would not be possible to find within the novels themselves.

The discussion of these three novels in particular creates an understanding that could not be found without the synthesis of the individual ideas found within the novels. With a relatively short span of time from the late 1950s to mid 1980s, the environment is thoroughly discussed by each of the authors. The claims from each of the novels creates a microcosm of thoughts on marriage. This allows a statement to be made about how these novels connect. Each of the protagonists offers a different perspective that ends in a similar place, with each woman having a negative viewpoint on marriage. This perspective could stem from their upbringings, their relationships, as well as the time periods into which they were born. These novels are set within a time where any kind of marriage equality may not have even been on their minds, which could also add to the negativity surrounding marriage. These three novels tell the story of their times, and I will speculate that the combination of these novels allows for an understanding of how the average lesbian within this time frame would view marriage.

### **Odd Girl Out**

*Odd Girl Out* is a novel from 1957 written by Ann Bannon. This story is about a college girl named Laura who slowly realizes that she is a lesbian. She meets and falls for Beth, and is

surprised when her feelings are reciprocated. The two become closer, and they spend almost all their time together. Beth slowly falls into love with Charlie instead of Laura. She doesn't want to hurt her, but Beth breaks Laura's heart. Laura finally accepts herself, and leaves college to live her life away from the expectations placed upon her.

Laura doesn't think very much about marriage per se. She is not interested in being forced into marriage; this perspective is very different from that of the other two books. It focuses on "growing out" of homosexuality, and Laura's intensity and regard for love rather than needing marriage. It focuses on accepting, and acting upon homosexuality, and that she has accepted that she will never be with a man. She plans to live her life loving women, and if that prevents marriage then so be it, because she will be happy.

Although Laura does not think about marriage as much as Molly and Jeanette from the other two novels do, this presents a view on how a woman growing up in the late 50s would view marriage. She would focus on the quality of her relationships rather than the marriage that would not be legal anytime soon. This section of my thesis will analyze how Laura feels about marriage, how these feelings are formed, and how these feelings are affected by the time that she exists in.

There is little academic literature written about this novel. However, two works were found that relate to this work: one an academic article, and one a documentary film. The first is an article entitled "Locating Queer Culture in the Big Ten" written by Siobhan Somerville. Her article focuses on the college that Bannon fictionalizes within her novel, and she uses student research about LGBT and other marginalized communities as a way to understand queerness. For the most part, Somerville's discusses the ethnographic process used for projects in Somerville's classes. She discusses the use of *Odd Girl Out* as a way of separating from the idea that being a

lesbian will come about in a big city, since Bannon's novel takes place in a midwestern university. She also distinguishes between different uses of the word "queer" in society: "Thus, while Queer as an umbrella term pivots around a 'straight/queer' binary based on sexual orientation, Queer as critique recasts questions of power in terms of social norms rather than identities" (11). Using this idea, situations such as the one of Laura's friend Emily, who was caught having sex with her boyfriend and removed from the sorority, can be seen as queer.

The idea of queer used not only as a means of sexual identity, but also as a term for when something disrupts the "normative notions of respectability" is heavily explored within the article (Somerville 12). Somerville points to a section of *Odd Girl Out* where Laura judges Emily for her actions because they go against what is expected, but she does not take into account the relationship that she is currently engaging in with Beth. She points out that "Laura herself is vulnerable to the same ostracisation for her own sexual acts and desires (12). This point places the binary of hetero/homosexual at the forefront. The queerness of both Laura's and Emily's relationships could get them into trouble, but Emily is only in trouble because she is the one who got caught.

Somerville then moves on to explain how the idea of queer culture is explored within the confines of the classes that she teaches. Somerville is a professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (U of I), which is the same college that Bannon herself attended, and the college that she used as a backdrop for *Odd Girl Out*. This set of circumstances makes Somerville's classes a place where queer culture can be explored and understood with Bannon's fiction to refer back to. U of I has large archival collections where students can learn from research done in the past, and they can create their own projects to further the understanding of queer culture at this institution. However, inside the collections, there is a severe lack of LGBT

representation, unless the student can read into the subtleties of the texts. These projects allow for students to “pay attention – and thus attribute new forms of value – to the queer aspects of their everyday worlds” (Somerville 15). This fosters understanding of different ideas of queer culture that culminate in an environment. These projects range between sexuality, race, gender, and many other topics that can be observed as queer.

While Somerville’s article does not deal directly with the idea of lesbian views on marriage, she does interact with Bannon and *Odd Girl Out*. This fact places her article in a position of importance, because this work of Bannon’s does not have much scholarship written on it. Somerville uses Bannon as a backdrop and guiding idea throughout how she teaches her classes. She recognizes the similarities between her placement and the setting of *Odd Girl Out*. Somerville also thinks about the idea of queerness, and how this can be explored through text and through first hand research. The way that Somerville uses characters like Laura and Emily to further her point about the different meanings of the word queer adds to the understanding of Bannon’s novel, and how this article relates back to it. Her use of queer also refers back to the idea of normativity in society, which is something that Laura deals with heavily in the novel. This article does not directly address the topic of this thesis, but it does add to ideas and understanding of how this novel exists in the real world.

As we move on from Somerville’s work, the film *Forbidden Love: The Unashamed Stories of Lesbian Lives* directed by Lynne Fernie and Aerlyn Weissman uses interviews to understand what Canadian lesbian communities are like. This film pertains to Bannon’s work in particular because one of the interviewees is Ann Bannon herself. This gives the movie more credibility to understand Bannon’s novel, and it creates a background of knowledge into the environment that she writes in.



*Forbidden Love: The Unashamed Stories of Lesbian Lives* is a Canadian documentary film released in 1992 directed by Lynne Fernie and Aerlyn Weissman. It ranges from dramatically acted out scenes from Ann Bannon's novels to stories told by women about their real-life experiences coming out and being gay in Canada. Each of the women being interviewed is able to speak freely about her experiences, and it gives plentiful examples of just how varied these experiences can be. While the film presents a lot of topics in a dramatic way, the views of the women, as well as judgments made about them, are always dealt with seriously. Before the opening scene there are words placed on the screen: "Unless otherwise stated, the people who appear in this film should not be presumed to be homosexual...or heterosexual." This statement allows for women to be in this film freely, without assumptions being made about them.

This then relates back to Ann Bannon and *Odd Girl Out* right from the very first scene. The film begins with the voice-over ending of *Odd Girl Out*, where Beth meets Laura at the train station but refuses to go with her. Laura then boards the train, and she leaves Beth behind to live freely somewhere else. From this point, several women discuss the prominence and importance of pulp novels of the 50s and 60s. However, as wonderful as it is for these women to have had lesbian novels to enjoy, it seems that a large portion of them could be described the same way, with a butch who meets a straight femme, they fall in love, and somehow reach a tragic ending.

One of the women interviewed is Ann Bannon herself, who comments on the nature of previous pulp fiction by stating, "One or both of the women had to die or be essentially shipped out of the country, or undergo some sort of calamity that would break her heart, or break her spirit, or end her life." She is able to then differentiate her own writing from that of other pulp novelists. Bannon's work allows for the women that she writes about to attain a happy ending, and *Odd Girl Out* is no exception. Although it is disheartening that Beth refuses to join Laura so

they can run away together, Laura still accepts herself, and she leaves in order to make herself happy.

Bannon also discusses her own writing, and how she has been influenced by others. She discusses her regret for stopping writing when she did, but that she did what she had to: “I was doing what I--what everyone else told me to do. My family, my life, my culture, my society, all said be a good wife and mother.” Bannon says that she regrets leaving writing when she did, but she felt that she had to in order to spend more time with her family, and because she knew her children would start asking questions sooner rather than later. Bannon’s work is important to the genre of pulp fiction, and her novels have an impact on lesbians to this day.

From here, the women in the film are able to explain what experience they have in lesbian culture. They each discuss the nightlife, and how the bars are ruled by a butch/femme binary. This binary allowed for submissive femmes and butches who were very territorial of the spaces they inhabit. While this system takes place, these women are also being targeted by police officers simply for their sexual orientation. Even higher among this is the idea of interracial relationships. Being either a lesbian or in an interracial relationship was frowned upon, but doing both was seen as doubly wrong. These women have been targeted by police in their own public spaces because the officers did not want lesbians around.

These women are told by society who they should be, and how they should act. They are expected to be wives and mothers; they should be homemakers and submissive to their men. There is a voiceover section where the announcer says, “Whether it’s careers, or cradles, or both, the woman of today in every field of activity welcomes these new plans. Although she will never abandon her role as wife and mother, she looks forward to a greater share in the world of today

and tomorrow.” When some women would live together, they would live a “heterosexual lifestyle” so that they could still live a normal life.

Some of these women have experiences with family members and with men that affect how they see the world. A woman named Nairobi is interviewed, and during her interview she talks about an intersection with her mother, “I would cry, and I would say, ‘But mother I love her.’ [she said] ‘No! You don’t love a woman, you love a man.’ And I said, ‘Sorry I love a woman.’ And that’s it.” She had the courage to come out in the 50/60s as a black lesbian woman. Ruth Christine is also interviewed in the film, and she discusses her trust of women versus her distrust of men, “I trust all women. If there were only women in this world I would never lock my doors, but I lock my doors to keep the men out, not to keep the women out. I lock my doors to keep the women in.” This film includes interviews of various women, and each of them provides a different insight into what lesbian lives were actually like.

Along with the article and the film, the best place to seek evidence to support the claim that the negative perspective on marriage comes as a by-product of the time period is the novel itself. *Odd Girl Out* delivers this idea through the way Laura talks, acts, and thinks. The characterizations of Laura and Beth present two diverging characters, and their differences enable Laura to further her mindset. However, this line of argument can truly only be evidenced by passages within the actual novel, along with the use of feminist/queer theorists. The theorists utilized here will be Radicalesbians, Teresa De Lauretis, and Catharine Stimpson. These scholars, along with Bannon’s novel will create a full picture to draw evidence from.

In *Odd Girl Out*, Laura goes through her college life pining for Beth. She goes through a transformation from the beginning to the end of the book; from a girl who is afraid of even thinking about the fact that she might be a lesbian, to a woman who accepts who she is. But

above acceptance, she acts upon her feelings, and she decides to value her own happiness over any societal norms or expectations such as marriage . Laura's transformation marks a switch from her feeling like she is somehow "wrong in this world" to feeling like she can escape her reality and go where she can live her life and love the women that she wants to love. Laura's ideas are not explicitly stated within the pages of *Odd Girl Out*, but through close reading of the text they are shown. Laura does not care about marriage; the thought is not even on her radar. She is focused on her life and happiness, and she only cares about having a relationship with someone who loves and supports her. In this respect, it is shown that Laura therefore may be against getting married since the institution is not something that fits in line with her ideals.

Laura's first idea of how to deal with the fact that she is a homosexual whose life will be very different than the way she imagined it is through repression. At the beginning of the story she starts to get feelings for Beth, but instead of facing those feelings and their implications, she decides to throw herself into the dating scene with men. None of these dates amounts to anything, and Laura is left wondering why she is always left unsatisfied by her dates with men. At this point, she is still convinced that she will fall for a man and lead the life she has always thought that she would. At the outset of her narrative, Laura is the type of character who knows what she wants, but she is too afraid and polite to make anything happen. She is kind to both Jim and Charlie, but she becomes very uncomfortable. Jim tries to make sexual advances throughout the course of their date, but Laura can only think about how uncomfortable she is and how she would rather be on a date with Beth instead. All of this, however, is not enough for Laura to come to terms with her feelings and how they affect her own vision for her future.

Laura's inability to acknowledge her homosexuality and convince herself that she will still be with a man is a way that she tries to place herself within the confines of society's

expectations of her to become a wife and mother. Bannon explains Laura's feelings by saying, "She knew that there were some men who loved men and some women who loved women, and she thought it was a shame that they couldn't be like other people. She thought she would simply feel sorry for them and avoid them. That would be easy, for the men were great sissies and the women wore pants. Her own high school crushes had been on girls, but they were all short and uncertain and secret feelings and she would have been profoundly shocked to hear them called homosexual" (Bannon 24). These words are used as a way to try to show she does not have a problem with lesbians, but that she is simply not one. Laura uses this excuse to promote her heterosexuality along with her eagerness for a relationship with a man. Even though she can see through her own motives, she is not at a place where she can accept her new path in life, and she devises a façade of a narrative as a placeholder at the beginning of *Odd Girl Out*. In the midst of her parents' divorce and the calamity it causes for her, she asserts a sense of her own heterosexuality in order to promote her own sense of normality and her conformity to the idea of marriage and motherhood in the future.

Along with this sense of forced or fabricated heterosexuality, Laura's situation relates to that of the Radicalesbians. In their manifesto "The Woman-Identified Woman" they write, "Sex roles dehumanize women by defining us as a supportive/serving caste *in relation to* the master caste of men, and emotionally cripple men by demanding that they be alienated from their own bodies and emotions in order to perform their economic/political/military functions effectively. Homosexuality is a by-product of a particular way of setting up roles (or approved patterns of behavior) on the basis of sex; as such it is an inauthentic (not consonant with (reality)) category" (172-173). This selection from the Radicalesbians relates to *Odd Girl Out* because of its sense of gender roles. At this point in her narrative, Laura sees herself as the typical woman. She is

attending college, making friends, and presenting herself as any woman should. After she gets an education, she will be able to settle down with a man that she loves, and she will have a family to create future generations of men and women who will continue to follow along the path of heterosexuality and reproduction. These gender and sex roles are stated to be damaging to both men and women, for they cause these feelings like repression and shame among people like Laura. She is unable to accept that she loves women; unable to accept that marriage is not something that will inherently be in her path along with children and a life of normalcy. This repression of feelings bleeds into Laura's ideas about what makes a "homosexual," and how this is something vastly different from how Laura presents herself as a person.

These feelings of repression change vastly from the beginning to the end of the novel. By the end of *Odd Girl Out* Laura accepts her feelings. Not only does she accept her feelings towards Beth, but she also understands that she loves women and that she will for the rest of her life. Laura's transformation leads her to understand that even though she may not have always wanted to be, she is a lesbian and her life will forever be different. Her values have shifted greatly as well, and Laura gains importance from her interactions and relationships with women rather than from grooming herself to be the heterosexual woman that society expects her to be. She no longer feels the need to bury her feelings because she has grown to accept rather than repress her feelings.

Laura is described as an ordinary girl whose appearance would not make her stick out from her peers. She is a polite girl who would do anything that she could to blend into a crowd. All of this is something that Laura takes into consideration when she is contemplating whether she could truly be a homosexual or not. She arrives at the decision that she is simply too different from her vision of what a lesbian "should" look like. All of this feeds into Laura's stereotyping

of what a lesbian is, and it shows how desperately she wishes she could just be heterosexual and be in a relationship with a man. All of this stereotyping is part of Laura's early characterization as a woman who is still trying to convince herself and others that she is a "normal" girl who will continue on just like everyone else.

Laura's idea of what a lesbian is is what one specific type of lesbian might look like, rather than an average woman like herself. Bannon gives readers the ability to understand Laura's view on lesbians when she says

She thought that homosexual women were great strong creatures in slacks with brush cuts and deep voices; unhappy things, standouts in a crowd. She looked back at herself, hugging her bosom as if to comfort herself, and she thought, 'I don't want to be a boy. I don't want to be like them. I'm a *girl*. I *am* a girl. That's what I want to be. But if I'm a girl why do I love a girl? What's wrong with me? There must be something wrong with me' (Bannon 64)

She uses her own views on homosexual women in order to paint a picture of the differences between her and "them." This distancing between the two groups points to how uncomfortable Laura still is with the idea that she could be one of "them" instead of what she is expected to be.

An important piece of queer theory brings up a similar argument about stereotyping lesbians. In regards to Djuna Barnes's *Neighborhood*, Teresa de Lauretis discusses in her article "Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation" that

in this light, [Carolyn] Allen suggests, may we read Barnes's personal denial of lesbianism and her aloofness from female admirers as a refusal to accept and to live by the homophobic categories promoted by sexology: man and woman, with their respective deviant forms, the effeminate man and the mannish woman--a refusal that in terms of my

argument could be seen as a rejection of the homo-sexual categories of gender, a refusal of sexual (in)difference. (de Lauretis 22)

What de Lauretis is claiming, is that it is possible to denounce the norms of what it looks like to be a homosexual. It does not always have to involve a flamboyant man and a masculine woman in order for the person to be a “real homosexual.”

These stereotypes and the rejection of them point back to Laura. At the early sections of the book, she holds herself very closely to the stereotypes of what a straight woman should look like. She is to be feminine, polite, and submissive, and to understand that men are essentially the opposite. She holds herself to the fact that she needs to subscribe to these ideals in order to be the woman she thinks she has to be. However, by the the end of the novel, while her style has not changed her demeanor has. Laura has changed into someone who is unashamed to behave how she deems to be appropriate, and she refuses to let what society expects her to look and act like to control her life. She pushes through these stereotypes to accept her homosexuality and the differences between how she is supposed to carry on her life as opposed to how she will live.

*Odd Girl Out*, along with many other lesbian novels, responds to the idea that homosexuality is some sort of transitional period. Being a lesbian is seen as something that is acceptable until a certain age. Being attracted to a member of the same sex is just a part of growing up, but should be put away eventually along with other childish things in favor of maturity and responsibility. This idea is thrust upon Laura from all directions. At this point in the novel, Laura has started to accept herself and her sexuality. However, as soon as this happens she is being told that it is time to get over the feelings and move on to what she is supposed to be, that it is time for her to stop fooling around with women because she is getting old enough to find a man worthy of starting a family with. This notion is one that hits Laura hard because she



has finally decided that she can be okay with being a lesbian, and now she has to decide whether she should return to her previous thinking that she needs to conform to expectations or if she should decide to follow her feelings and reject a heterosexual future.

Later in the novel when Beth decides that she would rather pursue a relationship with Charlie than Laura, she takes out her feelings on Laura rather than confronting her own. She ends up shouting at Laura saying that, “You can’t love a girl all your life, Laura. You can’t be in love with a girl all your life. Sooner or later you have to grow up” (Bannon 125-126). This statement hits Laura especially hard because she and Beth have been both romantically and sexually involved, and yet she still thinks of their love as something that will eventually be outgrown. Laura feels that their love is real, and she uses it as her own kind of stepping stone. Not as one that will lead to the inevitability of a nuclear family in the future, but as one that will allow her to gain a better understanding of herself and her expectations. Her relationship with Beth has made her a more assertive individual who cares about her own wants and interests rather than the ones she is told to have. The notion that she will leave these feelings behind creates a knowledge that Beth is not as serious about this relationship as she is.

Although Laura hears this idea directly, the thought of her having to grow up is one that is also discussed behind Laura’s back as well. Beth and Emily have a conversation after Emily discovers the relationship:

Emily: “But Laura isn’t playing. She is in love. I heard her say so.”

Beth: “Oh, she thinks she is. She’s just so young, she doesn’t know. These things never last.”

Emily: “How do you know?”

Beth: “Oh, Em, when you go to a girl’s boarding school, you just know. It happens all the time. You grow out of it. It doesn’t last. It’s just part of growing up.” (140)

This assumption points to the idea once again that Laura is essentially a child who does not know what she is doing. That she will grow up someday and see how silly her feelings were. This idea is a damaging one, and Laura rejects it. She realizes that she is not immature because she loves women. She may be immature in some aspects of her personality, but this aspect is not one of them. Laura is responsible for her own life, and she decides that her feelings are valid ones.

This also points to a piece of queer literary criticism that delves into lesbian writers and characters. Catharine Stimpson proposed the idea that, “It has been a deviant voice that has both submitted to deviancy and yearned to nullify that judgment” in her article “Zero Degree Deviancy: The Novel in English” (Stimpson 379). What she is saying with this claim is that while lesbians are able to enjoy certain situations because of the fact that they are a marginalized group, they try to fight against the idea that they are a deviant population. This follows along the lines with Beth’s idea that her relationship with Laura is alright because she will grow out of it, unlike a real lesbian. But on the other side, is Laura trying to fight back against that idea because it is dehumanizing to actual homosexual women to have their identity used as a fashion statement by experimenting women? Laura’s rejection of the idea of growing out of homosexuality fades into Laura’s complete acceptance of her life and how she will never be what she is “supposed” to be.

In the latter section of *Odd Girl Out* Laura is able to come into complete acceptance of her homosexuality to the point where she and Beth decide to run away someplace where they can be together without the imposing judgment of society. Laura understands that her life will not be an easy one where she can just pick an eligible bachelor to create the perfect little family with.

She now knows that she is a lesbian who will live a life judged and ostracized. She accepts that she will not have everything that she expected to, and she cares only about living as her true self instead of worrying about those expectations. Laura's character makes a large transformation from the beginning to the end of the novel in regards to how she feels about herself and the expectations that she now rejects.

Laura enters the last few pages of the novel as a completely different person. She is sure of herself and her wants, and she refuses to let Beth change her mind. When the two meet at the train station where they are supposed to run away together, Beth decides that she is going to stay. At this point Laura realizes fully that her life will never be "normal" like Beth's will. Laura tells her, "Beth, I love you. I'm not like other people—like most people. I can never love more or better than I love you—only more wisely maybe, some day, if I'm lucky. It can never be any other way for me. What I mean is—there can never be a man for me Beth. I'll never love a man like I love you" (189). Laura is a smart character who takes a while, but she comes through the narrative with a clear view of who she is and how she will steer her life. She understands who she is, and does not resent Beth because she is not the same. Laura understands that they are two different people, and she will not be held back into a life she does not want to live by Beth just because she loves her.

Laura is about to board the train that she was supposed to go on with Beth, and she explains she is okay leaving without her. Laura takes responsibility for her actions throughout the novel, and she decides to live the life that will make her happy regardless of whether Beth will join her or not. When she is finally leaving the two have this exchange:

Beth: "You're running away."

Laura: “No, I’m facing it. I know what I am, and I can be honest with myself now. I’ll live my life as honestly as I can, without ruining it. I can’t do that here and I can’t do it with you. That’s over now.” (190-191)

Laura understands that her place is no longer at school with Beth. All that she can do there is become a person who she is not meant to be. Instead, she decides to board the train alone to journey to somewhere that she can live her life truly. She is not thinking about what she should do anymore; she now only thinks about what will make her life the happiest. This shows just how much Laura has grown from the timid girl at the beginning of the novel.

Laura leaves Beth with words that show how much she has grown and changed throughout this small part of her narrative. She says, “Beth, you’re meant for a man. Like Charlie. I’m not. I’m not afraid to go, I’m not sorry. It hurts, and I love you—” (192). After this Beth tells Laura that she loves her, they share a parting kiss, and Laura rides away while Beth remains in Champlain. The Laura that is seen at the end of the novel is shown to be very strong and mature as opposed to the polite and shy girl on page one. Laura’s story is one that shows a transformation from a girl trying to be what she is expected to be, to a woman who is able to reject the judgments and ideas placed upon her in favor of her own.

*Odd Girl Out* is unique from the other books selected within this thesis. Marriage is not something that is explicitly discussed except for by Emily when she thinks that she is pregnant. Laura never says out loud that she either wants or does not want to get married. However, the idea of marriage is interwoven throughout every page. Laura thinks about marriage and a family whenever she doubts that her feelings are true. She thinks about marriage whenever she is told to go on a date with a man instead of just sitting in her room. For a novel that does not discuss marriage within the pages, it presents its ideas about the institution very clearly.

## **Rubyfruit Jungle**

*Rubyfruit Jungle* is a novel written by Rita Mae Brown, and it focuses on the character of Molly Bolt. This novel is about Molly growing up being told that her life will be valued based upon marriage and children, in that order. Molly disregards this sentiment every step of the way. She has her first homosexual experience in sixth grade, and she never feels ashamed or turns back as time goes on. Molly continues to love women, and goes to college to pursue a career in filmmaking. She escapes to the city to live her life, and she consistently refuses to follow norms. This story is narrated by Molly, which allows for deeper insight into her thoughts and feelings. Molly's life is influenced by her adoptive mother who only wants her to be "normal," having sexual experiences with women, going to college, and reflecting back on her young life and challenges that she faces. This contemporary setting begins in rural Pennsylvania, and then follows Molly as she moves to Florida and then works to put herself through college in New York City. The novel ends with Molly graduating from NYU with honors, having trouble finding a job within the film industry based solely on the fact that she is a woman, and continuing to promise to try to reach her dreams no matter what adversity she faces.

Molly deliberately states several times throughout the novel that she never wants to get married, and that the sex of the person doesn't matter. She is an independent, irreverent girl who lives life how she wants to. She is also expected to "grow out" of her feelings as Leota (like Laura in *Odd Girl Out*) does, but she never makes any attempt to hide how she feels. She is a lesbian, and she knows it. She disdains marriage and the shackles that it would place her in. Molly has a conflicting concept of marriage throughout and after she grows out of childhood. *Rubyfruit Jungle* handles the subject very bluntly. Molly states several times that she has no interest in marriage, which is quite different from the subtleties that are seen from Laura.

However, there is a difference between Molly and Laura. While Laura did not have a concept of same-sex marriage existing, Molly acknowledges that this idea could exist, but she rejects it altogether. This rejection places Molly within her timeline as well. She is growing up at a time when being able to marry a woman is not quite as preposterous as it was before, but now she would rather be her own independent woman than be held back by trying to gain a permanent kind of love.

This novel does not have a vast amount of scholarly articles written on it. However, there are some works of scholarship that do not pertain to the scope of this thesis. The article “Dr. Molly Feelgood; or, How I Can’t Learn to Stop Worrying and Love *Rubyfruit Jungle*” written by W. C. Harris discusses the role of identity as it pertains to Molly’s life. Harris makes the claim that Molly rejects all labels, including that of being a lesbian. This claim is made because Molly has heterosexual relationships throughout the novel, and refers to herself as a lesbian a handful of times. This, however, begs the question that if a heterosexual relationship is unsatisfactory does that make her a heterosexual? This article deals mostly with her characterization, and does not address marriage. The other piece of scholarship is the article “Reading Queer Counter-narratives in the High-School Literature Classroom: Possibilities and Challenges” written by Kirsten Helmer. This article focuses on a high school English classroom that is teaching queer novels, including *Rubyfruit Jungle*. It makes the claim that classrooms are positively affected by queer novels because they allow for open discussion, and allow for the heteronormative novels usually taught to be placed in the background for a while. However, this does not directly relate to the concept of marriage within the novel either.

The relevant piece of critical scholarship about *Rubyfruit Jungle* is an article written by James Mandrell in 1987 titled “Questions of Genre and Gender: Contemporary America,

Versions of the Feminine Picaresque.” This article discusses the form of the novel, as well as the statements made within it. Mandrell writes about how Molly disregards the ideals set up for her, which push her into an even more marginalized place than the one that she inhabited before. He writes, “it is hard to conceive of anyone more marginal, more removed from access to power and authority, than a Southern lesbian from a poor, working-class family. With neither money nor the potential for upward mobility that would be offered by a husband, Molly Bolt is essentially condemned to her marginality” (Mandrell 152). This characterization shows the independence and drive that Molly possesses throughout the novel, but Mandrell wonders whether these are enough. Later he adds, “by offering this ‘good and true account,’ Molly/Brown changes nothing, shows no possibility for change, but, rather, *acquiesces* to and *confirms* the marginality experienced by those who are not straight, white middle-class males” (Mandrell 163). This marginality is partially caused by her background and her sexuality; however, it is also caused by her refusal to get married to a man who can give her more power. Mandrell focuses heavily on this, and it adds a layer of thinking onto the idea of what it truly means to get married for Molly.

Throughout her life, Molly is expected to conform to the ideas of society in order to become a successful woman. However, she rejects these norms every step of the way, from childhood onto and throughout her adulthood. Molly’s adoptive mother Carrie is one of the first people to put heteronormative expectations on her. She would try to teach Molly how to do housework or simple activities that would be necessary once she becomes a housewife. Molly has no interest in these activities, and she would rather play down by the river with her cousin Leroy. One instance has Carrie talking to her husband Carl, saying, “She don’t want to learn none of the things she has to know to get a husband. Smart as she is, a woman can’t get on in this world without a husband” (Brown 39). Carrie is very critical of Molly throughout the novel,

especially on the grounds of how different she is from other girls. Molly has no interest in learning housework or manners that will draw a man later down the road. She has high goals for herself, as does Carl who insists that Molly will go to college. Her two parents place different expectations of Molly; Carl expects her to go to college and become an independent woman, while Carrie expects Molly to stop being rebellious and lead a life that conforms to the expectations of those around her. Throughout her life she will grow to meet the expectations Carl had laid out, but she will continue to disregard the ideas that Carrie presents to her.

Molly continues into high school, still defying the expectations of others. She has a relationship with Carolyn, who refuses to believe that their love makes them gay. Carolyn wants to have the perks of a lesbian relationship without giving up her heterosexual privileges and ideals for her “normal” life. After the two begin having sex Carolyn asks Molly not to tell anyone. Molly says she does not want to lie, but that she doubts anyone will ask anyway. Carolyn then says:

“I hate to lie too, but people will say we’re lesbians.”

“Aren’t we?”

“No, we just love each other. Lesbians look like men and are ugly.” (Brown 103-4)

Carolyn’s statement brings in the stereotyping of lesbians that is prevalent throughout *Odd Girl Out*. As if somehow because Carolyn doesn’t look like a man she can’t be a lesbian. This notion is one that Molly rejects because why would she lie about this. Her sexuality is something that she is never ashamed of throughout the entire novel. The difference between the reactions of Molly and Carolyn show where each of them are in terms of their sexuality. While Molly has come to terms with her attraction to women, Carolyn still acts as if it does not mean anything



unless she looks the part. This stereotyping is a harmful idea that carries through the novel and through gay culture itself as well.

Along with the evidence found within the text itself, ideas about the expectations that come along with a lesbian sexuality can be found in critical theory as well. Catharine Stimpson, in her article “Zero Degree Deviancy: The Lesbian Novel in English,” discusses expectations placed upon women (including lesbian women) in the world. She writes of a growing sense of independence among women in terms of jobs and ideas on marriage. She writes:

Among the causes of the reappearance of a submerged consciousness and its narrative of enabling escape have been the women’s movement, more flexible attitudes towards marriage (so often contrasted favorably to the putative anarchy of homosexual relations), the “modernization of sex,” which encourages a rational, tolerant approach to the complexities of eros, and the growing entrance of more women into the public labor force, which gives a financial autonomy inseparable from genuine sexual independence. (Stimpson 374)

Stimpson’s statement adds onto the ideals that Molly faces, and that any woman would also face. Molly is expected to learn what she needs to do in order to entice a man to marry her; however, she would rather do anything else.

Molly’s childhood thoughts on marriage are explicitly stated from quite early in the novel. Molly would spend time contemplating the idea of marriage, which allowed her to think about why she thinks a person would want to get married. Molly is seen having a conversation with Leroy where he asks her “Why do people get married anyway?” Her response to this is, “So’s they can fuck” (Brown 37). This conversation shows Molly’s nature of thinking that marriage is a waste of time. She sees that during this time period, getting married serves a

purpose of having sex and then having babies. She asserts that the only reason she can find for marriage is for sex, which she does not believe are mutually exclusive activities. Perhaps this is because she is living proof (as a bastard) that both sex and procreation can happen without marriage. This statement from Molly highlights her disregard for marriage from an early point within the novel. Above all, it creates a trend of thinking that will follow Molly throughout the novel, until her adult life, and into the foreseeable future of the character that exists after the end of the novel.

Molly is a character who not only rejects marriage as a point of procreation, but also rejects marriage to a man, and the idea of marriage in general. From childhood, Molly would spend much time with her cousin Leroy, which would later turn sexual. However, in a conversation that Molly has with Leroy she says, “Leroy, we don’t need to get married. We’re together all the time. It’s silly to get married. Besides, I’m never gettin’ married” (Brown 36). This statement from Molly shows that even from such a young age, she has no intentions of getting married. She thinks that the notion is laughable, although she *is* talking to her cousin who proposes marriage. This familial proposition ends up blurring the lines between romance and incest because while Molly is technically adopted, she has been raised as Leroy’s cousin from infancy. This taboo relationship places Molly further into the periphery of societal expectations. The act of rejecting Leroy’s proposal, along with her rejecting the ideals of society for her to get married at any point in her life, creates a path towards her adult ideas as well.

Along with her relationship with Leroy, Molly enters into a relationship with Leota Bisland when she is in sixth grade. She ends up having her first sexual experiences with Leota, and she starts to feel positively about some of the societal expectations, even if her relationship itself goes against those expectations. At this point, Molly comes up with an idea: “I began to

wonder if girls could marry girls, because I was sure I wanted to marry Leota and look in her green eyes forever” (Brown 44). Molly’s thoughts display her desire to be with Leota, and it’s the first real mention of getting married that seems to please Molly. This moment marks Molly’s toying with the idea of marriage, only if Leota will do the housework, of course. This first positive idea about getting married adds another layer to Molly’s personal ideals and thoughts about the institution of marriage.

All of these childhood thoughts from Molly lay the groundwork for the rest of the novel. Readers are given a picture of a girl who rejects the expectations of society at every turn. Molly’s feelings as a child lay the groundwork for her adolescent and adult life decisions. All of these decisions add up to create the character of Molly who becomes a woman who decides to take her choices into her own hands, and she lives her life the way that she wants to where she wants to live it. These connecting pieces are essential for understanding both Molly and her views throughout her life.

A notion that is carried on throughout both *Odd Girl Out* and *Rubyfruit Jungle* is the idea that a person can “grow out” of their homosexuality. This idea compares being a homosexual to being a child, and this thought is something that Molly has to deal with in her life. This comes to her from people like Carrie, Leota, Carolyn, and various other people that move in and out of her life. From all of these people comes an idea that only children think that homosexual relationships can exist, and that adults realize that living a heterosexual life is the only way to live a fulfilling life. Molly argues that this is not true, and lives her life happily how she wants to in defiance of all of the expectations placed on her.

During this period of her life where she is expected to grow up, she also has to deal with these attacks from within her relationship as well. Molly and Leota have a noteworthy conversation:

“Why don’t you marry me? I’m not handsome, but I’m pretty.”

“Girls can’t get married.”

“Says who?”

“It’s a rule.”

“It’s a dumb rule.” (Brown 49)

This conversation shows that Molly doesn’t care what society or her family expects, and that she is going to do what she wants no matter what. If she wants to marry Leota, she will. If she wants to stay single, she will, and nothing will stop her. Molly’s will comes through in these statements as perseverant and confident. She decides that she will not just “grow up” into someone that society expects her to be, and that she will become her own person with her own life in whatever way she sees fit.

Leota is the first person that Molly ever has sex with, and she becomes an important part of the narrative of Molly Bolt. After her sixth grade year, Molly’s family moves away, and she does not see Leota again for quite some time. When Molly is able to reconnect with her, Leota has now grown into the kind of woman that Molly resents. She has gone from her “childish” self, and she lives a heterosexual life. Leota is now an adult woman who is married to a man, and she has children. She has shunned her old ways as if they were nothing but normal childhood games, and then goes on to tell Molly that she should embrace this life and marry a man too. To this Molly responds,

“Leota, I will never marry.”

“You’re crazy. A woman’s got to marry. What’s going to happen to you when you’re fifty? You got to grow old with somebody. You’re going to be sorry.”

“I’m going to be arrested for throwing an orgy at ninety-nine and I’m not growing old with anybody. What a gruesome thought.” (Brown 219)

This conversation reinforces the idea that Leota “grew out” of her homosexuality. She has fallen into the societal norms of the need to marry and to procreate in order to have a fulfilled life in the eyes of everyone else. Molly goes against this, because she does not believe that others can be in charge of what makes her life a successful one. She even goes as far as calling a “normal,” heterosexual life a gruesome one. The amount of distaste Molly has for the idea of marriage is viewable from afar.

However, she does not only view the thought of being with a man forever to be the gruesome part. She deliberately states that she will not be growing old with “anybody.” If she wanted to dig into Leota for her marriage in particular, she could have said that she would not grow old with any man. But her use of “anybody” shows her feelings towards any kind of long-term commitment, whether it is with a woman or a man. This conversation adds even more layers into the argument for Molly’s thoughts on marriage. From her thoughts presented directly within the text, Molly has shown that she places no value in marriage or getting married. She feels that marriage is used as a tool for people to feel better about themselves for having sex and, along with it, children. She knows that being legally bound to a person for the rest of your life is not the only way to live a life that is meaningful to the person living it. She decides to become living proof that she can live a happy and fulfilled life that does not exist solely to function within the role of what she is expected to do by society along with her peers. Molly is a dynamic character who thoroughly thinks for herself.

This thinking is extended not only by a close reading of *Rubyfruit Jungle*, but it can also be seen within one of the critical texts as well. Bonnie Zimmerman, in her study *The Safe Sea of Women: Lesbian Fiction 1969-1989*, discusses Brown's novel in a small portion of her writing. She writes, "Molly decides early in her life that she does not want to be like other women, trapped by the female destiny of marriage and motherhood, nor does she want to grow old or die like her cousin Leroy's mother" (Zimmerman 47). This statement from Zimmerman adds further evidence to the argument of Molly's feelings on marriage. She writes that Molly does not want to be "trapped," and usage of words that conjure up ideas of incarceration or being forcibly held against her will are common within Brown's writing. This idea can be continued into Molly's thoughts on marriage that are carried into adulthood.

As Molly enters into adulthood and the world, she starts to notice even more how unbalanced the world is towards the people who live in it. She sees how people perceive her based on the facts that she is a woman, that she is lower class, and that she is a lesbian. These statements come from the men in her film classes at New York University demeaning and underestimating her because she is a woman in a "masculine" field of work. They come from the film executives who refuse to hire her for anything other than low-level reception jobs. They come from women like Mighty Mo who try to tell Molly what kind of lesbian she has to be simply because that makes it easy for others to judge her off of whether she is a "butch" or a "femme." All of these simple judgments form Molly to have an outlook where she sees the injustices that she is given as a poor, gay woman. Collectively, this leads Molly into a space where she ends up rejecting marriage and the expectations that society presents her with to the point where she is resentful of them all. Above all, her adult thoughts given to readers in the

novel allow for a prediction of the late life of Molly Bolt. She is such a powerful figure, that it is hard to imagine a scenario in which Molly is forced into a life that she does not intend to live.

As Molly grows older, she has relationships with both men and women. Her relationships with men are boring and short-lived while her relationships with women are wild and full of passion before they eventually fizzle out. Molly reaches the point where she says, “I didn’t even want a husband or any man for that matter. I wanted to go my own way. That’s all I think I ever wanted, to go my own way and maybe find some love here and there. Love, but not the now and forever kind with chains around your vagina and a short circuit in your brain. I’d rather be alone” (Brown 88). This statement from Molly shows that she views marriage as something that will stop her from living life freely. Molly wants to be able to love who she wants when she wants, and she doesn’t want to be controlled by outside forces. She would rather live her life alone than be forced to be with one person for the rest of her life. The idea of being chained or forced to be with another person seems like torture to her, and seeing other people be within that force repels her even more.

In the above quote, she mentions that she does not want a husband, or even any man in her romantic life. This is farther off from the Molly who would sleep with men and go on dates with them because she could. This signifies a change of her tolerance of men romantically, to wanting to remove these men from her life. Molly states that she wants love, but not the type of love that society expects her to have. Instead of a Love where she will be submissive and raise children, she wants a love that is casual and fun. The “now and forever” kind of love does not appeal to Molly; she wants to live her own life. She wants this even above any love at all. Molly values her freedom and independence more than any love she could have, and she wants to retain that feeling. She has goals in her life, and she will not let anyone get in the way of them. These

statements create a larger lens to see Molly's actions through. Although she does not say that she would not want to marry a woman, aside from childhood she may not retain thoughts that marrying a woman would be an option in her life. Furthermore, she rejects marriage itself, and she shows how she would much rather live how she wants with any kind of lover that she wants to have.

Towards the end of the novel, Molly returns to her hometown and goes to see Leota for the first time since sixth grade. When the two reconnect, Molly expects to see a woman who resembles her first love, beautiful and vibrant. Instead, what she gets is a tired woman who looks far too old for her age. Leota tells Molly that she is married now, and her children can be seen in her house. Molly is horrified at the change that has happened to Leota, and how she is forcing herself to be a person that is wanted rather than the person that she is. Leota claims to be happy, that her life is just something that was always meant to happen this way. Molly does not buy into Leota's way of thinking that a heterosexual life is unavoidable, and she talks of their childhood love. Leota mentions that it was just childish, and that it is not like they would have stayed in love anyway because that is not how a normal life turns out. Molly rejects this statement from her as well.

At this point, Molly tells Leota that she still loves women. Leota tries to tell her that she needs to get married in order to have a fulfilled life, to which Molly replies, "Let's stop this shit. I love women. I'll never marry a man and I'll never marry a woman either. That's not my way. I'm a devil-may-care lesbian" (Brown 220) At this point, Molly officially removes any shadow of a doubt that she will remain single. She doesn't care who it is; she refuses to be tied down to any person. She knows that marriage is not something that she foresees in her life, and she doesn't shy away from showing it. She refers to herself as a lesbian in front of Leota, which



presents itself as a way to dig back to their former relationship that Leota has written off long ago. Molly decides that she does not want to marry anyone, man or woman. She will continue to love women, but having a legally bound relationship is not something she is even slightly interested in.

She says that is not “her way” to be married to anyone. From her actions within the novel, this proves to be correct. Molly’s independent nature leads her to a life of whirlwind romances rather than one steady love who will change her world. She does not need the grand gestures and grand romance that comes with a long-term relationship. She wants to have a connection with someone that is meaningful and worthwhile. Molly’s approach to love and romance is far off from the kind that society and people like Carrie would expect from her, but that means nothing to her. Her life and how she loves are completely up to her, and she makes sure that everyone around her knows that.

Along with a close reading of Brown’s work, critical scholarship can also be used to understand Molly’s adult thoughts. This scholarship shows that women in the world may feel the same way that Molly does about marriage and the state of the world as a whole. Molly notices all of the things around her, and she wears all of her hardships like a badge of honor in order to keep trudging through until she gets the life that she truly desires. However, along the way some of her setbacks come from the people that should be wanting to help her because they understand, women. Many women want to shy away from lesbians as if they can somehow “catch it” or simply because they feel it is wrong. These women view lesbians as the “wrong” way to be a woman, and that somehow lesbians bring attention away from the needs of all women. This is primarily what the Radicalesbians are referring to, but their statement also allows for the ideas

that Molly presents as well. It is important to note that Rita Mae Brown is a member of the Radicalesbians, and that she should be taken into account as a part author of this manifesto.

They write:

Affixing the label lesbian not only to a woman who aspires to be a person, but also to any situation of real love, real solidarity, real primacy among women is a primary form of divisiveness among women: it is the condition which keeps women within the confines of the feminine role, and it is the debunking/scare term that keeps women from forming any primary attachments, groups, or associations among ourselves.” (Radicalesbians 174)

This passage from “The Woman-Identified Woman” displays some of the same notions that Molly notices within *Rubyfruit Jungle*. The Radicalesbians claim that labels such as that of “lesbian” are used as a tactic to hold women down. The work is used as a way to keep women in the roles they are traditionally told to be in, because if they stray from the norm they will be ostracized as a lesbian. The fact that this word is used to hold women within their designated place creates a disconnect between heterosexual women and the lesbians they so desperately want to be distanced from, and it suggests, that Molly’s feelings hold a valid place in this world.

The close reading along with the scholarship creates a wealth of evidence for Molly’s disdain for marriage. From childhood, everyone around her tries to force her to become the woman that she is supposed to be. All of these forces lead Molly to decide to live her life however she wants to, even if that life is not one that garners respect from others. This life turns out to be one of personal struggle along with triumphs and Molly going farther than people thought she would. She graduated from NYU, and is a strong woman who does not need to depend on others to get what she wants. Through the analysis of the text, Molly is shown to be a woman who appreciates her own freedom more than conforming to the ideals of others.

## **Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit**

*Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* written by Jeanette Winterson is a semi-autobiographical novel about Jeanette growing up in a very religious household where she is expected to marry a man, only have sex if necessary for reproduction, and raise children within the church. Jeanette comes into her homosexual feelings at an early age, but she is forced to hide and repent in order to be kept at home with her family instead of being seen as “sick.” She eventually becomes unashamed of her feelings, and ends up leaving the church and everything she has ever known just to be able to live her life how she wants to. Jeanette is the narrator of this novel, and her inner monologue allows for readers to understand how Jeanette feels at different stages in her life. Along with this, there is also a fantasy component within the chapters. These fantasy sections relate to the narrative that Jeanette is telling, and this lets the narrative that Jeanette is telling continue to flow.

Jeanette is told as a child that she will never get married. She sees all of the women in her community unhappy in their marriages, becomes disinterested in the idea, and does not want to marry just to appease her community. She is forced to choose between the church and her feelings. At first, she chooses the church, and she lives unhappily, trying to repress her own feelings. Eventually, she leaves the church and everyone in her life because she refuses to hide her feelings anymore. Jeanette ends up seeing her former lover Melanie getting married to a man, and acting like she has grown out of her homosexual feelings. Jeanette resents Melanie for this, and this acts as another form of negativity added to the idea of marriage on Jeanette’s mind. Jeanette transforms as an individual throughout the novel, and all of the negativity around her leads to the disdain for marriage since it only ends with unhappiness for the rest of your life. Jeanette does not view marriage in the same way Molly does. She sees same-sex marriage as

something that is not attainable. While she understands that marrying a woman could happen, her negative associations with marriage outweigh any desire she would have to marry anyone. She sees marriage as a path to unhappiness no matter who it is with.

There is not a particularly large amount of critical scholarship on this novel which pertains to the subject of this thesis, however, there are two articles which incorporate different elements. The first article is written by Lies Xhonneux and titled “The Classic Coming Out Novel: Unacknowledged was Challenges to the Heterosexual Mainstream.” This article discusses how coming out novels are often criticized for their rigid nature because they often end up failing to critique the system of internalized homophobia and forced heterosexuality that is seen as what should be a large focus of the genre. Xhonneux fights back against these claims through analysis of three different coming out novels. For her article she chooses *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, *Zami: A new Spelling of My Name*, and *A Boy’s Own Story*. Each of these novels is studied for its own merit, but Xhonneux’s claims about Winterson’s novel are the relevant ones to state at the moment.

Her analysis of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* begins by setting this novel apart from its peers by discussing its non-linear structure. This is shown through several narratives that Jeanette tells, where she begins one story, a key word calls her to tell another story, and then she returns to finish the original story she was trying to tell. This jumpy nature shakes off the rigidity of traditional coming out novels. Xhonneux presents evidence for this claim with several instances like “when Jeanette is thinking about marriage and wonders why she cannot ‘fall in love like everybody else,’ she adds almost casually that ‘some years later, quite by mistake, I did’ (75). The narrative thereby moves effortlessly to the story of Jeanette meeting her first lover Melanie”

(103-104). This non-linear design allows more mobility for Jeanette as a character to move as a real person would within the world, and she takes advantage of that movement in the novel.

Xhonneux makes another major point involving *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* when she discusses the main viewpoint of traditional coming out novels. She makes the claim that the genre is often criticized because the main characters cannot seem to get past their identity. The main aspect of their personalities revolves around the fact that they are LGBT individuals, and not much happens from there. Then the characters end up coming across as one-dimensional and only talking about themselves in terms of the identity that they claim. This claim is reversed when Xhonneux discusses both *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* and *Zami*. She writes, “As we move from *A Boy’s Own Story* to *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* and *Zami*, we notice that lesbianism is clearly not the protagonists’ sole encompassing viewpoint, but rather a *constituent* of their identities. This constituent therefore becomes a possible site for protest and change, instead of something these narratives are merely working to establish and fix” (108-109). Xhonneux uses her arguments to make a claim that Winterson uses her writing to create a different type of coming out novel, one that shows a realistic lifestyle rather than a literarily manufactured one.

The other relevant piece of critical scholarship on *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* is “Models for Female Loyalty: The Biblical Ruth in Jeanette Winterson’s *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*” written by Laura Bollinger. This article deals heavily with the relation between Ruth, the biblical book, and how the story of Ruth plays into Winterson’s narrative. Each of the chapters of the novel are titled by a biblical book, ranging from Genesis to Ruth. Bollinger discusses how the main story within the book of Ruth is the bond that Ruth forms with her mother-in-law Naomi. Ruth is so devoted that she says, “Wither thou goest, I will go; and where

thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: The *Lord* do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me” (Ruth 1:16-17). This passage contains the ultimate lines of devotion to Naomi, and provides insight into how this book functions within *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*.

Bollinger uses the aforementioned passage to create a link between Jeanette and her mother. Bollinger uses the ideas of psychologists like Sigmund Freud and Carol Gillian to assert the claim that mothers and daughters have a longer lasting relationship, and that the daughter wants to stay at home as long as she can in order to retain the close relationship. She backs this up by writing, “The central relationship in the text is between Jeanette and her mother, whose commitment to evangelism leaves her uninvolved with Jeanette’s development and intolerant of her daughter’s sexuality. Despite their differences, however, Jeanette does not reject her mother, but continues the relationship even after her mother has forced her to leave their home” (Bollinger 364). This statement points to Jeanette wanting to preserve the relationship between herself and her mother as a way to allow herself to continue to grow as a person, rather than ending up feeling like she is lacking because of the relationship she has lost.

Bollinger then points out a major difference between the biblical Ruth and its effect on the narrative. She writes, “Although the Ruth story offers a powerful model of female bonding, it still visualizes (heterosexual) marriage and motherhood as a requisite for female fulfillment” (Bollinger 372). This is in stark contrast of how Jeanette operates in the novel, and she does not live unfulfilled because she does not have a man. In fact, she is much happier that way because then she does not have to live a life filled with unhappiness because the men in her community never seem to be able to give the women the “fulfilled” life they they claim to.

Besides this counterpart, Bollinger asserts that the relationship between Jeanette and her mother heavily correlates to the relationship between Ruth and Naomi. These relationships add layers onto Winterson's narrative, and they show how varied and complex the story of Jeanette truly is. It paves the way to show how the relationships within *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* are more important than they may seem at first glance. Bollinger's article presents Jeanette and her mother as a more interconnected pair than a first glance might suggest. Her claim adds an intrinsic layer onto the relationships within the novel, as well as themes within the entirety of the novel itself.

“Once, when I was collecting the black peas, about to go home, the old woman got hold of my hand. I thought she was going to bite me. She looked at my palm and laughed a bit. ‘You’ll never marry,’ she said, ‘not you, and you’ll never be still.’ She didn’t take any money for the peas, and she told me to run home fast. I ran and ran, trying to understand what she meant. I hadn’t thought about getting married anyway” (Winterson 7).

This quote is from Jeanette's childhood, where she is told just by her looks that she won't be getting married. It gives a sense of foreshadowing to the rest of the book since she will get in relationships with various women. She even says that she hasn't given thought to getting married, even though in her evangelical household getting married and having children are presented as the most important things in life. This lack of thought could be because Jeanette never envisioned a married life for herself after seeing all of the women around her, or it is very likely that she has not thought about marriage since she is still a child who is far off from getting married.

This lack of thought does seem strange, however, because as Jeanette grows it is practically all her mother wants. Her mother wants her to become as influential as she is within

their church, to get married to a man who will be in their community, and above all to stay chaste. All of these combine into a childhood of having expectations thrust upon her before she could even understand what they would mean. These expectations along with the gypsy telling her that she will never marry creates a disconnect between the life she is expected to live and the life that she will inherently live. This disconnect shows how the life her mother wants her to live and the life that the gypsy predicts for her are mutually exclusive. These two lives cannot intersect, and one person will have to give in: Jeanette or her mother. It creates an interesting scenario that Jeanette continues to have to pull herself through just to achieve the life that will make her the happiest.

Jeanette continues to go through her daily life, and she starts to think about the men in her community. She finds them repulsive, and she begins to feel bad for their wives. She does not understand why women would want to spend the rest of their lives with ugly and horrible men simply because they are supposed to. Jeanette then has her first moment of rejection for marriage. She thinks, "Then I remembered the gypsy. 'You'll never marry.' That might not be such a bad thing after all" (Winterson 13). This inner monologue shows Jeanette's beginning thoughts of resistance to marriage, even as a child. She begins to think fondly on the fact that she may not get married someday. This thinking alludes to her even more defined later thoughts where she does not want to get married because of her experience with women that are married around her.

Along with the close reading of passages that analyze the first real exposure that Jeanette has to thinking of her own marriage, there is a piece of writing that makes an additional claim. This claim discusses how lesbians are treated early in their lives, and how these women must



learn how to adapt themselves to stay safe and unobserved in a society that wants to keep them within its rigid confines. These lesbians feel the weight of society far earlier than their peers:

The turmoil she experiences tends to induce guilt proportional to the degree to which she feels she is not meeting societal expectations, and/or eventually drives her to question and analyze what the rest of her society, more or less accepts. She is forced to evolve her own life pattern, often living much of her life alone, learning usually much earlier than her “straight” (heterosexual) sisters about the essential aloneness of life.”

(Radicalesbians 172)

This quote from the Radicalesbians explains the difficulties faced by lesbians very early in life. These women have to learn to adapt and hide because they are aware that their actions and feelings are not accepted by those around them. The statement from “The Woman-Identified Woman” manifesto points to hardships that Jeanette would go through, especially within her evangelical community. Jeanette will have to learn to hide her relationships, but this will eventually be found out anyway. Then Jeanette’ hardships will really begin to take hold of her.

Within *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* there are recurring fantasy stories that are intercut with the narrative that Jeanette is telling. These fantasy stories takes place in a distant world with a prince trying to find his perfect wife, or a woman who gets tricked into being stuck with a wizard. These fantasy scenarios always relate back to Jeanette, and they give further insight into what she is really thinking about. This insight allows a more in-depth analysis of how Jeanette functions as a woman and a member of her community. She becomes more dynamic when she is not restrained by the expectations and guidelines that the world sets out for her. In a world without outside expectations, Jeanette can become the person that she truly wants and is meant to be.

The prince of the kingdom is lonely without having a wife. He longs for companionship, and wonders how he will be able to carry on without anyone by his side. He states, “‘If only I could find a wife,’ he sighed. ‘How can I run this whole kingdom without a wife?’” (Winterson 61). This scenario presents a fantasy version of Jeanette’s life. It is presenting a narrative where the ruler cannot function in life without a significant other. It is apparent that this notion is that of society and the church, rather than what Jeanette actually wants to happen. Jeanette is not desperate for a man to come into her life and make her whole. But the people around her are waiting for Jeanette to realize that her life will go nowhere without someone to take care of her. She will have no use in life if she does not get married and have children.

This fantasy world that has the values of the real world shows Jeanette having trouble escaping from these norms even when she is imagining. These values are so ingrained in her that she unintentionally puts them within her fantasy as well. There is a lack of separation between what Jeanette wants her life to be, and what everyone in her life wants it to be. This disconnect places Jeanette in a position where she is going to have to choose between her family and her church or living her life truly and loving women.

Ultimately Jeanette chooses both at different times. She will try to hide, but as she grows older and gets more power within the church, she is expected to hide more. When she cannot do this they take away whatever power she has left. This makes Jeanette finally realize that she can never be herself within the church. She leaves the church, and she sets off on her own to attempt to create a life that she wants by the end of the novel.

Jeanette’s fantasy world also creates a space where she can voice her true feelings without being afraid of the real world consequences. She can say that she loves girls or that she does not want to get married, and her mother cannot reject her any more than she already has.

This fantasy world is something that Jeanette sinks into at various times within the chapters and the stories that she is telling. Her fantasy narratives usually coincide with how she is feeling before they start, and sometimes she cannot even escape from her reality inside of these fantasies. The prince within the story has been looking for his perfect bride, and his advisor has been helping, searching near and far to find the perfect woman for him. They think they have found her in this moment, but she says,

“We’ve got to get moving, I’m taking you to the prince.”

“What for?” Asked the woman, ladling out her own soup.

“He might want to marry you.”

“I’m not getting married,” she said.

The advisor turned to her in horror, “Why not?”

“It’s not something I’m very interested in.” (Winterson 63-64)

This passage delves farther into the fantasy world. Give the statements she makes within the story, this woman presents herself as a representation of Jeanette in this section of the fantasy narrative. The prince believes that it is his right to marry whoever he wants, but never considers that a woman would not want to marry him, or anyone else for that matter. However, this woman has a choice and she refuses. Later, when she is killed by the prince, it appears that this passage represents Jeanette being farther separated from her church and all of the expectations that they place on her.

She cannot even escape persecution in her fantasy life. In Jeanette’s life, she tells her mother about her relationship with Melanie because she feels that her mother will understand her anyway. Instead she is locked in her room and prayed for until she breaks and repents. Within her fantasy, she stands up for herself and says that she will not marry the prince because she does

not want to. That reasoning should be good enough because she does not owe the prince anything. However since she made a scene, the prince has her killed. This parallel shows how Jeanette lives her life bound by expectations, even in her fantasies.

As Jeanette grows older, she faces even more expectations from her religious community. In her church, she is expected to get married, have children, raise them in the church, and continue to evangelize. Instead, Jeanette only evangelizes, and in fact this is how she meets her lovers. When she meets Melanie, the two create their romance, and Jeanette decides to tell her mother. She wants her to understand and love her regardless. What her mother does is go to the head of their church, and have the two girls called up front. They are ridiculed as demons until they are supposed to repent. Melanie gives in easily, and is sent away to live somewhere where she will be free of temptation. Rather than just giving up Jeanette says,

“I love her.”

“Then you do not love the Lord.”

“Yes, I love both of them.”

“You cannot.”

“I do, I do, let me go.” (Winterson 105)

Jeanette is put in a position where she has to choose between her feelings and everything else that she knows in her life. It shows the pressure that she is under to conform and get married. However, Jeanette does not think that these things are mutually exclusive, and this moment leads to her leaving the church. This situation creates an understanding for Jeanette that if she wants to live in her church, then she needs to give up on loving the people whom she wants to love. However, if she decides to live her life according to who she loves, then she will have to give up on her church and everyone she knows. The latter is what ends up happening, after a large

amount of effort on Jeanette's part to remain within the church. She knows that she is not welcome so she does not force herself to stay.

By the end of the novel, Jeanette decides to leave her church and her family to pursue her own life. She walks around a beautiful city where she does not know anyone, and they do not know her. This opportunity creates an exciting experience for Jeanette, since she can live freely from these expectations—or so she thinks. Even in the city there is a person who approaches her and asks when the last time she saw her mother is. This draws Jeanette back into her former life where she says, “I came to this city to escape. If the demons lie within they travel with you” (Winterson 161). This passage shows how Jeanette may escape from her community and the expectations, but that does not mean that those expectations will not still haunt her and follow her through life. These expectations have been so far ingrained in her that she feels them even when she is in a different environment. Although she has rejected them, these expectations continue to weigh down upon her, and although she has left, she now has to grapple with that decision rather than hiding herself. Jeanette's existence is a complex and varied one that creates a lack of mobility for her. Even through all of this, she still manages to grow as a person, and return home to see her mother, where the ending is left quite ambiguous.

Along with Winterson's work itself, critical scholarship lends itself to understanding the role of religious and familial expectations within *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. Stimpson's article discusses the importance of a family structure in a lesbian life. Other scholars have also touched upon the importance of a mother-daughter relationship within the lesbian's life, but she says, “The tension between the role of mother, which the lesbian may desire, and the traditional family structure, in which women are subordinate, is obviously far more characteristic of lesbian than gay-male writing. A man may have both paternity and power, but a woman must too often

choose between maternity and comparative powerlessness” (Stimpson 373). Here, she shows that Jeanette’s choice between one way of life or a completely different one is not a unique experience. Lesbians are forced to make this choice, and they are shamed if they choose not to have a family since that is the “right” way to be a woman. Stimpson claims that this is a characteristic of lesbian writing because the men are often given that chance to “have it all” in their life. However, the women often have to choose, and this choice will follow them for the rest of their lives. This relationship that Jeanette has with her mother is similar to the one that is shared between Molly and Carrie. This relationship is one that consists of being rejected by a mother, and then as an adult the child tries to mend the relationship with a degree of success.

This is true for Jeanette. She is forced to choose between her church and her sexuality, and she ends up choosing herself. Seeing her be true to herself creates a feeling of a happy ending in and of itself, but it also begs the question of why a woman has to choose to leave something behind in order to become the person she desires to be. Above all, Jeanette ends up deciding not to get married not because she thinks that marriage is unimportant, but because of the exposure she has had from her community. Marriage is an important part of her church society, but all of the women Jeanette sees are unhappy within their marriages, including her mother. Jeanette’s father lives with their family, but he is rarely around and holds almost no power within the household. Jeanette’s mother often would ridicule him, and the other women in the community would continually talk about how useless their husbands are. Jeanette brings up a story where she says, “There was a woman in our street who told us all she had married a pig. I asked her why she did it, and she said ‘You never know until it’s too late,’ Exactly” (Winterson 71). This statement presents the downside of marriage for Jeanette. She sees that practically all of the women in her community are unhappy in their marriages. The “exactly” at the end shows

that Jeanette is doubtful in marriage because she doesn't want to be trapped with someone who turns out to be completely different than the person she married.

It seems as if the women in her community have just accepted what they have gotten, and continue to live unhappy lives with their husbands because they see no other option. This life does not appeal to Jeanette. She does not want to live unhappily and live a married life simply because she is "supposed" to. This dilemma is part of the reason why she does not want to get married. When given the choice between being married or being happy, Jeanette chooses to be happy.

Jeanette continues to watch the women around her struggle living within the unhappy marriages they have. The majority of the women around Jeanette who talk about their marriages are constantly complaining about their situation. However, they would never do anything to distance themselves from their marriage because being married is seen as following the expectations. Something like separation or divorce would immediately ostracize a woman from the church community. Some women would talk about how their husbands are just alcoholics who offer nothing, but that there is nothing that they can do about it. Some women wish that they could change their situation, but they know that it will never happen. Jeanette has a conversation with her aunt where she started by telling Jeanette,

"There's time enough for you to get a boy."

"I don't think I want one."

"There's what we want," she said, putting down a jack, "and there's what we get, remember that." (Winterson 73-74 )

This conversation presents more of the expectations that fall on Jeanette from her community. As if it doesn't matter that she doesn't want to get married or be with a boy, that is what is expected

so that's what will happen. Her aunt seems as if she went through a dilemma like Jeanette's where perhaps she did not want to get married, but she followed the rules placed before her instead. She lives unhappily with Jeanette's uncle, while the women continue to refer to men as beasts. All of this leaves Jeanette's wondering why anyone would get married since all it does is end up with unhappiness.

Towards the end of the novel, Melanie returns to the church community with a man that she says she is going to marry. Jeanette can see that Melanie is trying to show that she has "grown out" of her phase where she liked women, and that she is now prepared to live her adult life within marriage. Melanie is presented as a powerless figure, even though she is not yet married. Jeanette dislikes the idea of Melanie getting married, but she does not want the reader to be confused by her disapproval. She says, "So I didn't object to Melanie getting married, I objected to her getting married to *him*. And she was serene, serene to the point of being bovine" (Winterson 124). This statement places Melanie in the realm of a married woman. This portrayal sheds a light on how Jeanette could see herself becoming if she gives in to her community and just marries a man. She thinks that this decision is one that is a self-sacrifice not worth making, and that Melanie is now going to live a life that is a miserable lie. This situation makes marriage appeal even less to her, and Jeanette does not understand how someone like Melanie can just change her mind and decide to live this life. She chooses to live as she wants to, because even if she is alone she will at least be happy rather than living a lie.

Melanie functions within *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* like Leota does within *Rubyfruit Jungle*, and similarly to how Beth functions within *Odd Girl Out*. These three women reject their relationships with women, and they grow up to be the heterosexual women that they feel they are meant to be. Melanie and Leota both end up marrying men, thinking that the



protagonists are fooling themselves if they think that they can live a homosexual life forever. Similarly, Beth is convinced that Laura will grow out of her feelings, and she returns to her boyfriend instead of pursuing a life with Laura. All three of them choose to live a heterosexual life rather than embracing the feelings that they have.

Along with Winterson's novel, there is critical scholarship that adds onto Jeanette's disinterest in marriage. Zimmerman's monograph focuses on various topics, but she speaks on *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* as well. She discusses the characteristics of Jeanette's story, and this explanation adds depth into understanding Jeanette's struggle and/or reasoning. She writes, "Jeanette's coming out story, her understanding of difference, and her experience of maternal power—all themes characteristic of lesbian novels—are placed within the context created by her particular class and religious culture, not divorced from it" (Zimmerman 230). Zimmerman's statement shows that Jeanette's struggle is something that is shown widely in lesbian fiction. It shows a wide scope of what Jeanette deals with throughout the novel. All of these characteristics create a space for Jeanette to decide that she does not want to be married. She can choose to live her life freely from the unhappiness that a spouse would bring. Jeanette's choice shows how much power she truly wields within her own narrative.

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