

**A QUESTION OF MARRIAGE:  
OF HOLY GRAILS, ULTIMATE MEANINGS AND  
UNTOUCHABLES**

by

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## ABSTRACT

The study draws on a post-structural epistemology to interrogate ‘the truths’ of marriage, to foreground the interplay between the institution and society as the site of poetic and political struggle, and in particular psychology’s influence (on marriage) as a dominant knowledge system. This exploration of marriage shows marriage to be anything but ‘neutral’; it highlights marriage as the receptacle of societal, ideological struggle and in the process it highlights the tensions inherent to our subjectivity, in relation to marriage. It then asks the question as to how psychology and in particular marital (couple) therapy has played a role in the sedimentation of certain dominant stories of marriage and self (in relation to marriage), how it has reified marriage as the preferred form of heterosexual pair bonding and how it has reified ‘husband’ and ‘wife’ as dominant templates of being.

The implicit question here concerns, one, the silencing and marginalization of alternative descriptions of marriage and, two, alternative ways of pair-bonding. The critical analysis of the knowledge/power interrelationship, as it plays out in the sphere of intersection between marriage and psychology, raises questions about the (ideological) accountability of the profession: for the kind of world we manufacture and maintain. The critical-affirmative paradigm of the thesis compels an engagement with ‘alternatives’ in response to the critical deconstruction of marriage. In the final analysis the study then moves into the arena of ‘challenges’. The latter constitutes an attempt to construct an agenda for action (on the level of psychological practice) that would allow for re-description and alternative descriptions of pair-bonding and self.

## OPSOMMING

Die studie word begrond deur 'n post-strukturele epistemologie. Dit maak dit moontlik om 'die waarhede' van die huwelik te ondersoek, om die interspel tussen die institusie en die samelewing te voor grond as die lokus van poetiese en politieke stryd, en in besonder sielkunde se invloed (op die huwelik) as 'n dominante kennis sisteem. 'Die huwelik' tree uit hierdie verkenning as als behalwe 'neutraal' nie deurdat die huwelik blootgele word as die 'houer' van sosiale, ideologiese stryd en in die proses werp hierdie verkenning lig op die spanning inherent tot ons subjektiwiteit, in verhouding tot die huwelik. Die studie vra dan die vraag hoe sielkunde, en in die besonder huweliks(pare) terapie 'n rol gespeel het in die sedimentering van sekere dominante stories van die huwelik en self (in verhouding tot die huwelik), hoe dit die huwelik gereïfiseer het as die verkose vorm van heteroseksuele paarbiding en hoe dit 'man' en 'vrou' gereïfiseer het as dominante template van menswees.

Die implisiete vraag hier het betrekking op, een, die stil maak en marginalisering van alternatiewe beskrywings van die huwelik en, twee, alternatiewe maniere van paarbiding. Die kritiese analise van die kennis/mag interverhouding, soos dit uitspeel in die sfeer van interseksie, tussen die huwelik en sielkunde, maak vrae oop aangaande die aanspreeklikheid van die professie: vir die tipe wereld wat ons help om te vervaardig en onderhou. Die kritiese-affirmatiewe paradigma van die tesis vra vir 'n omgaan met die 'alternatiewe' in reaksie op die kritiese dekonstruksie van die huwelik. In die finale analise beweeg die studie dan in die arena van 'uitdagings'. Laasgenoemde aksie begrond 'n poging om 'n agenda vir aksie (op die vlak van sielkundige praktyk) te konstrueer, wat sou toelaat vir her-beskrywings en alternatiewe beskrywing van paarbiding en self.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*“Night.*

*I’m sitting at my screen reading this story. In turn, the story reads me. Did I write this story, or was it you, writing through me, the way the sun sparks the fire through piece of glass?”*

- Jeanette Winterson (*Power Book*)

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