

Jeannette winterson weight

[Experience](#), [Human Nature](#)



In Jeanette Winterson's novel *Weight*, the author demonstrates how myths have modern personal relevancies and can encourage each reader to investigate the three main subject matters in their lives; boundaries, freedom, and guilt. The numerous references to walls throughout the novel signify the boundaries, which make Atlas strive for freedom. Winterson's *Weight*, is a modern rewrite on an old myth of Atlas and Heracles, and the challenges they endure can be interpreted by individual readers for personal relevancies.

Atlas, a father of daughters, is faced with the burden of carrying the world on his shoulders. This can represent a feeling as if one is carrying a world of stress and guilt on one's shoulders and conscience. Heracles, the stronger of the two, takes the weight of the world from Atlas momentarily and struggles to carry the burden when he sends Atlas to pick three golden apples from the Garden of Hesperides. For example, boundaries are represented by walls throughout Winterson's novel, not just the physical structures but also any other representation of a boundary.

Winterson conceives the body itself as a boundary, in the sense that the skin stands between a human and everything else and although Atlas feels trapped in his own body, he escapes into his own mind to ponder the philosophies of boundaries and the universe. Winterson writes, " At last I began to hear something, I found that where the world was close to my ears, I could hear everything. I could hear conversation, parrots squawking, donkeys braying. I heard the rushing of underground rivers and the crackles of fires lighted.

Each sound became a meaning and soon I began to de-code the world. ... As the dinosaurs crawl through my hair and volcanic eruptions pock my face, I find I am become a part of what I must bear. There is no longer Atlas and the world; there is only the World Atlas. Travel me and I am continents. I am the journey you must make. " (p. 24). This can represent feeling stuck within self, feeling trapped and almost tortured to find freedom. Although boundaries are a very strong representation within the novel, there is a connection between the walls and the freedom of nothingness.

Atlas constantly is escaping into the limitless of his imagination, where he is not punished for wanting the forbidden. The Gods hoped that by punishing Atlas to be trapped in his body under the weight of the world that they would contain his mind, and they were mistaken. This can be interpreted as the strength and perseverance from within an individual. The wall that Atlas builds around the Garden of Hesperides is constructed in such a way that it explains freedom and nothingness that can sometimes be unappreciated.

Winterson writes, " I built a walled garden, a temenos, a sacred space. I lifted the huge stones with my own hands and piled them carefully, as a goatherd would, leaving tiny gaps to let the wind through. A solid wall is easily collapsed. My mother stirring in her sleep could do as much. A wall well built with invisible spaces will allow the winds that rage against it to pass through. When the earth underneath it trembles, the spaces make room for movement and settlement. The wall stands. The wall's strength is not in the stones but in the spaces between the stones.

It's a joke against me I think, that for all my strength and labour, the wall relies on nothing . Write it more substantially - NOTHING. " (p. 16). On the

contrary, carrying the world doesn't only make one feel trapped, it also feels as if one is carrying stress and guilt on their conscience, which feels as heavy as the world on one's shoulders. Heracles is a representation of this when he sends Atlas to pick the golden apples from the Garden of Hesperides, and takes the weight of the world while Atlas travels.

Heracles suffers while holding up the world. She writes " Meanwhile, Heracles was not happy. The world was much heavier than he had guessed. His strength lay in action not in endurance. He liked a short sharp fight, a good dinner and sleep. His body was as strong as Atlas's, but his nature was not. Hera was right about him there. Heracles's strength was a cover for his weakness. " (p. 58). While Heracles is holding up the weight of the world, he begins to think of murdering his own children, and all the brutal sexual abuse he has committed on women.

This is a very strong moment for readers. When one uses their strength to such exhaustion, physically and emotionally, they tend to think about the wrong doings, and stress within their life and can no longer cope. Winterson shows this by writing, " Heracles was more afraid now than he had been in his whole life. He could accept any challenge except the challenge of no challenge. He knew himself through combat. He defined himself by opposition. When he fought, he could feel his muscles work, and the blood pumping through his body.

Now he felt nothing but the weight of the world Atlas was right, it was too heavy for him. He couldn't bear it. He couldn't bear this slowing turning solitude. " (p. 71). In conclusion, humans need both freedom and boundaries. One may think they want freedom and despise boundaries, but to have no

limitations and have complete freedom can actually be a burden itself. Humans need the weight of boundaries to keep from drifting away from reality. For Jeanette Winterson, weight can be equated with retelling a myth.

The "I want to tell the story again" theme applies as Winterson writes about how you can tell a story numerous times, but need to stay within the boundaries of the original. For others, this novel may open up a new way of thinking, and coping with personal challenges one can face in modern day. Jeanette Winterson's *Weight* is an authentic retelling of a classic myth, including the use of science facts and personal relevancies. Between the limitations, liberty, and culpability that the two main characters face, each reader can interpret each section inversely. Reference Winterson, J. (2006). *Weight* (2005). Toronto: Vintage Canada.