

# **Sexing the Cherry Study Guide**

**Sexing the Cherry by Jeanette Winterson**

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# Plot Summary

*Sexing the Cherry* by Jeannette Winterson is a novel that explores the relationship between Jordan and his mother, the Dog-Woman, as well as the concept of time which is explored extensively throughout the novel. *Sexing the Cherry* is a novel that incorporates magical aspects of time travel and teleportation into a more realistic plot concerning a mother and her adopted son.

The Dog-Woman finds a baby in the slime of the river bank, takes him home, raises him and names him Jordan. As a child, Jordan is fascinated with boats, and he meets John Tradescant while playing with his boats on the banks of the Thames when he is about ten years old. Soon after the start of the civil war, the Dog-Woman's argument with her neighbor is interrupted by Tradescant's request to hire Jordan as his gardening assistant at Wimbledon. Thus, Jordan and his mother move to Wimbledon.

As an adult, Jordan is infatuated with a dancer he sees at a dinner party, beginning his search for her. This search takes him to the town where Zillah's tower lies and the village whose inhabitants rebuild their homes daily, leading to Jordan's visit to the twelve dancing princesses who share their stories with him.

Jordan, Tradescant and the Dog-Woman return to London to attend the king's trial, and they mourn when he is executed. Tradescant decides to head back to sea, and Jordan joins him. During Jordan's absence, the Dog-Woman seeks vengeance against the Puritans for King Charles' execution, ultimately uniting with a brothel full of prostitutes to kill Preacher Scroggs and Neighbor Firebrace. Jordan lands in Barbados where he finally finds Fortunata, the mysterious dancer, and he spends a month with her before returning to England with a pineapple. The Dog-Woman eagerly awaits her son's return and watches by his feet as he sleeps on the night of his return.

Nicolas Jordan is fascinated by ships and so decides to join the Navy. The woman does pollution research on the banks of the river and goes mad from the mercury. She hallucinates about being a giant able to kidnap the world's leaders and force them to help the world. Jordan and the Dog-Woman travel to London, and during their journey, he tells her about Fortunata.

Artemis kills Orion when he rapes her, and she sees that her past is altered, though her future remains intact. After Jordan tells his mother about visiting the Hopi Indian tribe, they both prepare to present the pineapple to King Charles the Second. Nicolas Jordan and Jack argue about a woman fighting a plant's pollution of the river, and Nicolas decides to find the woman who he recognizes, though he knows that is impossible. The Dog-Woman sees the Plague as God's judgment on England for the execution of King Charles. The hallucinating woman suggests to Nicolas Jordan that they burn down the factory. A fire demolishes London, and Jordan and the Dog-Woman escape down the Thames in his ship. Jordan knows that he will never return to his home, but he looks forward to the future with hope.



# Introduction

## Introduction Summary

Sexing the Cherry by Jeannette Winterson is a novel that explores the relationship between Jordan and his mother, the Dog-Woman, as well as the concept of time which is explored extensively throughout the novel. Sexing the Cherry is a novel that incorporates magical aspects of time travel and teleportation into a more realistic plot concerning a mother and her adopted son.

The first thing that Jordan sees is the night divided, half cloudy and half fair, as the moon reflects in the water of the river. Walking with his hands in front of him, he tries to find the path, stating that "every journey conceals another journey within its lines: the path not taken and the forgotten angle" (p. 2). He records the journeys he might have made and his discovery that his own life was written invisibly. Jordan resolves to watch himself, to catch himself disappearing, but the longer he eludes himself, the more obsessed he becomes with the thought of discovery. Gradually, he begins to find evidence of another life, which gradually appears before him. The day that his mother finds him in the slime by the river, she hangs a medallion around his neck. She takes him home where she keeps him with no company besides herself and her fifty dogs.

She forgets her former name, but she is now called the Dog-Woman, and she calls him Jordan. The Dog-Woman names him Jordan because she wanted to give him a river name, a name bound to nothing like the waters. She nourishes Jordan when he is a baby. She "should have named him after a stagnant pond and then [she] could have kept him, but [she] named him after a river and in the flood-time he slipped away" (p. 4). When Thomas Johnson brings the first banana to England, the Dog-Woman takes Jordan to see it when he is three years old. Jordan stares into the distance, and she sees the blue sea when she puts her head next to his. London is a foul place, and the Dog-Woman would like to take Jordan to live in the country but needs to be near Hyde Park to enter her dogs in races and fights. When the Dog-Woman first finds Jordan, the witch neighbor helps her clean him and warns her that he will break her heart. The Dog-Woman nearly kills her neighbor for saying that many will want Jordan's heart but only one will have it and she will spurn it. One night, Jordan takes his mother sailing down the Thames to show her something she has never seen before at sunrise. As they sail home, she looks behind her; what she remembers is the shining water and the size of the world.

Jordan has seen the shining water and the size of the world many times since leaving his mother on the banks of the Thames. He once accompanies a cleaner in a balloon and sees two lovers killed by their own passion. As a boy, Jordan makes paper boats to float on the river, learning how the wind affects the sail but not how love affects the heart. The Dog-Woman mends his broken bones, but Jordan is alone when he loses his heart. While visiting a family whose house has no floor, Jordan notices a dancer, a "woman whose face was a sea voyage [he] had not the courage to attempt" (p. 15).



That night he sees her climbing down from her window; he strains his eyes to follow her, but she is gone.

In 1640, Jordan meets John Tradescant on the banks of the Thames when he is about ten years old. As the Dog-Woman takes an apple to Jordan, she sees him in the distance with Tradescant, the gardener to the king. Tradescant meets Jordan when he tries to rescue his paper boat, and he explains how he used to sail around the world, which is too vast to finish sailing. The Dog-Woman wonders when Jordan will make a ship too big to carry and leave her behind forever. The Dog-Woman is very hideous and large. She outweighs an elephant in a traveling circus, and people are scared of her; however, she and Jordan are always happy, and he is proud of her because no other mother can hold a dozen oranges in her mouth at once. One morning, soon after the start of the Civil War, as the Dog-Woman yells at and strangles Neighbor Firebrace in defense of the king, Tradescant goes to their house to ask Jordan to be a gardener's boy at Wimbledon where he is laying out a garden for Queen Henrietta. The Dog-Woman refuses to lose Jordan and goes with him three days later so that they can begin their new life as servants to the king.

Jordan sleeps for two hours before excusing himself to search for the dancer. He dresses as a woman and is entertained at a house kept by a rich man for his prostitutes. Being dressed as a woman is like being in a foreign country, and he is shocked by the conspiracy among women because he never realized how much they hate and pity men. The woman who owns a fish stall writes a list of rules about men for Jordan. At first, the rules upset him, but then he realizes them to be true. Holding a fish, he is carried out to sea by a flock of birds. Jordan faints in fear and awakes on a windowsill in a strange town. A young girl comes to the window and invites him to share her bed for the night. The morning after their arrival in Wimbledon, the Dog-Woman awakes in a pool of philosophical thought. She wonders about love, but the only love she has ever known is from Jordan and her dogs. She once fell in love with a boy merchant, but he fainted in terror when she requested a kiss.

The next morning, Zillah, the young girl, tells Jordan that she has been locked in this tower since her birth, but Jordan only sees a stallholder from the window of the house. When he pulls her to the window and looks out with her, he sees foaming waves beating against rocks below. As she approaches him with rats to eat, Jordan jumps from the window and lands in a pile of radishes. He tells the townspeople that he has come from the tower, and the people cross themselves and share the story of an incestuous young girl who was forced to build her own death tower which was eventually replaced with this house where no one can live because the screams are too loud at night. Jordan tells the villagers about his search for the dancer, and the village philosopher tells him that love is better ignored than explored. A discourse on love follows. When night falls and the villagers leave, Jordan wonders if he is searching for the dancer whose name he does not know or the dancing part of himself.

The Dog-Woman weighs nothing in the dark and water. After her failed excursion in love, she resolves to never again make a fool out of herself. She cannot school Jordan in love, but in its lack. On the way to Wimbledon, a man disrobes before her, and she



bites his member off when he asks her to put it in her mouth. The Dog-Woman plans to warn Jordan to be careful of his member when he is older, though she fears for his heart. At Wimbledon, she often hides behind a rock at a stream's source in the evenings. Away from home, at sea with Tradescant by his side, Jordan often dreams about a town where the cunning inhabitants knock down their houses and rebuild them in a new location nightly to avoid their creditors. The first time he arrives, he makes friends with a family, but he finds a museum in that location when he tries to revisit them the next day. He finds a windmill when he returns to the museum, and the miller suggests that he go see the Twelve Dancing Princesses who live down the road. Jordan thinks that one dancer may know another, so he bangs on their door.

## Introduction Analysis

Sexing the Cherry begins with a short verse on the language of the Hopi Indians. Although it is sophisticated, there are no past, present or future tenses. The narrator questions what this means about time. The verse says that matter makes everything, but it mostly consists of empty space and points of light. The narrator wonders what this says about the reality of the world. The first forty-four pages of the novel are untitled and alternate viewpoints between the Dog-Woman and Jordan, as does the majority of the book. The first narrator is Jordan, who first recalls seeing the night divided, half cloudy and half fair. The moon reflects in the water of the river, which introduces the importance of water in this novel as Jordan has a fascination with boats and eventually sails around the world. Jordan notes that he plans to record the journeys he might have made rather than the journeys he actually made. He discovers that his own life was written invisibly, comparing his life to that of the twelve dancing princesses. Jordan decides to watch himself in an attempt to catch himself disappearing, but the longer he eludes himself, the more obsessed he becomes with the thought of discovery. Gradually, he finds evidence of the other life which begins to appear before him. His relationship with the Dog-Woman is mentioned when he states that his mother found him in the slime by the river and takes him home to care for him. When the Dog-Woman finds Jordan, she hangs a medallion around his neck, engraved with the message "remember the rock from whence ye are hewn and the pit from when ye are digged" (p. 3), and this medallion becomes a symbol of the Dog-Woman's love for her son in some sense as she never actually tells him that she loves him.

The viewpoint then switches to that of the Dog-Woman, who explains that she has forgotten her original name and is now simply called the Dog-Woman. She finds a baby near the river and wants to give him a river name, and so she calls him Jordan. Her belief that she should have named him after a stagnant pond so that he would stay with her foreshadows Jordan leaving his mother. The Dog-Woman takes Jordan to see the first banana in England when he is a child, and this parallels Jordan later bringing the first pineapple to England from Barbados. She compares the banana to Asian genitalia, introducing the minor theme of sex into the novel. Jordan stares at the banana, and when the Dog-Woman puts her head beside his, she sees the blue sea; she claims that this is the first time Jordan set sail, foreshadowing his voyages around the world in his adult life. The Dog-Woman continues the story by explaining that they live near Hyde



Park so that she can enter her dogs in races and fights, obviously the reason she is known as the Dog-Woman. When she first finds Jordan, her witch neighbor helps clean him and predicts that he will make the Dog-Woman love him only to break her heart. She also predicts that many will want Jordan's heart, but he will give it to only one who will spurn it. One night, Jordan has his mother don her nicest clothes so that he can take her sailing along the Thames; this foreshadows the future when the adult Jordan and his mother flee down the Thames to escape the fire in London. At the end of her first section, the Dog-Woman only recalls the shining water and the size of the world. As the novel reverts back to Jordan's viewpoint, he sees the shining water and the size of the world many times after leaving his mother. Jordan tells of a night that he went up in a hot air balloon with a cleaner.

Shifting the point of view back to the Dog-Woman, she describes Jordan in his youth, especially his fascination with making paper boats. Her allusion to Jordan never learning how love affects the heart and his being alone when his heart is broken foreshadows Jordan's heartbreak as an adult. Jordan then tells of attending a dinner party at a strange house with no floors. It is here that he first beholds the mysterious dancer who he searches for during his journeys around the world. The Dog-Woman recalls how Jordan met John Tradescant when he was ten years old while sailing his paper boats in the river. The Dog-Woman argues with a Puritan, introducing the theme of religion. Tradescant's affiliation with King Charles, as his gardener, introduces the theme of politics. Tradescant recounts his glorified youth spent sailing around the world, foreshadowing his return to that lifestyle after the execution of the king. The Dog-Woman wonders when Jordan will make a ship big enough to carry him, foreshadowing Jordan's voyages around the world. The Dog-Woman describes herself; she is very large and hideous, but Jordan loves her and is proud of his mother. She alludes to the beginning of the Civil War, and her argument with Neighbor Firebrace demonstrates her loyalty to the king. Tradescant's request that Jordan act as his gardening assistant at Wimbledon foreshadows the Dog-Woman and Jordan's time there which is immediately fulfilled.

Jordan takes over the narration at this point and describes his search for the mysterious dancer. This includes his time spent dressed as a woman at a brothel supported by a very rich man. Jordan recognizes the inequalities between men and women before being carried away by seagulls and deposited on the roof of a house in a small town, where the girl inside invites him to share her bed for the night since he is still disguised as a woman. The Dog-Woman discusses religion and the lack of love in her life. She describes her only encounter with romantic love as when she offered a kiss to a boy merchant and he rejected her. The next morning, Jordan learns about the girl. He sees the town below when he looks from the window and is unable to understand Zillah's horror, but when he gazes out of the window with the girl, he sees that they are in a tower above a rocky shore of the sea. When Zillah terrifies him, Jordan jumps from the window and lands in the village where the people explain the story of the incestuous girl forced to build her own death tower. He tells the villagers of his search for the mysterious dancer, and a discussion about loves ensues. Jordan ponders whether he is really searching for the dancer or if he is searching for the dancing part of himself. The Dog-Woman explains her rejection of love due to her first failed attempt. She tells of the



man whose member she bit off on her journey to Wimbledon and expresses fear for her son's heart. At Wimbledon, the importance of water is again mentioned as she frequently spends her evenings near the rocks at the stream's source. Jordan often dreams about a town where the inhabitants tear down and rebuild their houses daily. When returning, he meets a miller at a windmill who suggests that Jordan visit the twelve dancing princesses who live outside of the town. Jordan agrees, thinking that one dancer may know another, and this foreshadows his visit to the home of the twelve dancing princesses in the next chapter.





# The Twelve Dancing Princesses

## The Twelve Dancing Princesses Summary

Jordan bangs on the door, and when a voice behind him addresses him, he explains that he has come to pay his respects to the twelve dancing princesses. She is the eldest and says he may start with her. As he presents the herring that he has brought as a gift, a hand takes and eats the fish. The eldest princess says to excuse her because it is the penalty of love. The twelve princesses sleep in the same room every night from which they fly to a silver city. A clever prince catches them, and they are given in marriage to him and his eleven brothers. They live happily ever after but not with their husbands. The first princess enjoys swimming and falls in love with the mermaid who she eventually runs away with. When she discovers that her sisters have also left their husbands, they buy this house to share, and the first princess lives in the well with her mermaid.

The second princess collects religious items, and when her husband tries to burn the body of a saint, she wraps him in cloth. The third princess' husband never touches her because he loves a boy, so she kills them both with a single arrow. The fourth princess' husband marries her to make his other liaisons more dangerous, and she leaves him when she learns of his preference for virginal inmates of an insane asylum. He dies from sexually transmitted diseases. The fifth princess lives in a tower with Rapunzel as her lover until a prince ties Rapunzel up and blinds her lover who is found by her sisters and brought to their estate. The sixth princess watches her husband leave for a hunt and sees a stag jump a fence, causing her to recall when she could fly, which results in her leaving her husband.

The seventh princess marries a woman and is happy for eighteen years until their secret is uncovered and they come to burn her, so the princess kills her with a single blow to the head and joins her sisters; she still keeps a coil of her husband's hair. The eighth princess buys poison from a merchant and kills her husband. The husband of the ninth princess treats her like a falcon, and she becomes harsh and tears his liver out of his body before breaking her chains and leaving him.

When her husband cheats on her and admits to being in love with his mistress, the tenth princess leaves him. The eleventh princess' husband ignores her because he is busy contemplating the problems of Creation. One night, he asks her to kill him because he is trapped and alone. She smashes his skull, his body flies into the air, and she still sees him sometimes, though only in the distance. The stories finish, and Jordan points out that only eleven princesses have told their stories. The youngest never comes to live with them. She is the best dancer and very light, able to be supported by the winds, and they have not seen her for many years; her name is Fortunata.



## The Twelve Dancing Princesses Analysis

This chapter begins with Jordan's arrival at the home of the twelve dancing princesses, fulfilling the foreshadowing from the end of the Introduction. Jordan brings a gift of fish as a sign of respect. When a voice asks his name, he introduces himself, and the eldest princess explains that her lover is a mermaid when the mermaid snatches the fish from Jordan and eats it. The eldest princess explains that she and her eleven sisters shared a room as children, and they flew to an Enchanted City in the sky every night until a clever prince caught them and they were given in marriage to him and his eleven brothers. The princesses live happily ever after but not with their husbands. The first princess leaves her husband when she falls in love with a mermaid. After some years, she learns that her sisters had also left their husbands, so they buy a house and live together. The eldest princess and her mermaid lover live in the well.

The second princess does not mind her husband until he tries to burn the body of a saint, which is part of her collection of religious items. She wraps him in a cloth, embalming him while still alive. The husband of the third princess is homosexual, so she kills him and his lover. The fourth princess has a husband who likes to sleep around so she leaves him and he dies from sexually transmitted diseases. The fifth princess causes her husband to turn into a frog when she kisses him. She tells the story of Rapunzel, altering it to state that an old hag also lived in the tower and was Rapunzel's lover. She was that old woman who the prince beat and blinded, but her body heals, though her eyes do not, and she goes to live with her sisters. The sixth princess recalls the days when she could fly when she sees a stag jump over a fence, and she leaves her husband. The seventh princess is happily married to a woman disguised as a man until someone finds out and plans to burn her husband. The princess kills her husband and flees, but she still keeps a coil of his hair.

The eighth princess poisons her obese husband, and the ninth princess harshly attacks her husband because he treats her like a falcon. The tenth princess leaves her husband because he has an affair and falls in love with his mistress. The eleventh princess kills her husband at his request because he feels trapped and alone. Homosexuality is a recurring theme in these tales. All of these eleven princesses kill or leave their husbands. Jordan notes that one princess is missing and learns that the youngest, Fortunata, fled on their joint wedding day and never came to live with them. Their description of their youngest sister parallels Jordan's impression of the mysterious dancer and foreshadows the introduction of Fortunata into the plot of the novel.



# 1649

## 1649 Summary

At first, the civil war barely touches them at Wimbledon, and they assume that the king will return from a foreign country with allies and win as always. The Dog-Woman sees a country church that Cromwell has destroyed, but the women fix and clean the destruction because there are some things that cannot be destroyed. The trial begins on January 20, 1649, and Tradescant, the Dog-Woman and Jordan return to London for the first time in six years. As the Dog-Woman and Jordan approach the hut, they see Preacher Scroggs and Neighbor Firebrace chatting on the front steps. They have requisitioned her house for Jesus and Cromwell, using it to store papers denouncing the king. The Dog-Woman kills Scroggs' men when they seize Jordan, but she allows Scroggs and Firebrace to leave peacefully. Despite the prohibition of Cavaliers at the king's trial, Tradescant, the Dog-Woman and Jordan attend the seven-day trial, and King Charles Stuart is beheaded on the seventh day. Tradescant cries when the king is beheaded, and that night, he plans to take ship and leave London. From Jordan's face, the Dog-Woman can tell that he will leave also, so she goes for a walk alone beside the river. At a dancing school in a remote place, Fortunata teaches her students to dance until they lie on the ground, exhausted, then she refreshes them, and the dance begins again.

A man sells Jordan a necklace made from chicken bones to save him from pain, but nothing is proof against love. Jordan believes that those most in need of change choose to fall in love. He visits a city where the entire population is wiped out three times in a row by love. The third time, the sole survivors, a monk and a prostitute, prohibit love, and marriages are arranged. Jordan looks around and visits the Museum of Love, a gloomy place filled with forbidden items. As he strums a guitar and sings quietly, a crowd gathers. They continue at an inn when night falls, but around midnight, the monk, the prostitute and the chief of police come, but Jordan escapes. Years later, Jordan learns that the monk put the citizens of the city to death for refusing to give up their wicked ways. Jordan leaves the city and rejoins Tradescant's ship, continuing their course towards the Bermudas to gather exotic fruit to practice the art of grafting upon. Jordan slips away from the main ship as soon as they drop anchor, and he rows toward an inhospitable-looking rock while imagining his mother being found as a genie in a bottle. Like this place, his "heart has never been visited; and [he does] not know whether it could sustain life" (p. 86). He searches for a dancer in an effort to find out, though only in the course of his journey does he realize his true aim. When he leaves England, Jordan thinks he is running away, but time has no meaning on this journey which is not linear, and the self is not contained in any moment or place.



## 1649 Analysis

This chapter begins from the Dog-Woman's perspective. She describes how the civil war barely touches them at first and proceeds to describe Cromwell's cruelty. The Dog-Woman tells about the trial of King Charles which she, Tradescant and Jordan attend. Her thoughts and feelings about the king's trial and execution reveal her to be a loyal Royalist. She constantly expresses disdain for the Puritans, including Preacher Scroggs and Neighbor Firebrace, who have requisitioned her hut in her absence to store papers denouncing the king. These papers allude to Samuel Peck's "A Perfect Diurnal". When Jordan is seized upon Scroggs' orders, the Dog-Woman kills the soldiers but shows mercy by allowing Scroggs and Firebrace to go free. She later shows charity by sharing her fire and beer with the poor. In order to attend the king's trial, the Dog-Woman, Tradescant and Jordan must dress in disguise because cavaliers are forbidden to attend. The Dog-Woman praises the king's manner during his trial and mourns when he is condemned and executed. Because of his service to the king, Tradescant immediately makes plans to leave England, and the Dog-Woman can tell that Jordan will leave her as well when she looks at her son's face. She is sad and goes outside to walk along the river alone.

Fortunata is introduced in this chapter, and the reader learns that she is a teacher at a dancing school. The chapter continues from Jordan's perspective. He buys a necklace to protect him from pain, but the merchant tells him that nothing is proof against love. Jordan considers love, and he believes that those most in need of a change choose to fall in love and later blame it on fate. Jordan arrives in a city where love is forbidden because the entire population has already been decimated twice due to love. He plays a guitar, which is forbidden, and the citizens are enraptured. Jordan escapes from the chief of police and later learns that the citizens are put to death because they refuse to repent of their wicked ways which his guitar playing had inspired. Jordan rejoins Tradescant's ship and travels toward the Bermudas. He describes grafting and shows his regard for Tradescant, who he considers a hero, by his desire that some of Tradescant could be grafted onto him. Like his mother, Jordan prefers to be alone, and he sets off alone once Tradescant's ship sets anchor. He imagines his mother being found as a genie in a bottle and considers love as he rows toward an inhospitable-looking rock. He considers the fact that he is unsure if his heart can sustain life. Only in the course of his journey does Jordan realize that his search for the dancer is made in an effort to find out about his own heart. Jordan contemplates time and its lack of meaning on his journey; time is a very important theme in *Sexing the Cherry*. He claims that the self is not contained in any moment or place.



# The Flat Earth Theory and Hallucinations and Disease of the Mind

## The Flat Earth Theory and Hallucinations and Disease of the Mind Summary

In "The Flat Earth Theory", the earth is round and flat at the same time. That it is round is indisputable, and experience tells that it is flat. Jordan sees maps as magic, telling him how to find a place that he has never seen. It seems the journeys are done, but he starts a new map with connections obvious only to him.

In "Hallucinations and Diseases of the Mind", in Objects 1, a woman recognizes none of her belongings in her bag. She goes home and does not recognize her husband or children. She shoots her husband and claims to never have seen him before when she goes to trial. In Objects 2, a man visits a famous country house and makes himself comfortable, remembering how happy he used to be in this place. He is confused when he is fined. In Time 1, a man on a salvage tug looks at the stars as a man beside him speaks of burying King Charles at Windsor, but the first man knows only of a queen who is far from dead. He turns to find himself face to face with John Tradescant. In Time 2, the girl wants to kill them as they mock her. She tugs the blanket closer because she is home as always and Jordan will be waiting for her. Seven lies about time are offered.

The Dog-Woman wants Jordan to be safe and protected, but she knows that the water will claim him again. She carries on in her old ways for a while, spitting on Puritans she passes for Jordan and Tradescant's sake. One night, a man approaches her, concerned with the liberty of all, and she goes to a meeting and hears the preacher's sermon about the Royalists avenging the king's death without breaking the Holy Law. By their next meeting, the Dog-Woman takes 119 eyes and over 2,000 teeth, but she is hurt when the preacher asks her to be less zealous in the next fortnight. As she decides to continue her sabotage alone, she is approached by the whore from Spitalfields whose brothel has taken to killing Puritans who visit them, and the whore asks for the Dog-Woman's help in disposing of the bodies because they do not trust men to help them. At the brothel, the Dog-Woman sees Scroggs and Firebrace with a woman and each other. When the Dog-Woman explains her associations with the two men, the prostitute agrees to allow her to return her pains with their bodies. Scroggs and Firebrace return to the brothel to play Caesar and Brutus before the quarrel, and the Dog-Woman bursts through a panel in the wall and kills them. She leaves the room and burns her clothes as the other gentlemen disport themselves among the ruins of Scroggs and Firebrace.



## The Flat Earth Theory and Hallucinations and Disease of the Mind Analysis

In "The Flat Earth Theory", Jordan contradicts himself by claiming that the earth is round and flat at the same time. He states that the journeys are never over because one can always get a new map and start over with connections obvious only to that person. "Hallucinations and Diseases of the Mind" is divided into several sections at the beginning of the chapter. Objects 1 describes a woman killing her husband who she claims that she has never seen before. Objects 2 tells of a man who is fined for making himself at home in a famous country house. Time 1 reveals a man in the future who is approached by Tradescant on a salvage tug on the Thames. In Time 2, the girl wants to kill them for mocking her, but she is home as always and knows that Jordan will be waiting for her. Seven lies about time follow these sections.

The Dog-Woman wants Jordan to be safe and protected, but she knows that the water will claim him again. She carries on in her old ways for a while, spitting on Puritans that she passes for Tradescant and Jordan's sake. One night, a man approaches her, concerned with everyone's liberty, and she attends a meeting where the preacher tries to reconcile the contradictions of "thou shalt not kill" and "an eye for an eye". The Dog-Woman reacts overzealously and, by the next month, has taken 119 eyes and over 2000 teeth. After the preacher reprimands her, the Dog-Woman decides to continue her sabotage alone just before she is approached by the whore from Spitalfields who asks her to help dispose of the bodies of Puritans that she and her fellow prostitutes kill. At the brothel, the Dog-Woman sees Scroggs and Firebrace and obtains the prostitute's permission to kill them. After she kills them, she burns her clothes because she wants no part of those men on her.



# The Nature of Time

## The Nature of Time Summary

Jordan compares time to maps. Time is not linear and moves through mankind who are no longer bound by matter which has become what it is: empty space and light. Paintings show how light affects man. Paintings 1 tells about "A Hunt in a Forest" with figures in the distance which Jordan only notices in degrees. In Time 4, Jordan has no proof that his childhood existed, but his mother claims that it did; however, he trusts no one because everyone lies and "everyone remembers things which never happened" (p. 102). As he walks around the island, Jordan finds a pair of worn-out ballet shoes, and he follows a trail to a house, determined to seek an end to the mystery. He hears music and sees ten points of light and a young woman dancing. The points of light slow down until they become ten women dancing. Jordan falls, and when he recovers, the woman from the dinner party stands over him, smiling. He introduces himself.

Memory 1 states that this scene is either in the past or the future; Jordan is either recalling Fortunata or still imagining her. The first thing that Fortunata recalls is the winter of her and her sisters' marriages. They dress for their wedding, but when Fortunata sees her husband, she realizes that she does not want him so she runs off, sailing around the world and earning her living as a dancer before she comes here and builds this school. In Lies 8, it is not possible for that winter night to be the first thing she saw, but before then she is "like those who dream and pass through life as a series of shadows" (p. 106). What has been told is true though it is not.

Before that winter, Fortunata and her sisters danced in a silver city that abandons gravity and drifts two hundred miles above earth's atmosphere. She and her sisters are born light and wake, pulled by the city overhead, on the same night, and they begin to visit the city nightly. Their father notices that they are always tired and offers their hands in marriage to anyone who can tell him where they go at night. One night, the youngest prince holds to their shirts and flies away with them, and their father chains the sisters down the next night.

Jordan stays with Fortunata for a month, learning about her ways and his own. She tells him how she learns to dance alone for its sake and her own, ignoring love. He gives her his medallion, and when she asks about his wings, he says nothing because only angels have wings and everyone else must wait to be rescued. Paintings 2 depicts "St. Nicholas Calming the Tempest", and as the storm rages and the four disciples huddle in fear, St. Nicholas flies through the stars overhead. Jordan prepares to leave the island, but Fortunata will not come with him. When he is little, around 1633, Jordan's mother takes him to see a great wonder, a banana, and he sees the beach as he looks at it, but then he forgets it completely. He tries to return to that memory in his games with ships. In becoming an explorer with Tradescant, Jordan tries to find something he has lost, himself. He wants to be brave and admired like his mother. He thinks that she loves him but is not sure. She seems to expect it when he decides to leave with Tradescant, but



he wants her to ask him to stay like he wants Fortunata to ask him to stay. He packs and leaves Fortunata, saying he will return though he knows it is not true. He rows away, using her body as a marker, and he always will.

The pineapple arrives, and Jordan prepares to cut it in half. This is a historic occasion in 1661 as the first pineapple is brought to England from Jordan's journey to Barbados. Everyone is dead, and the Dog-Woman misses Tradescant. Her witch neighbor is not dead, but she loses her house so the Dog-Woman loans her a dog kennel. Jordan takes over the expeditions after Tradescant's death, and he has been at sea for thirteen years. The Dog-Woman is born small, and when she grows large later, her father wants to exhibit her but her mother refuses to allow it. One night, her father tries to sell her, and he is her first murder. She forgets her childhood because it is a bleak and unnecessary time. When she hears news of Jordan's return, the Dog-Woman prepares herself to receive a hero as a hero's mother should. She travels to Hove and waits for him, unable to picture how the years may have changed him. She is happy to see him and wants to tell him that she loves him, but she is unable to get the words out so she says nothing. The Dog-Woman examines Jordan as he sleeps and notices that he wears a silver pendant of dancing shoes around his neck instead of the medallion his mother had given him. Jordan moves in his sleep and clutches the chain, and the Dog-Woman sits at his feet all night, counting the hours by the tide.

## The Nature of Time Analysis

Jordan compares and contrasts time and maps, stating that time is not linear and moves through man. Man is no longer bound by matter, which has reverted to its actual parts, empty space and light. According to Jordan, empty space means to be devoid of people, and paintings demonstrate how light affects man. Paintings 1 alludes to "A Hunt in a Forest". In Time 4, Jordan states that his he has no proof that his childhood existed, though his mother claims it did, but he trusts no one because everyone lies and "remembers things which never happened" (p. 102). As he walks around the island, he finds a pair of worn-out ballet shoes and follows a trail to the dance school where Fortunata teaches.

Jordan clarifies in Memory 1 that this scene may occur in the past or the future; it may be something he is recalling or something that he is still imagining. This adds to the theme of the ambiguity of time. She describes her wedding day, stating that the winter is the first thing she saw. She corroborates her sisters' story of her rejecting her proposed husband; however, she claims that she ran away while her sisters said she flew away. Fortunata mocks Jordan's claim that she could fly away, causing him to question how she could fly to the Enchanted City when such places do not exist. Jordan is befuddled when Fortunata asks if they do not. Lies 8 points out that it is not possible that the winter of her marriage was the first thing that Fortunata saw, but she is like "those who dream and pass through life as a series of shadows" (p. 106) and what has been told is true though it is not.





Before that winter, the twelve dancing princesses dance in a silver city of curious motion, though no one else in the city dances. Fortunata describes the city which has abandoned gravity, causing gravity to abandon them. She reiterates the tale of her father catching her and her sisters and forcing them to marry the young prince who caught them and his brothers. During their betrothal, the princesses often look at the sky, thinking of where they might be but knowing where they are. Jordan stays with Fortunata for a month, learning about her ways and his own as she tells him about learning to dance for its sake and her own. By giving Fortunata the medallion that his mother gave him when he was a baby, Jordan replaces the Dog-Woman as the most important female figure in his life.

Paintings 2 alludes to "St. Nicholas Calming the Tempest", which contains connotations of Christianity. Jordan retells the story of seeing the first banana brought to England, which his mother had told earlier in the novel. Jordan also compares Fortunata and the Dog-Woman as he wants both of them to ask him to stay, but neither does. Jordan's return to England with the first pineapple parallels the banana from the first chapter which his mother took him to see when he was three years old. The point of view changes to that of the Dog-Woman, who describes the deaths that have occurred. She also tells about her first murder, her father, and her childhood which she forgets because it was a bleak and unnecessary time. She prepares for her son's return but is unable to tell him that she loves him. As Jordan sleeps, the Dog-Woman examines him and notices that he now wears a pendant of silver dancing shoes instead of the medallion that she gave him; she knows that she has been replaced in his affections.



# 1990

## 1990 Summary

In Paintings 3, "Mr. Rose, the Royal Gardener, presents the pineapple to Charles the Second", Mr. Rose is on one knee and the king is accepting the pineapple. Soon after seeing this painting, Nicolas Jordan decides to go join the Navy. He makes model boats on the weekend. This coincides with two other things. The second is "The Observer's Book of Ships", which he buys in a second-hand shop. He models boats after the pictures in the book. One day, a man notices his boats. The man says he has been everywhere but feels he has missed it, and he always loses it just as he is on the brink of making sense of it. The third thing is "The Boys' Book of Heroes", and Nicolas wants to be a hero. He goes to the Navy recruitment office to see the sophisticated equipment he will be using. When his boat gets damaged at the park, Jack, his best friend, tells him that he is too old for this boat stuff. Nicolas is accepted as a naval cadet, and his family has a special dinner the night before he leaves. Instead of sleeping that night, he thinks about the sky and how dancers and acrobats must feel that empty space. Six months later, he is on board an admiralty tug in the Thames Estuary outside of Deptford, standing on deck, when a man in old-fashioned clothes tells him that they are burying the king today at Windsor. Nicolas knows him but does not know from where. Tradescant sighs, Nicolas' name is Jordan.

She is a woman going mad. As a giant, she kidnaps the world leaders and forces them to help people and change the world. The mercury causes her hallucinations, and she starts a one-woman campaign, writing articles and letters. She is a lonely child, and her parents find her difficult. Being ignored causes her to grow bigger to the point that she is impossible to ignore. She loses weight when she leaves home, but the weight persists in her mind. Her alter ego is huge and powerful, but it is only a fantasy in the beginning. She goes into pollution research and camps by a river, going insane. She wonders why, when as an attractive woman with a chemistry degree, she could get a better job. She has been alone for a long time now, but she does not measure time; it measures her. Outwardly, she is always here, but inwardly, she can escape. She looks for a theory to fit the facts. She wants a home, a lover and some children, but it will never work because she is still a monster even if she does not look like one on the outside anymore. She loses patience with the hypocrisy of the world and cannot stand the lying and flattery anymore. She remembers being a schoolgirl and not wanting to go home but staying out all night instead. Why does that day return when she is alone?

In the morning, the ship is held at anchor, and Jordan's boat pulls up high on the beach. When Jordan awakes, the Dog-Woman opens oysters up with a little knife. After the deaths of Scroggs and Firebrace, she vows to restrain her natural capacity for murder. She does not see herself as a criminal because she only seeks justice. She knows that God will forgive her on Judgment Day if it proves she has made mistakes. After they eat, Jordan tells his mother he must go to London to present the king with his rarest find, and the Dog-Woman looks at the new scaly fruit. They take a carriage to London,



and the Dog-Woman asks Jordan if the necklace he wears is also a precious thing. He tells her that it was given to him by a woman who does not exist, whose name is Fortunata. It was a day like this that she told him the story of Artemis and why she was in her service.

## 1990 Analysis

This chapter opens with Paintings 3 which alludes to "Mr. Rose, the Royal Gardener, presents the pineapple to Charles the Second". The point of view now changes to that of Nicolas Jordan, a young man in the twentieth century. He explains that he has decided to join the Navy due to his love for boats as well as three things that coincide. The first is seeing that painting, the second is buying "The Observer's Book of Ships", and the third is finding "The Boys' Book of Heroes" which he often read as a child. The last book contains allusions to William the Conqueror, Christopher Columbus, Francis Drake and Lord Nelson. Nicolas' best friend, Jack, disapproves of his obsession with boats, claiming that he is too old for it. While Nicolas plays with his boats, a man approaches him and tells him about seeing the world, paralleling Jordan's introduction to Tradescant. Nicolas' narrative focuses on his relationship with his parents and his obsession with boats. Once he joins the Navy, he sees Tradescant aboard an admiralty tug on the Thames and claims that he is Jordan.

Next, a woman in 1990 is hallucinating and going mad. She imagines that there is a giant inside of her and describes her pollution research. She enjoys being alone. She also tells about her childhood while debating the significance of time. This woman and Nicolas Jordan seem to parallel the Dog-Woman and Jordan and are possibly meant to be reincarnations of these primary characters. This chapter ends with the Dog-Woman resuming the narrative and expressing her belief that God will forgive her on Judgment Day if her actions prove mistaken. She and Jordan head to London, foreshadowing Jordan presenting the pineapple to King Charles the Second. The Dog-Woman asks her son about his new necklace, and he proceeds to tell her about Fortunata and why she is in service to Artemis.



# Fortunata's Story

## Fortunata's Story Summary

Artemis begs Zeus, her father, for a bow and arrows because she wants to hunt rather than marry and have children. She packs and sets off for a new life in the woods, but Orion comes and rapes her, so Artemis kills him with a scorpion. She sees her past changed by a single act; the future is intact, but the past is irredeemable. The waves swarm around Artemis's feet as the sun rises. After covering Orion's body with rocks, she walks away until it is night and there is nothing to remind her of the previous night across the stars.

Jordan apologizes to his mother for talking so little. He tells her about visiting an Indian tribe, the Hopi, who had captured a Spanish man who now lived as one of them, and the Spanish man explains that the Hopi have no tenses for the past, present and future because they do not sense time that way. Jordan and the Dog-Woman continue in silence. While Jordan dresses to present his pineapple to the king, the Dog-Woman cleans the hut because he has not seen his home in such a long time. She hopes to sell one of her hounds to the king tonight because it will raise the values of her other hounds that she sells to the nobility. She washes and gets ready for Jordan.

Jack tells Nicolas that his trouble is that he never thinks about the future because one cannot make a career out of a hobby. Nicolas plans to sail around the world now, but Jack says there is no point, that the world is divided into those who do and those who will not do. He swears at the paper because some woman is at it again. He launches into a tirade about a woman camping by a river and complaining about the mercury levels. After Jack leaves, Nicolas reads the article and thinks the woman is surely a hero. Looking at her picture, he feels that he knows her though that is impossible, and he decides to find her.

God's judgment on the murder of the king has befallen England, and London is consumed with the Plague. The Dog-Woman takes soup to an ailing friend who she finds dead and asks the convicts pushing carts full of corpses through the street to be burned where to take her. She carries her friend to the pit, and the man in charge says it is hell. She returns home to find Jordan delirious with fever and calling for Fortunata. She asks the witch neighbor to heal him, and the witch brings a pan of foul-smelling fluid for him to drink, bathe in and sleep within sight of. Jordan's fever abates in a few days, and the Plague ends in 1665, leaving London quieter and emptier. The Dog-Woman tells Jordan that this is God's revenge for the corruption of London. Suddenly, Jordan announces that he intends to go back to sea soon, and his mother walks the streets for comfort but finds that this will not be purged and thinks that the whole city should be burned down. Nicolas Jordan tells her his name as they eat by the campfire, but she does not talk much. She suggests that they burn down the factory which is polluting the river.



On September 2, 1666, a fire breaks out in Pudding Lane, and the Dog-Woman does nothing to stop it because she cannot hinder the work of God. She runs home to await the news, and a day later, it seems that all of London is burning. Jordan and his mother pack and board his ship. She rows down the Thames while he attends to final arrangements, and he finally joins her at midnight. He had found himself a stranger after falling and wonders if he will die or live and be as complete as Fortunata said he would be. Jordan casts off from the bank, and as his mother looks at him standing at the prow, she thinks that she sees a slight, strong woman beside him. She has no voice to call to him and then the woman vanishes, leaving only empty space beside Jordan. As Jordan leaves London, he knows that he will never return. He feels sadness and then hope because the future lies ahead like a glittering city, but it is fake because the future, past and present exist only in man's mind. Even the most solid and real objects are only shadows on the wall, empty space and points of light.

## Fortunata's Story Analysis

This chapter begins with an anecdote about Artemis which contains allusions to Greek mythology. Artemis kills Orion when he rapes her and, as a result, sees her past altered by this single act, though her future remains intact. The Dog-Woman regains perspective of the narrative as she describes Jordan and her journey to London. On the journey, Jordan tells her about visiting the Hopi and what he learned about their language having no terms for the past, present and future because they do not sense time that way. She prepares her hut for Jordan because she wants him to be proud of her and their home.

The point of view reverts to Nicolas Jordan, who tells of an argument with Jack, culminating in Nicolas' recognition of the hallucinating woman in 1990 and his decision to find her. The Dog-Woman sees the Plague as God's judgment on England for allowing the execution of King Charles. When Jordan grows ill and feverish, the witch neighbor provides a concoction which saves his life. Jordan announces again that he plans to return to the sea, and his mother walks the streets for consolation. Her thought that the entire city should be burned down foreshadows London burning.

Nicolas Jordan finds the hallucinating woman who, much like the Dog-Woman, wants to burn down the factory as punishment for its corruption. Nicolas alludes to "The Ancient Mariner" and Van Gogh's "The Sower". London catches fire, fulfilling the earlier foreshadowing, and Jordan and the Dog-Woman escape down the Thames in his ship. Jordan thinks that he will die or live as complete as Fortunata said he would be. As Jordan stands at the prow, the Dog-Woman thinks that she sees Fortunata standing beside him. As he leaves London, Jordan knows that he will never return. At first, he is sad, but then he is hopeful because the future lies ahead like a glittering city; however, he knows that it is fake because the future, the past and the present only exist in one's mind and even the most solid and real objects are only shadows on the wall, empty space and points of light.



# Characters

## Jordan

Jordan is the adopted son of the Dog-Woman. She finds him in the slime near the river when he is a baby. The first thing that Jordan sees is the night divided, half cloudy and half fair, as the moon reflects in the water of the river. Walking with his hands in front of him, he tries to find the path, stating that "every journey conceals another journey within its lines: the path not taken and the forgotten angle" (p. 2). He records the journeys he might have made and his discovery that his own life was written invisibly. Jordan resolves to watch himself, to catch himself disappearing, but the longer he eludes himself, the more obsessed he becomes with the thought of discovery. Gradually, he begins to find evidence of another life which gradually appears before him. The day that his mother finds him in the slime by the river, she hangs a medallion around his neck. She takes him home where she keeps him with no company besides herself and her fifty dogs. Jordan has seen the shining water and the size of the world many times since leaving his mother on the banks of the Thames. He once accompanies a cleaner in a balloon and sees two lovers killed by their own passion. As a boy, Jordan makes paper boats to float on the river, learning how the wind affects the sail but not how love affects the heart. The Dog-Woman mends his broken bones, but Jordan is alone when he loses his heart. While visiting a family whose house has no floor, Jordan notices a dancer, a "woman whose face was a sea voyage [he] had not the courage to attempt" (p. 15). That night he sees her climbing down from her window; he strains his eyes to follow her, but she is gone.

In 1640, Jordan meets John Tradescant on the banks of the Thames when he is about ten years old. As the Dog-Woman takes an apple to Jordan, she sees him in the distance with Tradescant, the gardener to the king. Tradescant meets Jordan when he tries to rescue his paper boat, and he explains how he used to sail around the world, which is too vast to finish sailing. Jordan sleeps for two hours before excusing himself to search for the dancer. He dresses as a woman and is entertained at a house kept by a rich man for his prostitutes. Being dressed as a woman is like being in a foreign country, and he is shocked by the conspiracy among women because he never realized how much they hate and pity men. The woman who owns a fish stall writes a list of rules about men for Jordan. At first, the rules upset him, but then he realizes them to be true. Holding a fish, he is carried out to sea by a flock of birds. Jordan faints in fear and awakes on a windowsill in a strange town. A young girl comes to the window and invites him to share her bed for the night. The next morning, Zillah, the young girl, tells Jordan that she has been locked in this tower since her birth, but Jordan only sees a stallholder from the window of the house. When he pulls her to the window and looks out with her, he sees foaming waves beating against rocks below. As she approaches him with rats to eat, Jordan jumps from the window and lands in a pile of radishes. He tells the townspeople that he has come from the tower, and the people cross themselves and share the story of an incestuous young girl who was forced to build her own death tower which was eventually replaced with this house where no one can live because the



screams are too loud at night. Jordan tells the villagers about his search for the dancer, and the village philosopher tells him that love is better ignored than explored. A discourse on love follows. When night falls and the villagers leave, Jordan wonders if he is searching for the dancer whose name he does not know or the dancing part of himself. Away from home, at sea with Tradescant by his side, Jordan often dreams about a town where the cunning inhabitants knock down their houses and rebuild them in a new location nightly to avoid their creditors. The first time he arrives, he makes friends with a family, but he finds a museum in that location when he tries to revisit them the next day. He finds a windmill when he returns to the museum, and the miller suggests that he go see the Twelve Dancing Princesses who live down the road. Jordan thinks that one dancer may know another, so he bangs on their door, meets them and hears their stories.

A man sells Jordan a necklace made from chicken bones to save him from pain, but nothing is proof against love. Jordan believes that those most in need of change choose to fall in love. He visits a city where the entire population is wiped out three times in a row by love. The third time, the sole survivors, a monk and a prostitute, prohibit love, and marriages are arranged. Jordan looks around and visits the Museum of Love, a gloomy place filled with forbidden items. As he strums a guitar and sings quietly, a crowd gathers. They continue at an inn when night falls, but around midnight, the monk, the prostitute and the chief of police come, but Jordan escapes. Years later, Jordan learns that the monk put the citizens of the city to death for refusing to give up their wicked ways. Jordan leaves the city and rejoins Tradescant's ship, continuing their course towards the Bermudas to gather exotic fruit to practice the art of grafting upon. Jordan slips away from the main ship as soon as they drop anchor, and he rows toward an inhospitable-looking rock while imagining his mother being found as a genie in a bottle. Like this place, his "heart has never been visited; and [he does] not know whether it could sustain life" (p. 86). He searches for a dancer in an effort to find out, though only in the course of his journey does he realize his true aim. When he leaves England, Jordan thinks he is running away, but time has no meaning on this journey which is not linear, and the self is not contained in any moment or place. Jordan compares time to maps. Time is not linear and moves through mankind who are no longer bound by matter which has become what it is: empty space and light. Paintings show how light affects man.

In Time 4, Jordan has no proof that his childhood existed, but his mother claims that it did; however, he trusts no one because everyone lies and "everyone remembers things which never happened" (p. 102). As he walks around the island, Jordan finds a pair of worn-out ballet shoes, and he follows a trail to a house, determined to seek an end to the mystery. He hears music and sees ten points of light and a young woman dancing. The points of light slow down until they become ten women dancing. Jordan falls, and when he recovers, the woman from the dinner party stands over him, smiling. He introduces himself. Memory 1 states that this scene is either in the past or the future; Jordan is either recalling Fortunata or still imagining her. The first thing that Fortunata recalls is the winter of her and her sisters' marriages. They dress for their wedding, but when Fortunata sees her husband, she realizes that she does not want him so she runs



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Description

## The Dog-Woman

The Dog-Woman has a flat nose, heavy eyebrows and only a few teeth which are black and broken. Fleas live in the scars on her face that were caused by smallpox when she was a child. She is very large and outweighs an elephant, but she is very loyal to King Charles. The Dog-Woman rescues Jordan from a river when he is a baby, and she goes to Wimbledon with Jordan and John Tradescant. She attends the king's trial and avenges his death against the Puritans, though she is sad and lonely when Jordan leaves London to explore the world with Tradescant. She kills Preacher Scroggs and Neighbor Firebrace at a brothel. She forgets her former name, but she is now called the Dog-Woman. The Dog-Woman names her son Jordan because she wanted to give him a river name, a name bound to nothing like the waters. She nourishes Jordan when he is a baby. She "should have named him after a stagnant pond and then [she] could have kept him, but [she] named him after a river and in the flood-time he slipped away" (p. 4). When Thomas Johnson brings the first banana to England, the Dog-Woman takes Jordan to see it when he is three years old. Jordan stares into the distance, and she sees the blue sea when she puts her head next to his.

he Dog-Woman is very hideous and large. She outweighs an elephant in a travelling circus, and people are scared of her; however, she and Jordan are always happy, and he is proud of her because no other mother can hold a dozen oranges in her mouth at once. One morning, soon after the start of the Civil War, as the Dog-Woman yells at and strangles Neighbor Firebrace in defense of the king, Tradescant goes to their house to ask Jordan to be a gardener's boy at Wimbledon where he is laying out a garden for Queen Henrietta. The Dog-Woman refuses to lose Jordan and goes with him three days later so that they can begin their new life as servants to the king.

The Dog-Woman wants Jordan to be safe and protected, but she knows that the water will claim him again. She carries on in her old ways for a while, spitting on Puritans she passes for Jordan and Tradescant's sake. One night, a man approaches her, concerned with the liberty of all, and she goes to a meeting and hears the preacher's sermon about the Royalists avenging the king's death without breaking the Holy Law. By their next meeting, the Dog-Woman takes 119 eyes and over 2,000 teeth, but she is hurt when the preacher asks her to be less zealous in the next fortnight. As she decides to continue her sabotage alone, she is approached by the whore from Spitalfields, whose brothel has taken to killing Puritans who visit them, and the whore asks for the Dog-Woman's help in disposing of the bodies because they do not trust men to help them. At the brothel, the Dog-Woman sees Scroggs and Firebrace with a woman and each other. When the Dog-Woman explains her associations with the two men, the prostitute agrees to allow her to return her pains with their bodies. Scroggs and Firebrace return



to the brothel to play Caesar and Brutus before the quarrel, and the Dog-Woman burst through a panel in the wall and kills them. She leaves the room and burns her clothes as the other gentlemen disport themselves amongst the ruins of Scroggs and Firebrace. After the deaths of Scroggs and Firebrace, she vows to restrain her natural capacity for murder. She does not see herself as a criminal because she only seeks justice. She knows that God will forgive her on Judgment Day if it proves she has made mistakes. She sees the Plague and the fire in London as God's judgment on England for allowing the execution of King Charles.

## **John Tradescant**

John Tradescant first meets Jordan while the boy is playing with model boats in the river. He sails to exotic places until his father's death forces him to return to England and his family position as gardener to the king. He asks Jordan to be his assistant at Wimbledon, and he mourns the execution of King Charles. Tradescant returns to voyaging around the world and invites Jordan to join him.

## **Fortunata**

Fortunata is the youngest of the twelve dancing princesses. Jordan first sees her at a dinner party in a house without floors, and he searches for her, finding her at a dancing school in Barbados. As a child, she flies to the Enchanted City with her sisters. Fortunata flies away to avoid marrying the prince, and she is the only sister who does not live together.

## **Preacher Scroggs**

Preacher Scroggs requisitions the Dog-Woman's hut for Jesus and Oliver Cromwell to store papers denouncing the king while the Dog-Woman and Jordan are at Wimbledon. The Dog-Woman sees Scroggs and Firebrace together with a prostitute at a brothel, and she kills them both.

## **Neighbor Firebrace**

Neighbor Firebrace requisitions the Dog-Woman's hut for Jesus and Oliver Cromwell to store papers denouncing the king while the Dog-Woman and Jordan are at Wimbledon. The Dog-Woman sees Scroggs and Firebrace together with a prostitute at a brothel, and she kills them both.

## **Witch Neighbor**

The Witch Neighbor helps the Dog-Woman clean off Jordan when he is found as a baby. She predicts that the only woman he gives his heart to will thwart it. When she



loses her house, the Dog-Woman gives her a dog kennel to stay in, and the witch neighbor provides a potion that saves Jordan from fever during the outbreak of the Plague.

## Nicolas Jordan

Nicolas Jordan is the young man in 1990 who is obsessed with boats and joins the Navy. He sees and hears Tradescant while on an admiralty tug on the Thames. Nicolas Jordan recognizes the photograph of the woman in the paper and sets out to find her.

## Woman in 1990

The woman in 1990 is hallucinating and going insane. She imagines forcing the world leaders to change and improve the world. Her insanity is caused by the mercury in the river. She imagines a giant inside of her that cannot be ignored. She is an attractive woman with a degree in chemistry, but she goes into pollution research. The woman wants to burn down the factory polluting the river.

## King Charles

King Charles is the king of England who is executed in 1649.

## King Charles the Second

King Charles the Second reassumes the throne in England and punishes those who signed his father's death warrant.

## Twelve Dancing Princesses

The twelve dancing princesses, except for Fortunata, the youngest, live together in a house near a small town that Jordan visits while searching for the mysterious dancer from the dinner party. As young girls, they fly to the Enchanted City in the sky every night. They move in together after leaving or killing their individual husbands.



# Objects/Places

## London

London is the main setting of *Sexing the Cherry* and the city where the Dog-Woman and Jordan live.

## Barbados

Barbados is where Jordan travels, meets Fortunata and finds the pineapple which he brings to England.

## The Thames

Jordan takes the Dog-Woman sailing down the Thames once to show her something that she has never seen before and again to escape from London during the fire.

## Wimbledon

The Dog-Woman and Jordan go to Wimbledon to help John Tradescant with the gardening.

## Pineapple

Jordan brings the first pineapple to England from Barbados.

## Banana

When Jordan is a boy, he sees the first banana brought to England, and he sees the ocean while looking at it.

## Medallion

The Dog-Woman gives her son a medallion to wear, and he gives it to Fortunata.

## Ships

Jordan builds model ships when he is a child, as does Nicolas Jordan. Both men travel in ships when they are adults.



## **The Plague**

When the Plague devastates London, the Dog-Woman sees it as God's revenge for the king's death.

## **The Enchanted City**

The Enchanted City defies gravity and floats two hundred miles above earth. The twelve dancing princesses fly there every night.

## **The Factory**

The woman in 1990 wants to burn down the factory because it pollutes the river with mercury.

## **Navy**

Nicolas Jordan joins the Navy because he wants to sail around the world.

# Themes

## Time

The concept of time is explored extensively in *Sexing the Cherry*, and time is arguably the most important theme that the novel investigates. The novel opens with a comment of the Hopi Indians' lack of words for different tenses. The narrative begins with the first thing that Jordan remembers, the night divided. Throughout the text, the narration alternates between time periods, specifically the seventeenth and twentieth centuries; however, the fact that the primary characters in 1990 seem to emulate Jordan and the Dog-Woman serves as a commentary on the incongruity of time. Throughout the novel, flashbacks to the characters' childhoods and other various times in their pasts and futures are common and seem to speak of the subjective nature of time.

In Jordan's narrations, he indicates a connection between time and travel. The anecdote of Jordan meeting Fortunata emphasizes his uncertainty as to whether it occurs in the past or the future. When Jordan meets the twelve dancing princesses, minus Fortunata, they share their stories with him in the form of flashbacks as well. The third chapter of the book, 1649, focuses on events during that year, primarily including the execution of King Charles. Throughout the actual events of the novel, Paintings, Objects, Lies and Time appear sporadically to emphasize the disorientation of time. The fourth chapter is entitled *The Nature of Time* and focuses on time in depth. Jordan claims that he has no proof that his childhood existed because people often recall things that never actually happen.

When the focus shifts to Nicolas Jordan and the hallucinating woman in 1990, these characters seem to parallel Jordan and the Dog-Woman, perhaps hinting at reincarnation but definitely indicating the inconsistency of time. For example, Nicolas claims that his name is Jordan when he encounters Tradescant on the admiralty tug on the Thames. Jordan recounts the anecdote that Fortunata told him about Artemis and why she serves the goddess, and in that anecdote, Artemis indicates that her act of killing Orion changes her past though not her future. The final chapter, *Fortunata's Story*, alternates between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries. The novel ends with Jordan and the Dog-Woman fleeing from the fire that consumes London, and Jordan sees the future lying ahead like a glittering city though he knows that it is fake due to the subjective nature of time.

## Religion and Politics

A recurring theme in *Sexing the Cherry* is that of religion and politics, both individually and as they are connected to one another. The Dog-Woman, in her narratives, frequently expresses faith in God. She also professes loyalty to the King of England and claims to be a Royalist. She does not feel that the sins she commits are morally wrong because she is working toward the greater good, and she is certain that God will forgive



her on Judgment Day if her actions prove mistaken since her intent is pure. Another addition to this theme is the Dog-Woman's encounter with the preacher who sermonizes about reconciling "thou shalt not kill" with "an eye for an eye" in retribution for the execution of King Charles. She later murders Preacher Scroggs and Neighbor Firebrace, who are both homosexuals and disloyal to the king, at a brothel that they frequent.

Tradescant, gardener to King Charles, and Jordan are also loyal to the king. They, along with the Dog-Woman, attend the king's trial and mourn his condemnation and execution. These three characters also express disdain for Oliver Cromwell and the Puritans. When King Charles the Second returns to England and resumes the throne, he punishes those who signed his father's death warrant. Near the end of the novel, the Dog-Woman sees the Plague and the outbreak of a fire which consumes London as God's justified punishment for the execution of King Charles.

## Love and Relationships

Love and relationships play a large role in *Sexing the Cherry*. The Dog-Woman finds Jordan on the banks of a river when he is a baby, and she takes him home to raise him. Her witch neighbor helps her clean him and predicts that he will make his adoptive mother love him, only to break her heart. She also predicts that many women will desire Jordan's heart but he will only give it to one who will spurn it. The Dog-Woman's flashbacks to her childhood reveal a lack of parental love in her youth, and her only experience in romantic love leaves her feeling rejected and thus rejecting love thenceforth.

Another important relationship is the friendship between Jordan and John Tradescant, which leads to Jordan's voyages around the world as an adult. Jordan's lack of knowledge about his own heart leads to his search for the mysterious dancer in an effort to learn if his heart can support life. The second chapter of the novel focuses on the twelve dancing princesses and their experiences with their husbands. Jordan's search ends when he finds Fortunata and spends a month with her in Barbados. Jordan is unsure if his mother loves him; though he thinks that she does, she never actually tells him so.

The theme of love and relationships is also visited in the anecdote about Artemis and Orion. In 1990, Nicolas Jordan longs for a mysterious lover and searches for the hallucinating woman. His relationships with his parents and Jack also contribute to this theme. The Dog-Woman has antagonistic relationships with Preacher Scroggs and Neighbor Firebrace, and she eventually kills them. When she and Jordan escape from the fire in London on a ship down the Thames, she thinks that she sees a woman, presumably Fortunata, standing next to Jordan at the prow of the ship.

# Style

## Point of View

The point of view of *Sexing the Cherry* is first person. The point of view is limited, unreliable, unrealistic and alternating. This is proven by the fact that the narrator at any given point can only report upon their own subjective experiences and feelings. This point of view is important to the novel since it allows the reader to see the same scenes from several different perspectives and obtain a more realistic feel for that particular scene. Without this ability to see multiple perspectives, the reader could not see the many aspects of each scene.

The story is told using a fairly equal distribution of exposition and dialogue, though much of the exposition actually occurs more in the form of monologues as the character whose viewpoint is being given shares their thoughts and feelings during particular sections of the book. Much of the novel is focused on comparing the different viewpoints which different scenes are described from which is enhanced by this point of view. The events of the novel are seen through the viewpoints of Jordan, the Dog-Woman, Nicolas Jordan and the hallucinating woman in 1990.

## Setting

The novel is set in an alternate version of the real world, varying time periods between the seventeenth century and the 1990s. The majority of the text occurs in England, especially London where the Dog-Woman finds and raises Jordan. London is also where the king is tried and executed and also where the Dog-Woman has her adventures after Jordan leaves her to sail around the world. The Dog-Woman and Jordan live at Wimbledon for six years while helping John Tradescant tend the king's garden. Nicolas Jordan and the hallucinating woman in 1990 are apparently also from England.

Jordan sails around the world with John Tradescant. They stop in Barbados, where Jordan meets Fortunata and spends a month with her. It is also here that Jordan finds a pineapple which he returns to England with in order to present it to King Charles the Second. Jordan also visits the town where the girl is trapped in the tower which is near the house of the twelve dancing princesses. While they are children, the twelve dancing princesses fly to the Enchanted City every night. At the end of the novel, the Dog-Woman and Jordan leave London forever when a fire breaks out and spreads through the city.

## Language and Meaning

The language of the novel tends to be somewhat stiff and formal. The sentences are constructed in a slightly antiquated style such as is common in the time period during





which the story is set. Once the reader becomes accustomed to the style of the writing, it does not hinder comprehension of the novel. The language adds a depth to the novel that makes the world in which the novel is set more believable through the language used by the narrating characters throughout *Sexing the Cherry*.

The language of the novel tends to characterize the cultures and characters involved in the story. The novel is told through a fairly equal distribution of dialogue and exposition, though the latter is possibly better described as monologue where the narrating character shares their views on a certain event. A large amount of time tends to pass in short passages, so this sharing of opinions is important to the overall plot of the novel. The somewhat stiff language allows the reader to easily understand the events described as well as the individual character's thoughts and feelings about that particular event. Overall, the effect of the language is fairly equal to understand and very effective in allowing the reader to distinguish between characters.

## Structure

*Sexing the Cherry* is comprised of seven specific sections and 167 pages. The chapters are titled to describe the events and main point of that specific chapter. The chapters range from eleven to forty-five pages long. The chapters are long and full of descriptive passages in which large amounts of time pass in a short space in the novel.

The plot of the novel is extremely complex and encompasses several subplots. The main plot of the novel involves the relationship and concurring events between the Dog-Woman and Jordan. This includes their time at Wimbledon with John Tradescant and their loyalty to the king. Additionally, this plot expands to encompass Jordan's voyages around the world and his mother's adventures while he is gone. Outside of their relationship, the story explores the events in the lives of Nicolas Jordan and the hallucinating woman in 1990.

The novel's pace is quick but confusing as the point of view changes and also alternates between time periods. The novel is very easy to read and the plot is engrossing as the author explores the concept of time. The story is non-linear, and the narrators flashback to different time periods in their lives and also to 1990 as concerns Nicolas Jordan and the hallucinating woman. The novel is easy to read and entertaining in its entirety.



## Quotes

"The Hopi, an Indian tribe, have a language as sophisticated as ours, but no tenses for past, present and future. The division does not exist. What does this say about time? Matter, that thing the most solid and the well-known, which you are holding in your hands and which makes up your body, is now known to be mostly empty space. Empty space and points of light. What does this say about the reality of the world?" Preface, p. i

"Every journey conceals another journey within its lines: the path not taken and the forgotten angle. These are the journeys I wish to record." Introduction, p. 2

"I swear that what he had resembled nothing more than the private parts of an Oriental. It was yellow and livid and long." Introduction, p. 5

"There's many will want this heart but none will have it. None save one and she will spurn it." Introduction, p. 7

"A man must have responsibilities. But they are not always the ones he would choose." "Indeed not, and for a woman the Devil's burden is twice the load." Introduction, p. 18

"I fell in love once, if love be that cruelty which takes us straight to the gates of Paradise only to remind us they are closed for ever." Introduction, p. 33

"But he never touched me. It was a boy he loved. I pierced them with a single arrow where they lay. I still think it was poetic." The Story of the Twelve Dancing Princesses, p. 50

"He admitted he was in love with her, but he said he loved me. Translated, that means, I want everything. Translated, that means, I don't want to hurt you yet. Translated, that means, I don't know what to do, give me time." The Story of the Twelve Dancing Princesses, p. 58

"Then pity me. I pity you, for you are in no danger, it being quite certain that you entered Hell a time ago and will not be returning." 1649, p. 68



"Not at all, for everyone is inclined to love. It is easy to bring on, impossible to end until it ends itself." 1649, p. 78

"I think it is often so that those most in need of change choose to fall in love and then throw up their hands and blame it all on fate. But it is not fate, at least, not if fate is something outside of us; it is a choice made in secret after nights of longing." 1649, p. 79

"What I would like is to have some of Tradescant grafted on to me so that I could be a hero like him. He will flourish in any climate, pack his ships with precious things and be welcomed with full honours when the King is restored. England is a land of heroes, every boy knows that." 1649, p. 85

"Time has no meaning, space and place have no meaning, on this journey. All times can be inhabited, all places visited. In a single day the mind can make a millpond of the oceans. Some people who have never crossed the land they were born on have traveled all over the world. The journey is not linear, it is always back and forth, denying the calendar, the wrinkles and lines of the body. The self is not contained in any moment and place that the self might, for a moment, be seen vanishing through a door, which disappears at once." 1649, p. 87

"The earth is round and flat at the same time. This is obvious. That it is round appears indisputable; that it is flat is our common experience, also indisputable. The globe does not supersede the map; the map does not distort the globe." The Flat Earth Theory, p. 87

"LIES 1: There is only the present and nothing to remember. LIES 2: Time is a straight line. LIES 3: The difference between the past and the future is that one has happened while the other has not. LIES 4: We can only be in one place at a time. LIES 5: Any proposition that contains the word 'finite' (the world, the universe, experience, ourselves...) LIES 6: Reality as something which can be agreed upon. LIES 7: Reality as truth." Hallucinations and Diseases of the Mind, p. 90

"My own life is like this, or, I should say, my own lives. For the most part I can see only the most obvious detail, the present, my present. But sometimes, by a trick of the light, I can see more than that. I can see countless lives existing together and receding slowly into the trees." The Nature of Time, p. 102



"In the Bible only the angels have wings; the rest of us have to wait to be rescued." *The Nature of Time*, p. 112

"The Buddhists say there are 149 ways to God. I'm not looking for God, only for myself, and that is far more complicated. God has had a great deal written about Him; nothing has been written about me." *The Nature of Time*, pp. 115-116

"I wanted to tell him things, to tell him I loved him and how much I'd missed him; but thirteen years of words were fighting in my throat and I couldn't get any of them out. There was too much to say so I said nothing." *The Nature of Time*, p. 123

"I used to make them and sail in them too. I've been everywhere, but I still have a feeling I've missed it. I feel like I'm being laughed at, I don't know what by, who by, it sounds silly. I think I may have missed the world, that the one I've seen is a decoy to get me off the scent. I feel as though I'm always on the brink of making sense of it and then I lose it again." 1990, p. 130

"A lot of small men would like to be heroes, they have to have their fantasy moment. Thing is, the small ones always get killed." 1990, p. 134

"It seems obvious, doesn't it, that someone who is ignored and overlooked will expand to the point where they have to be noticed, even if the noticing is fear and disgust." 1990, p. 141

"The truth is I've lost patience with this hypocritical stinking world." 1990, p. 144

"I don't hate men, I just wish they'd try harder. They all want to be heroes and all we want is for them to stay at home and help with the housework and the kids. That's not the kind of heroism they enjoy." 1990, p. 145

"Artemis lying beside dead Orion sees her past changed by a single act. The future is intact, still unredeemed, but the past is irredeemable. She is not who she thought she was. Every action and decision has led her here. The moment has been waiting the way the top step of the stairs waits for the sleepwalker. She has fallen and now she is awake." *Fortunata's Story*, p. 152

"I asked if their language had some similarity to Spanish and he laughed again and said, fantastically, that their language has no grammar in the way we recognize it. Most



bizarre of all, they have no tenses for past, present and future. They do not sense time in that way. For them, time is one. The old man said it was impossible to learn their language without learning their world. I asked how long it had taken him and he said that question had no meaning." Fortunata's Story, p. 155

"I'll tell you what's the matter. I work twelve, fifteen hours a day at what I'm good at and I'm getting tired of nosy people poking about in the private business of perfectly respectable companies. Everybody wants jobs and money. How do they think we make jobs and money? There's always some fall-out, some consequence we'd rather not have, but you do have them and that's life." Fortunata's Story, p. 158

"We speak of it with longing and with love. The future. But the city is a fake. The future and the present and the past exist only in our minds, and from a distance the borders of each shrink and fade like the borders of hostile countries seen from a floating city in the sky. The river runs from one country to another without stopping. And even the most solid of things and the most real, the best-loved and the well-known, are only hand-shadows on the wall. Empty space and points of light." Fortunata's Story, p. 167

## Topics for Discussion

What is the relationship between time and travel in this novel?

Who is your favorite character, and why?

Who is Nicolas Jordan and the hallucinating woman in "1990", and how are they related to the rest of the story?

What is the significance of fruit in *Sexing the Cherry*?

How does the constantly changing point of view affect this novel?

The novel is full of allusions to art and literature; how does this contribute to or hinder the story?

What roles do religion and politics play in *Sexing the Cherry*?