



Sexing the Cherry

Jeanette Winterson

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In a fantastic world that is and is not seventeenth-century England, a baby is found floating in the Thames. The child, Jordan, is rescued by Dog Woman and grows up to travel the world like Gulliver, though he finds that the world's most curious oddities come from his own mind. Winterson leads the reader from discussions on the nature of time to Jordan's fascination with journeys concealed within other journeys, all with a dizzying speed that shoots the reader from epiphany to shimmering epiphany.

Sexing the Cherry Details

Date : Published August 10th 1998 by Grove Press (first published January 1st 1989)

ISBN : 9780802135780

Author : Jeanette Winterson

Format : Paperback 167 pages

Genre : Fiction, Fantasy, Magical Realism

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From Reader Review Sexing the Cherry for online ebook

Greta says

Once I stood in a museum looking at a "painting" hanging on the wall. It had all the components of a painting: the canvas, lines and squiggles rendered in pencil, the artist's signature, and some blotches of color here and there. I read the review on the little plaque next to it which described what it was made of, its post-modern symbolism, its meaning. I didn't see that at all.

Another time I put on a CD to listen to. It had all the components of "music": instruments, notes, pauses, a musician behind the scenes who determined how the people playing the instruments were to perform. I read the review on the back of the CD case which described the musicians, their instruments, its post-modern interpretation and why it was supposed to be musical. I didn't hear that at all.

Today I finished reading a "book". It had all the components of a work of fiction: characters, words, sentences, descriptions of places and ideas and things. I read the blurbs on the back of the book, the reviews here at Goodreads and on Amazon, online on blogs and forums, and even what the author herself said about her post-modern piece of literature. I tried to understand why people liked it, but somehow nobody ever said why, only that they did. Nobody could even tell me what it all meant. They could only describe the component parts. I didn't get it at all.

All of these "beautiful" works of art I just mentioned remind me of a "good" wine. People go on and on about the bouquet, the subtleties, the nuances, and the vast depth of flavor, the slight hints of this and that. At the end of the day, what they're describing is rotten grapes. I kind of feel that way about this book.

Sinem says

yazar han?m baya muazzam i? ç?karm??. kitap boyu gerçe?i bükmü? arada da felsefi sorular sormu?. de?i?ik bir deneyim oldu benim aç?mdan.

Molly says

Sometimes I think I would like to write a letter of thanks to Jeanette Winterson. The letter would go something like this, "Thank you, Ms. Winterson, for being so magical. Thank you for holding on to the play of childhood and mingling it with a breadth of creative intelligence I never knew existed. Thank you for reading as much as you do and for deploying history in new and invigorating ways. Thank you for playing with your narratives, changing your characters into hyperboles of their human selves, and ducking back into reality with the seamlessness of silk. Thank you for writing. Please write more. I'll read every word."

Lisa says

"People will believe anything. Except, it seems, the truth."

I am in awe of Jeanette Winterson's writing. I don't know how else to put it. After *The Passion*, I honestly thought I could not be more impressed. But I think "*Sexing The Cherry*" may be even better. I suspect that her short novels should be read again as soon as you have added another one to your repertoire, because there are recurring themes and (fruity) flavours that are definitely part of Winterson's general narrative. "*Sexing the Cherry*" is all about the strange correlation between past, present and future, and the way human beings navigate time and space, physically and in their imagination. It is about the places we really go to and the things we experience in our minds. What is real? What is true? If I see something in my head, does that mean it has happened, even if I just imagine it?

"And I sing of other times, when I was happy, though I know that these are figments of my mind and nowhere I have ever been. But does it matter if the place cannot be mapped as long as I can still describe it?"

"*Sexing the Cherry*" is a tale of love, crossing borders of time and space, linking people despite all odds. It is a story about freedom and chains, about making choices and exploring the world outside. It is harsh reality and fantastical imagination. It can be interpreted in many ways and I am sure it speaks to every reader in a different way.

I actually happen to know that for a fact, because I had a silent co-reader on the first 31 pages. I bought my copy of the novel second-hand, and in the margins I found comments from the previous owner, and they increasingly drove me up the walls. I don't mind marking books at all. I do it all the time myself, but in this case I found myself in a noisy conversation, where I tried to listen to the author and the characters, while someone else was telling me basic facts.

"Monstrosity!" - Well yeah, it is a giant woman. No secret there?

"Pregnancy!" - Thanks for the clarification, I would never have guessed?

"Gay??" - Do you know ANYTHING about Jeanette Winterson's fiction?

"Cross-dressing!" - A most beautiful reminiscence of Virginia Woolf's "*Orlando*", another traveller in time and space.

"Religion?" - Well, see note on "Gay?"

And so on. Until the comments stopped abruptly after 31 pages, leaving me to guess whether my co-reader gave up or finally got sucked into the story and stopped wondering about the different topics thrown together in a creative mix.

What really annoyed me was the comment next to the sentence:

"I have seen a banana."

My reading partner underlined the fruit and wrote: "Penis!" Well, yes. And no. One of the amazing things about reading Jeanette Winterson is her magical way of describing reality. She does not hide (homo)sexuality, religion, cross-dressing or brutal violence, so I don't see why it needs to be pointed out all the time. On the other hand, she gives her storylines several layers of meaning, so that the complexity of human desire and exploration is in focus, not a banal equation of word and meaning. The banana in the story is so much more than: $x-2=0$, therefore $x=2$. At some point, the banana incident is explained further:

"When I was little, my mother took me to see a great wonder. It was about 1633, I think, and never before had there been a banana in England."

So yes, it is a phallic symbol, and Winterson does not hide that at all, but it is also a symbol for discovering things you didn't know before, things that you have access to because the world has opened up. The book

was written in 1989, and for parts of Europe, the banana became a symbol of free access to the world market. Reading Eastern European authors of that era, you inevitably stumble upon bananas sooner or later. I just got mad at the one-dimensional interpretation delivered by the person reading MY copy of this beloved book before me. (But thanks for dumping it in a thrift store, my book budget is constantly strained!)

One more thing (short of typing up the book in its entirety here, I can't give it appropriate credit!) that literally illustrates the multi-faceted story: there are little drawings at the beginning of each section, indicating who is currently telling the story. Bananas and pineapples! It took me a while to register that they are sometimes cut in half, and that they tell a tiny story on the side-lines of the main plot (if there is such a thing). This is an art in itself, which I have seen most exquisitely done in Maggot Moon. And just like in "Maggot Moon", the art and the title make sense, but not straight away, and not without thinking for a while. Won't say more about it!

I would say, Winterson is a queen of her art, and a queen of the human heart. I can't imagine there is a simpler way of showing how people express their love than this beautiful scene of a son leaving his tidy, orderly parents to go to the navy:

"I eat all my peas first and this annoys them."

On that last day, however, when the family can't find words to express the love, and loss, and worry, he reflects:

"I tried to leave my peas till last."

Nothing more needs to be said about the effort we put in to show our love, the symbolic little gestures that are only understandable if you are part of that specific unit of love.

Enough said! Read it if you like complex stories and many meanings, if you love poetry and truth and to travel between different times and places while staying in your reading chair. If you look for literal translation of symbolic language, I guarantee you that you will be successful as well, and find at least twenty translations from metaphor to plain meaning until page 31! If you can tell me what purpose it serves I will complete the exercise for the rest of my copy!

Sorry, sometimes my sarcasm steals the keyboard!

Meric Aksu says

Winterson kendi yazm?? oldu?u önsözünde diyor ki; "öykülerin de kendi kendilerini de?i?tirmek gibi bir özelli?i vard?r ve okumak özgürlüktür, bir dizi kural de?il." Bu vesileyle "kat?" cisimlerden olu?mu? dünyaya meydan okuyor kalemiyle. Dünyan?n gerçekli?ini sorguluyor ve de zaman alg?m?z?, Tanr?y? ve benlik sava??m?z?, egomuzu. Geçmi? zaman, gelecek zaman gibi ayr?mlar yapmayan, zaman? tek olarak alg?layan ve bizim asla ö?renmeyece?imiz asl?nda son derece yal?n bir alg? düzeyinde ya?ay?p, bunu sorgulamayan Hopi'lere nazaran bizim yüz?llard?r hep umutla ve özlemle bekledi?imiz gelece?in asl?nda çöldeki kentler misali biz yakla?t?kça par?lt?s?n? kaybedi?ini, biz uzand?kça bo? bir uzam?n bir parças? olduklar?n? idrak edi?imizi anlat?yor. Zamanla.

"Vi?nenin Cinsiyeti"nin ne hakk?nda oldu?unun hiç bir önemi yok asl?nda. Önemli olan, farkedilmenden içinden f?rlayan hayatlar. Farkedilmenden. Okuyucu ba?lam?ndaysa özgür irademizle, hiç kimsenin tesiri

alt?nda kalmadan anlayaca??z ki bir çocuk bir kad?n?n kalbini k?racak ve bunu onu sevmesini sa?layarak yapacak. Öte yandan onun kalbine çok talip ç?kacak ama kimse kazanamayacak, çünkü o a?k?n bir yüre?i nas?l etkiledi?ini ö?renemeyecek. Kalbini vermek isteyece?i tek ki?iyse onu reddedecek ve bu ç?lar? kapsayan modern masalda kocalar?yla olamasa da mutlulu?u yakalam?? on iki prenesesin de hikayesi anlat?lacak. Zaman, içinde bir ileri bir geri gitti?imiz dü?lerimizdeki gibi içimizde hareket ederken, bütün kar??la?t?klar?m?z?n bir parças? old??umuzu, bütün kar??la?t?klar?m?z?n da bizim bir parçam?z oldu?unu anlayaca??z. Zamanla.

"Hangi kayadan yontuldu?unu, hangi çukurdan çekilib ç?kar?ld???n? hat?rla."

P?nar Kür'ün çevirisiyle. Zamanla de?il bir anda sevilen bir yazar var kar??m?zda.

Fatin says

I...I don't know what just happened. I think I need to go reread some parts of this book, or at least think it over again because I am so darn confused.

But as for what I did understand, there are parts of this book that are bewitching, and then there are parts that drag so much it is as if there is no life in them.

This was a vintage twin set, basically I got the book for free along with Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. The set is called Vintage Monsters. So I guess I'll spend tonight thinking about all these confusing parts, and just how this is a monster book that connects to Frankenstein.

So having thought about this, I realize that the Dog Woman is considered a monster, because she's ugly, and huge, and kills people. She never really terrified me, so I guess I didn't pick up on that immediately.

Frankenstein and Sexing the Cherry both have monsters who maybe only be monsters because they have been alienated, and hated because they are so different. Society shuns them, can't accept them, and the anger and pain build up. Deep behind all this anger and pain, are two rather loving creatures, lost in thought.

Tina says

Jeannette Winterson is one of my all-time favorite writers and I'm constantly recommending this slim book. For what it lacks in girth, the book makes up for in substance. I have never more furiously scribbled passages down in my journal for future reference.

The story itself is entertaining enough to merit the book worth a read. The premise is reminiscent of a Brother's Grimm fairy tale - you know, back when fairy tales were sort of dark, creepy, and a little scary, before Disney got its hands on them.

But it's Winterson's introspection on love and relationships, their possibilities and their limits, conveyed deftly through her inventive fables, that make me love this book.

huzeyfe says

Elimden dusurmeden okudum. Ozellikle Ingiliz kültürünü ve tarihini birazcık taniyorsanız keyifle okuyabileceğiniz ilginc ve surukleyici bir kitap.

Joanka says

Winterson is amazing when it comes to fragments, paragraphs, she can tell a tiny little story that is oh so beautiful and then punches you in the gut while still smiling subtly. This is definitely something I fall for, I'm afraid. Add great language skills, she weave the sentences as she pleases and they work masterfully. She happily intertwines reality with fantasy, creating worlds that seems so real, although magical things happen there (while reading I thought that Haruki Murakami's style does something similar with my imagination) and finally she touches upon subjects that are not popular at all, her way of depicting women is simply beautiful.

So yes, I loved the parts of the book. The stories about dancing princesses made me gasp with amazement and my heart clenched more than once during Dog Woman parts. But... Winterson became the victim of her own style in my opinion in this book. There is too much of everything and the chaos that happens feels like more than was planned, to the point I shrugged helplessly realizing I don't really care anymore. Also, there are some disgusting parts and no, I'm not that delicate but when disgusting is supposed to be funny it very rarely gets to me. So maybe that's my problem and mine alone but somewhere in the middle of the book I lost the connection and although it was a pleasant read till the end, I hoped for something more.

I will definitely read more of Winterson in the future and I recommend that to all of you, there are not many authors like that, I'm afraid.

Sinem A. says

Kitaba büyük merak ve bekleni ile ba?lasam da birkaç sayfa sonra beklenimin bo?a oldu?unu anlad?m. Bir kere biçim ve içerik konusunda, dilin kullan?m? (belki çeviriden de kaynakl?d?r bilemiyorum) konusunda bence ciddi s?k?nt?lar var.

Masallar?, fantastik olaylar? hikayeye yedirmek göründü?ü kadar kolay bir meziyet de?il san?r?m. Çünkü yazar bunu ba?aramad??? takdirde karmakar???k bir anlat? ç?k?yor ortaya. Gerçi burada yazar?n yapmak istedi?i de biraz bu asl?nda yani biraz karma?a yaratmak ama bundan keyif alan okuyucular için zevkli bir okuma sunuyor.

Bense san?r?m bu tarz anlat?m? pek sevemedi?imden keyif almad?m. Benim için çok tekdüze bir ritmi vard?. Metnin kurgusu örgüsü anlat?m? bana keyif vermedi.

Paul Bryant says

Time 19:00 – 20.15

Location : The Box

Excerpt from interview with P Bryant

Detective Munch : Thing is, my literary friend, you got no proof.

PB : Proof?

Det Munch : Anyone can invent an identity and claim to have read like a zillion books and then post up fake reviews. Anyone. I could pay 15 year olds to do it.

PB : Well, so what? That's the internet for you. Who cares?

Det Pembleton : Who cares? Did you hear that John? Who cares? We care. Let me explain a little. This Goodreads thing, it used to be nothing much, a few book geeks with no social life, who gave a tinker's damn one way or the other. But now, now's different.

Det Munch : Now you have like 20 million people on this site. Now it's big. Now you get mentions in Fortune magazine. You know Fortune? That's like when rich people notice. Have you heard of rich people? Yeah. When they notice, it's important.

Det Pembleton : So we see that you reviewed this Jeanette Winterson novel here, er, "Sexing The Cherry", and awarded it a whole two stars, I mean, come on buddy, where's your proof that you even read this damn thing?

PB : It was years ago. There's no proof. You just have to take my word.

Det Munch : As a man of honour?

PB : Well, er, I probably wouldn't quite use those words.

Det Munch : Well, let's see if we can figure this thing out. May I direct your attention to these three mug shots. Take your time. Tell us which one is Jeanette Winterson.

He takes photos of Jeanette Winterson, Sara Waters and Ellen Degeneres and spreads them on the table.

PB : Er – this doesn't prove anything.

Det Pembleton : Not in itself. Let's say it's an...indicator.

PB stabs blindly at the photo of Ellen Degeneres.

Det Pembleton : Did you see that, Detective Munch? The interviewee has indicated the photo of Ellen Degeneres who is an American television personality and not an English novelist.

Det Munch : I did see that, Frank. I take that to be ... indicative.

PB : Anyhow, how did I get here? You guys, you're Baltimore murder cops. I seen you in that show.

Det Munch : We're on secondment. You're right, this fake reviewing crime isn't murder - except in the sense of murdering a writer's reputation with fake reviews and fake ratings and general fake fakery. You do realise that your fake reviews get Google hits? This is not some nerdy game. This is real life.

PB : The last thing I remember I was at home – I heard a hissing noise... it was a kind of gas... coming through my front door keyhole...and I woke up here. I've read about this... this is called extraordinary rendition...

Det Pembleton : Well, could be extraordinary to you, but not to us. Come on, let's quit the amusing back and forth – did you really read this novel?

PB : Yes! Years ago!

Det Munch : And what did you think of it?

PB : It was weird and phantasmagorical!

Det Munch: Much like her other one *The Passion* which you also “read” ?

PB: Yes – no – yes. Different. But similar. Oh, I don't know.

Det Pembleton : John, let's leave Mr Bryant to think things over for a minute or so.

They leave The Box and join the Goodreads editorial staff who have been observing the interview through the two way mirror.

Det Pembleton : He'll break. They all do, eventually.

Tim says

possibly my absolute favorite book of all time. I want jeanette winterson to read me a bedtime story every night. I didn't know how much I could worship an author before I read this. It's short but potent, and thoroughly infused with her wit. Please please read it, it's wonderful.

Jo (An Unexpected Bookish Geek) says

"I had sex with a man once: in and out. A soundtrack of grunts and a big sigh at the end"

This being the third book I've read by Winterson, I've concluded that she is certainly not the average writer. She's incredibly unique, and there is an oddity in her works. Winterson is an acquired taste, but she's

definitely "my taste"

This book is set in England, and the story jumps back and forth in time. During this, we meet various characters. I think the dog woman has to be my favourite. Wove expertly throughout the story, are other known characters from various fairy tales and myths. Doing this definitely worked, and I think it helped support the main story rather well.

The narration jumps fairly fast to one character to the next, so therefore to understand what's potentially going on, one must pay close attention. I found myself confused at various moments in the book.

The book is all based around love. It involves characters that cannot express the love that is controlling them, and eventually leading down the path of heartbreak.

There is a hilarious scene nearing the end, where the dog woman recalls when she slept with a man. Based on the fact the dog woman is a fairly large woman, the man complains in great vulgarity, that she is just "too big" downstairs to satisfy him. It's amusing as the dog woman hasn't a clue what he's referring to!

Before I finish this, I must say how much I fucking rate the dog woman. She's a force to be reckoned with, she's strong and powerful and doesn't give one singular shit about what society make of her. Isn't that how we all should be?

Austen says

I loved this book.

At the level of plot, we read about a gigantic woman who finds a small boy, Jordan, on the banks of the Thames in London in the 17th century. She raises this boy and watches him grow to develop a passion for boats, sailing, and exploring, knowing that she will lose him to his passions, and knowing that he will lose his heart to a woman who will not return his love.

At the core of this novel, though, are metaphysical and philosophical explorations--both for us as readers, and also for Jordan as an explorer. Winterson sets out two ideas that guide the metaphysical inquiry of the novel in a brief preface: that all time might exist simultaneously without the traditional divisions of past, present, and future, and that matter is largely empty space and points of light. And so even though Jordan travels the world, he comes to realize that the true journeys are inward, into our own minds and our own hearts. Along with these post-modern ideas that undercut traditional, rationalist notions of the truth of the world, we also explore the bafflingly complex affairs of the heart. Is it possible to find true love in a world where matter and time do not exist as we have previously believed them to? Was it ever possible to find true love? Does it even matter? Is it possible to find more a more fulfilling life exploring our more solitary desires? According to one of the most well-received portions of this novel (according to many of the Goodreads reviews I perused), The Story of the Twelve Dancing Princesses, it seems clear that traditional love existing in marital life is largely a fiction. Instead, these women find fulfillment in a lifestyle more fitting to their hearts--and ultimately, living together--than the arranged marriages they lived in briefly as young women. And their individual stories bear this out. All were slightly touched by magic--elegant dancers because they were born with the capability to fly, and were finally able to find their own joy, rather than live in a world that sought to restrict the natural, magical freedom of their hearts and their bodies.

Yet the characters in this novel still seem to desire love, as I believe we all do. Jordan's mother doesn't seem to have given up believing in it, though she is never able to find a suitable male companion. Jordan, after meeting his love one night, and without even speaking to her at dinner, searches the world to find her again. He does finds her, but like Artemis on her island (the myth of she and Orion, slightly re-imagined here by

Winterson), needs no man. She has found peace in her own life, and sends Jordan back upon his way with a necklace and a kiss. Damn... I feel him, there.

He spends the rest of his life exploring the world, and when he lands in London, he has been gone for 13 years. He reunites with his mother, but it is clear that he still thinks of Fortunata, the object of his heart's longing.

In this case, the epic journey narrative is somewhat inverted. And Winterson's characters reflect on this over the course of the novel, as well. Rather than the heroic, man's man fulfilling his hearts desire to explore the world and find adventure while his beautiful wife and loving children send him off tearfully and wait for his return, Jordan is more sensitive--more in touch with his feminine side, if you will. He only loves one woman, and she does not want him the way he wants her. Further, he considers that for all his traveling, the journeys of the world are not worth more than the explorations of the mind, and that the more he journeys he took, the more of the world there was, and the more mystery crept into his mind. And in this novel, we see three travelers in this novel who seem slightly unsatisfied, who seem always to be searching. As such, this idea recurs.

Jordan postulates that in travel we are really searching for ourselves, and that finally, this can be accomplished living in a muddy hut, and raising dogs in the bank of the Thames. In fact, his gargantuan and endearingly murderous and grotesque mother (to whom he returns after his journey), seems to have a much better grasp of who she is than almost anyone I know, and to find peace in it. Many in her situation would find only depression, but she raises fighting dogs, and lives life as she pleases. She seems to hope for love, and companionship, but also seems to find peace in its absence.

This book is fantastically imaginative, and at moments reminds me of Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* (in fact, strikingly so in Jordan's description of some of the places that he visits. The humor and grittiness of the plot, as well as the insightful explorations of time, space, matter, meaning, love, and life make this short novel as rewarding as it is dense, while still effortless to read.

This book leaves me more peaceful in the face of complexity in the world. I do not think I ascribe to fairytale notions of love or what sort of life I ought to lead, and this book makes me feel better about that. I feel confident that finding ones' self is the true task in life, whether that takes us around the world, or occupies our hours in the same place for a lifetime, and that the attendant chaos is to be welcomed. And while our passions are worthy indulgences, we should also know that our passions for others are bound to be temporary and somewhat tragic--for that is their nature, and we should only accept it as part of our larger journey to discover self, "unexpectedly, in a garden somewhere or on a mountain watching the rain."

Riff says

Painfully pretentious and drowning in a mess of its failed aspirations, it's always a bad thing when an author becomes too fond of the sound of their own voice. Characters, ideas, feelings, and stories are lost under the weight of what I can only presume is Winterson's creative vanity. While arguably intelligent she lacks the poetic ability required to pull off a style like this, using language which distracts and detracts from the world she is struggling to present. A wonderful imagination is compromised by trying far too hard to be lyrically interesting, leaving its subjects as crude and sloppy afterthoughts to the writer's aspirations. A great shame, because there would otherwise be a lot here to like; curious and observant visions wrapped in a fantasy motif. Sadly, it is a book that systematically fails on just about every level.

Shayantani Das says

A very rewarding reading experience!

My favorite quote:

“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. God is bigger, like my mother, easier to find, even in the dark. I could be anywhere, and since I can't describe myself I can't ask for help.”

Lea says

I may come back later and bump this up to 5 stars -- I really enjoyed the story and Winterson's gorgeous writing.

Well, describing this one is going to take some doing . . .

Set in England, the story jumps back and forth between the 1600s and the 1990s (or thereabouts). We see moments in the lives of various characters: the Dog Woman, a coarse giant of a woman who is continually reforming her murderous ways; Jordan, her son, who she found floating in the Thames; Nicholas Jordan, a naval cadet; as well as various characters from myths and fairy tales.

The story is structured so that it moves back and forth through time, sometimes with the characters meeting and interacting in ways that would be impossible in reality. The narrative skips from one person to the next, and the reader needs to pay close attention in order to tell which character is narrating.

The main themes seem to be time and love -- there is a lot of heartbreak in this book, people who are unable to express the love they feel, as well as people who turn their backs on the love they've been given.

From the book:

As I drew my ship out of London I knew I would never go there again. For a time I felt only sadness, and then, for no reason, I was filled with hope. The future lies ahead like a glittering city, but like the cities of the desert disappears when approached. In certain lights it is easy to see the towers and the domes, even the people going to and fro. 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.

My favorite character -- not just here, but in all of the recent books I've read -- is the Dog Woman. She is so authentically herself, even though she is completely aware of being unlike anyone else. She isn't ashamed of her massive size -- she views herself as strong and powerful. There is a funny scene towards the end of the book where she relates the only time she slept with a man -- it's vulgar and hysterical, especially because she finds herself bemused by the man's assertion that she is just too LARGE; to her, she is exactly the right size and she has absolutely no idea what he's talking about.

Highly recommend!

Michelle Yoon says

In *Sexing the Cherry*, Jordan is found floating in the River Thames. A large woman, known only as the Dog Woman, rescues baby Jordan, and brings him up like her own son. But Jordan, having been 'born' of the river, belongs to the river, and it isn't long before the flowing waters reclaim him once again, as he sets off with sails to travel the world.

The book is told with alternating narratives, first Jordan, then the mother, then Jordan again and so forth. But while the mother's narratives sound like actual accounts of what is truly happening in their world, the same can't be said for Jordan's narrative. Because you see, Jordan is a dreamer. His richest experiences are in his dreams, as he travels to places not yet known to him, but which he believes to perhaps truly exist.

Having dreamt of a beautiful dancer once, he then sets off in search of this elusive character. Which brings him to meet the Twelve Dancing Princesses. They, who were supposed to have lived happily ever after with their twelve princes, are now living together as sisters once again. They each tell him their story, and each one of them as enchanting as the next. All very unpredictable.

Towards the end of the book, we are introduced to another pair of characters, now in 1990. Nicholas Jordan is also a dreamer, someone who dreams of sailing and travelling the world, and to do so he decides he wants to join the army. During this time, he reads a newspaper article about a nameless woman who sits by a polluted river to draw attention and create awareness about what damage the world is suffering from.

Her thoughts (I assume these are her thoughts and beliefs), having been molded into the story, read just as beautifully as fiction.

Jayde says

I really wanted to enjoy this book and whilst I appreciate that it is written very well in a literary sense, it did not appeal to me at all. The relentless misandry made it quite a boring read, despite its short length. I could see flashes of brilliance in this book (the dancing princesses, the character of dog-woman), however none of it was fleshed out to any sort of degree to make me want to read on. All in all a difficult 140 pages to trawl through. I can't help thinking that if it were a little longer and the relentless male bashing toned down I'd have enjoyed it more, but then that wasn't probably the authors aim.

Jenny says

The juxtaposition of the stories of the giant woman living on the banks of the Thames with her dogs and her adopted son who is drawn to exploring the world in the mid 1600s was interesting. The incorporation of the stories of women who although kept by men for their pleasure are still able to lead lives of their own and escape were interesting asides as was the story of the 12 dancing princesses. The drawings of the banana and the pineapple at the top of the paragraph when the narrator changed was overly cute but OK. However, the book fell apart for me when the giantess moved on into violence against the Puritans and a modern story

about a young man who goes to sea and a female chemist who is testing water for contamination.

What exactly is it that I did not like? Too much for too short a book. too many loose connections -- like the fact that Jordan, the male narrator, may have wings he has never used. An attempt at fantasy and fabulism that is not quite good enough to measure up to the work of someone like Angela Carter or an attempt to show as the narrative of the book falls apart that so is our world, something done more skillfully by John Barth. I can't quite put my finger on it, but overall not a particularly satisfying book.
