



Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit

Jeanette Winterson

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This startling novel describes the adolescence of a ferociously bright and rebellious orphan adopted into a Pentecostal household in the dour, industrial Midlands and her coming to terms with her unorthodox sexuality.

Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit Details

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From Reader Review Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit for online ebook

Paul Bryant says

THIS IS A NUMBERS GAME

According to my Goodreads shelf, I have read 490 novels. If Joyce Carol Oates, Marcel Proust and William Gass have anything to do with it, I'll never make 500. But I want to see that magic number 500 there! I want to be able to say "I have read 500 novels, hear me roar!" So, I'm eating up SHORT novels like a madman right now, never mind the quality, feel the pages! 300? Too long! 250? Still too long!

Oranges is short and sweet; really, short and bittersweet. It was drop dead fabulous from page one. Here is how to write a) an autobiographical novel; b) an autobiographical comic novel; c) an autobiographical lesbian comic novel; d) an autobiographical lesbian religious comic novel. Here is rueful sweet-natured working-class English life without the usual accompanying hauteur you get from writers like Zadie Smith and bloody Martin Amis.

THERE'S ALWAYS A BUT

There are two types of writing here, the flat, banal account of JW's life, which I loved, and the experimental bits , which I hated. E.g. on p155

On the banks of the Euphrates find a secret garden cunningly walled. There is an entrance, but the entrance is guarded. There is no way in for you. Inside you will find every plant5 that grows growing circularwise like a target. Close to the heart is a sundial and at the heart is an orange tree.

And blah blah blah. All a bit portentously groanworthy. But I think JW thought these were actually the best bits, because her writing took off in that direction (*The Passion; Sexing the Cherry*); so that puts me in the same situation as people who only like The Clash's first album.

LET IT BE ORANGES... NAKED

Paul McCartney, scandalized at the overdubbings Phil Spector sloshed over the Beatles' *Let It Be* album, issued his own de-overdubbed version *Let It Be...Naked* in 2003. In 2011 JW issued her de-overdubbed version of *Oranges* called *Why be Happy when you Could be Normal?* So that will be interesting.

I CONTAIN MULTITUDES

I only just issued a pronouncement that no one under 30 could write a good novel except Emily Bronte. JW was 24 when she wrote *Oranges*. But cough cough, this is a memoir, really. The rule still stands. Although *wait*, that means it can't be counted in my 500 novels. Hmm...okay, if JW says it's a novel, it's a novel!

Joe Strong says

Oranges are not the only fruit, a book ruined by its author. And well, itself. When I began reading it for the first time, I enjoyed it; Jeanette was a witty character, though a tad hard to relate to, and her life as a girl trying to break free of a small town is a story many of us can understand.

What hurt the book for me was its pretence, emphasised in Winterson's ludicrously self gratifying introduction. It is difficult, for someone used to the more modest comments of authors such as Woolf ("I have my hopes for this book" – Mrs Dalloway), to understand how someone could be so arrogant and self indulged with themselves, especially after their apparently tragic childhood. This, unfortunately, began to rear its ugly head in the novel, as well.

Jeanette the character is absurd – she lives in the perpetual hypocrisy that no one understands her, yet she refuses to understand the plights of others, for example, Melanie. This simply was not countered, or indeed, addressed as a character flaw. Instead it was held as a beacon. That annoyed me.

However, the novel itself did present an interesting read in many respects. The magic realism used was something I had not come across in my reading, and at first I was impressed at the way it was used to subtly parallel Jeanette's life. Then it began to play a larger role, and the more I saw of it, the more I disliked its use. I suppose it was 'the fashion at the time' the book was written. Now it is less apparent in novels, though can still be used to great avail.

For me a novel that attacks the establishment of the church is always welcome. And one that attacks the prejudice that we still see against homosexuals is something I feel ought to be praised. Unfortunately, so did Winterson.

Three words: hit and miss.

Michael says

A quirky and warm-hearted tale of a girl, Jeanette, growing up in an evangelical household in England with a goal for her to become a missionary. She is well-behaved, a true believer comfortable with this goal. She feels love from her mother, with a lively relationship often lifted with humor and a sense of virtue from righteous community-minded spirit. Anyone who strays from the path of virtue can find forgiveness for succumbing to temptations of the Devil. Her mother works as an administrative assistant for their church's missionary society and pitches in directly for outreach efforts to convert unbelievers around England and for organizational support of revival meetings. She just knows Jeanette is destined for great things:

We stood on the hill and my mother said, "The world is full of sin."

We stood on the hill and my mother said, "You can change the world."

Jeanette doesn't have much to say about her father, but her mother is a rock for her, fighting the good fight: *She was Old Testament through and through. Not for her the meek and paschal Lamb, she was out there, up front with the prophets, and much given to sulking under the trees when the appropriate destruction didn't materialize. Quite often it did, her will or the Lord's I couldn't say.*

Jeanette is home schooled for a long time. When her hunger for knowledge gets big, she enters the local rural school system and gets a rude awakening. Her religious obsession gets her tagged as odd. Parents complain when their kids get nightmares from Jeanette's tales about the horrors of demons and fate of the damned. She

can't understand why the religious themes in her art work, like an embroidery project with the words "The Summer is ended and we are not yet saved", make her a target for ridicule. But she is tough and resilient and soon her broad readings are giving her plenty of fuel to adapt and philosophically argue circles around anyone who marshals ideas against her. Her downfall begins with perplexity about her dreams of marriage in which the bridegroom turns out to be an animal or an empty suit of clothes. At a Bible camp, she befriends a girl named Melanie. At a sleepover, her affections for her take a surprising turn:

We read the Bible as usual, and then told each other how glad we were that the Lord had brought us together. She stroked my head for a long time, and then we hugged and it felt like drowning. Then I was frightened and couldn't stop. There was something crawling in my belly. I had an octopus inside of me.

As her sin becomes apparent, her mother and the pastor do their best to pray her and shame her out of her sinful trajectory. Rather than getting emotionally destroyed, this girl raised to certitude and trust in her own goodness boldly breaks away. She begins to think her way forward by making up stories, fables, and parables to account for alternative views of reality. She comes to see stories as a core of truth and not to be distinguished as an alternative to historical fact:

It's a way of explaining the universe while leaving the universe unexplained, it's a way of keeping it all alive, not boxing it into time. Everyone who tells a story tells it differently, just to remind us they everyone sees it differently. Some people say there are true things to be found, some people say all kinds of things can be proved. I don't believe them. The only thing that is certain is how complicated it all is, like string full of knots. ...

Some people like to separate storytelling which is not fact from history which is fact. They do this so they know what to believe and what not to believe. ... Knowing what to believe had its advantages. It built an empire and kept people where they belong, in the bright realm of the wallet.

Will she find a way back to her mother's heart? Will she find a way back to Melanie's love? How much of this is Winterson's own history and the love of storytelling by Jeanette in the book a window on the author's own path to becoming a writer? Reading this first novel was a rewarding complement to the three others I've been enjoying. She has a fresh, playful voice, avoids melodramatics, and likes to infuse mythological and philosophical elements into her stories.

lori mitchell says

favorite excerpts:

"I miss God. I miss the company of someone utterly loyal. I still don't think of God as my betrayer. The servants of God, yes, but servants by their very nature betray. I miss God who was my friend. I don't even know if God exists, but I do know that if God is your emotional role model, very few human relationships will match up to it."

"As it is, I can't settle, I want someone who is fierce and will love me until death and know that love is as strong as death, and be on my side for ever and ever. I want someone who will destroy and be destroyed by me. There are many forms of love and affection, some people spend their whole lives together without knowing each other's names. Naming is a difficult and time-consuming process; it concerns essences, and it means power. But on the wild nights who can you call home? Only the one who knows your name."

Petra X says

Thinly-veiled memoir of the author's youth growing up with a religious nutter of a mother and a father whose character was subsumed entirely by his monster of a wife's.

I don't know why some girls become lesbians, presumably most are just made that way, but I do think some become that way through choice. In the book it's almost as if there was one thing calculated to offend the mother and the entire community of zealots as a mortal sin, but not offend anyone else in the world, the only possible rebellion for a girl who wasn't at all rebellious by nature.

I derive this theory from the fact that I was all sex-n-drugs-n-rock-n-roll in my youth (and beyond) and my son is Mozart, chess and judo. He's rebelling, and for a not-rebellious kid, he's really found the truly acceptable way to get at me (all that opera played at full volume) but not the world.

Whether it was true or a literary device doesn't matter, the book was hugely entertaining and a damn good read.

Fabian says

I seriously had no idea that this year I would read 2 lesbian books (& 4 gay ones!): "The Line of Beauty," "The Mad Man," "On the Road," & of course let us not forget "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn"). It's an obscure genre, if you ask me. "Tipping the Velvet" was disappointingly bland, although racy in parts and historically accurate, but it still felt a tad conventional. This, Winterson's first uber-acclaimed novella, is philosophical and entertaining and funny, part autobiography and part soaring flight of fancy. It's an unpredictable telling of that age-old story of the eversad girl-meets-girl dilemma. As an outsider in her rather comically tightly-knit religious community, Jeanette interweaves fable-like metaphors to better understand her mother's absolute rejection of her sexual orientation. But instead of deserting God, it's both interesting & empowering to see how she manages to strengthen her personal relationship with Him.

Deedles says

When I was a child, I had found a pair of gloves in the middle of the street in my cul-de-sac. They were black and worn with a little embroidered heart at each wrist. I slipped them on and flexed my fingers, amazed at how nicely they fit. I took them home and put them in my sock drawer, only taking them out on Thursdays for my bike ride down the street to piano lessons.

This book is exactly like those gloves. I found this book while on a field trip for pre-college English class, crammed in backward on a shelf between two books by Anais Nin. The title made me smile, so I turned to the first page and read the introduction. It is safe to say that Jeanette Winterson's writing wormed its way into my heart rather fast.

Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit is a great, great read. Winterson beautifully mixes religious theology with budding sexuality, curiosity and identity. It was nice to watch Jeanette (the main character) grow along with

the conflict of accepting her "demon". In a lot of ways it reminds me of the documentary *For The Bible Tells Me So* .

Elyse says

A delicious fruit bowl....

Funny, clever, poetic, quirky, creative well written bittersweet story.

Jeannette's innocence was so real.....her heart pure.

A terrific inspiring small book! Amazing how humor- and 'witty-charm' can transform sensitive situations.

Thanks Cecily!

Lishesque says

You need a lot of patience for Jeanette Winterson's weird little Beowulfesque tangents, but if you can get past that, there are little gems of brilliant clarity scattered throughout.

For me, this bit redeems all the boring parts:

"But where was God now, with heaven full of astronauts, and the Lord overthrown? I miss God. I miss the company of someone utterly loyal. I still don't think of God as my betrayer. The servants of God, yes, but servants by their very nature betray. I miss God who was my friend. I don't even know if God exists, but I do know that if God is your emotional role model, very few human relationships will match up to it. I have an idea that one day it might be possible, I thought once it had become possible, and that glimpse has set me wandering, trying to find the balance between earth and sky. If the servants hadn't rushed in and parted us, I might have been disappointed, might have snatched off the white samite to find a bowl of soup. As it is, I can't settle, I want someone who is fierce and will love me until death and know that love is as strong as death, and be on my side for ever and ever. I want someone who will destroy and be destroyed by me. There are many forms of love and affection, some people can spend their whole lives together without knowing each other's names. Naming is a difficult and time-consuming process; it concerns essences, and it means power. But on the wild nights who can call you home? Only the one who knows your name. Romantic love has been diluted into paperback form and has sold thousands and millions of copies. Somewhere it is still in the original, written on tablets of stone. I would cross seas and suffer sunstroke and give away all I have, but not for a man, because they want to be the destroyer and never the destroyed." (can't remember what page)

Paquita Maria Sanchez says

I tried to write this review eight minutes before I was supposed to go to work. I did not meet the deadline. I only mention this so I can make sure you know what quality shit you're getting when you shop here. My reviews occasionally take longer than eight minutes to compose.

Though much, much better than my miserable first experience with Winterson, I am still unsure about her after reading this, still plagued by minor annoyances. As with that other one, this book is riddled with what it seems to think are profound insights delivered in this showy "I'll give you a minute to simmer on *that*" way, an almost uncomfortable way, like someone telling you a bad joke and then staring at you all silently and expectantly. That feeling in the ensuing awkward silence? The state of me about 85% of the time while reading this. Interspersed with these profoundies are little whimsy-cutes that are I suppose intended to offset the serious tone, like this novel is letting you know just how unserious it takes its very serious self, all seriousness aside. It makes for a weird time.

And it is serious material. The coming-of-age of a lesbian and aspiring preacher in a devout household, rejected by her church and her adoptive mother for her "unnatural passions". It sounds like something I would love, because I adore the shredding of religious hypocrisy, and am fascinated by people raised in such a crazy environment since it is so far removed from my own experience, having been brought up by a religious skeptic and generally sane woman. Unfortunately, the tone is such an awkwardly comical one that it feels almost removed, and the character of Jeanette often reads silly. Like if you took the film version of *Carrie* (because there is one, only one), took out the violence, and replaced it with some *America's Funniest Home Videos* music. It wasn't really my brand of comedy, I guess, but then again you should keep in mind you're dealing with someone who is roughly one pun away from being somebody's grandpa. Unless you (correctly) think dick jokes are hilarious, you might not take my word when it comes to comedy.

At the same time, we have these little asides where Percival's quest for the grail is told, drawing some comparison where I guess Jeanette is Percival and the grail is, umm, her sexuality or something? Her relationship with god? I wasn't following there, but I admit that bringing myths and the like into your story does make them *seem* magical and weighty and stuff.

Gripes aside, I was still invested in the story, and I respect what it intended to do. I liked the character of the mother, the exploration of tight-knit church communities, and all the scenes where Jeanette is an outcast in school for telling bible stories about hellfire and damnation while totally convinced that she's doing a whole heap of good, and not understanding why people are such dicks to her about it. Mean-spirited as I often am about extreme religious beliefs, I was surprised to find myself happy that Jeanette, unlike her family and congregation, was able to reconcile her beliefs and her bodily needs so early in life, because it's good when people are happy, even if I feel I could make a pretty decent argument that they're crazy. It's good for people to embrace their various sexualities rather than live miserable lives built on lies and acting and self-hatred. If I believed in a god, I sure wouldn't worship her/him if I thought (s)he was a bigot. That would just be ridiculous, right?

Every once in a while, this novel is moving. Sometimes, it actually is funny. I'm going to give Winterson one more book to either kick my ass, or earn her third and final strike. I'm just California like that.

Kyriakos Sorokkou says

In spring 2009 I started my second year at university, the first year that I started reading literature. The previous year was mainly random, generic courses like sociology, psychology, philosophy, computer fundamentals, statistics, and so on...

In Spring 2009 as part of the *Introduction to Fiction* course I read my first ever short story in English (The Cask of Amontillado by Edgar Alan Poe), my first ever novella in English (The Metamorphosis by Franz Kafka), and my first ever novel in English (Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit by Jeanette Winterson)

It's Winterson's first novel.

A novel with autobiographical elements, a pseudo-autobiography where facts are blended with fiction.

It deals with a lesbian girl living in a fanatically religious society in a suburban town in the north of England in the late 1960's - early 1970's

In 2009 I wasn't able to grasp the whole meaning, the wittiness, and the beauty of the language this book has. With only just a year of experience in reading English (besides just in articles or children's books) it was hard to appreciate and understand the novel in its wholeness.

Now, 9 years later, more mature in English and in reading all kinds, genres, lengths of books; I was positive and confident that this time around, reading *Oranges* would be a success, and it was.

In 2009, I don't remember myself laughing at certain passages, or understanding certain allusions to literature (Jane Eyre, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland), history (Pol Pot, McCarthy).

After 2009, I also spent a few years living in Manchester and the atmosphere, the landscapes, the whole feeling of suburban life in Northern England was more vivid to me and it was as if I was there.

That what's interesting when rereading a book after almost 10 years.

The book hasn't changed but you did, and the experience is entirely different.

The reason I reread this book was because I good friend learnt that this was my first book I read in English and since Winterson is her favourite author we decided for a buddy read. I believe she enjoyed it far more than I did, even for a second time.

The novel with its humour that sometimes is sweet like honey and sometimes bitter like poison, is a critique on the absurdity, the inhumanity, and the silliness of religion.

A critique on social constructions that want a man falling in love only with a woman and not a man with a man or a woman with a woman.

When Jeanette (the protagonist) falls in love with a girl the hypocritical masks of religious persons fall and a war breaks out against her.

If you believe this sounds interesting, and you like experimental fiction like this (realism broken by morsels of fairy tales) then you are in for a treat.

Rating: 8/10

Κριτική και στα Ελληνικά στο μπλογκ μου ΒιβλιοΑλχημείες

PattyMacDotComma says

4.5★

(Read and reviewed February 9, 2017)

UPDATE:

I listened to an absolutely delightful 2016 podcast of Richard Fidler's conversation with Winterson where she openly discusses her childhood, family, and upbringing.

There seems to be no bitterness, rather a lot of humour and understanding. Have a listen. I love hearing her talk anyway. :) It's here:
<http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2...>

This book of fiction won the Whitbread Award (now the Costa) for first novel, but it appears to be an autobiographical memoir, judging by what the author has described at other times of her family and her growing up.

Jeanette (same name) is adopted (almost kidnapped, it would seem) by Pentecostal evangelist parents and taught how to read from the Bible. By that, I mean she learns her reading using that book, and she also learns how to read and preach from the Bible at meetings, and very successful she is too, saving souls left, right and centre. Her mother considers it her job to train the child to be a missionary - as if she's selected her own little servant.

We never see much of her father, but her mother is a real piece of work. The only time her real mother turns up, Jeanette is sent out of the room, listens through the wall and hears lots of noise but is none the wiser. Jeanette asks about her real mother.

‘I’m your mother . . . she was a carrying case.’

‘I wanted to see her.’

‘She’s gone and she’ll never come back.’

And she never did, as far as we know. Jeanette grows up smart and questioning, with a keen interest in science and peculiar creatures. She's a disturbing mystery to teachers, because when asked to write about animals, she chooses hoopoes (I had to look them up), rock badgers and shrimp, not quite what they are expecting. But she learned to read from Deuteronomy, which is full of animals, and made her eager to learn more about interesting ones. As for science:

“I learnt that it rains when clouds collide with a high building, like a steeple, or a cathedral; the impact punctures them, and everybody underneath gets wet. This was why, in the old days, when the only tall buildings were holy, people used to say cleanliness is next to godliness. The more godly your town, the more high buildings you'd have, and the more rain you'd get.”

Mother adores the missionary priest they support who looks like Errol Flynn. When he occasionally comes back and swans through town, she gets quite girly around him. She seems to have had a colourful past herself, and keeps warning Jeanette to stay out of trouble.

Poor kid has no friends, but when she finds a kindred soul, who happens to be a pretty girl, they become very close and it turns out to be her first real crush. The feeling is mutual, but Jeanette is careful. By this time, she's aware the kids are pairing off boy-girl, but she doesn't care for the boys and an old woman has read her

palm and announced she will never marry - never sit still.

When she goes as usual to collect her comic from a paper shop run by two older, unmarried women, they invite her to go with them to the seaside. But Mother immediately cancels the comic subscription and forbids Jeanette from returning with no explanation.

“A couple of weeks later I heard her telling Mrs White about it. She said they dealt in unnatural passions. I thought she meant they put chemicals in their sweets.”

With her new friend, she has an idea of what these *unnatural passions* might be. Meanwhile, she throws herself into the evangelical life, and a dreary one it must be. She doesn't chafe and rebel too much in her youth, because it's all she knows. She prays and preaches and sings carols and hands out religious tracts.

As she gets older, she bumps up against all kinds of criticism. Her needlework teacher is horrified at her sampler all in black and white with a picture of the damned in the corner.

“GO BACK TO YOUR DESK!”

What could I do? My needlework teacher suffered from a problem of vision. She recognised things according to expectation and environment. If you were in a particular place, you expected to see particular things. Sheep and hills, sea and fish; if there was an elephant in the supermarket, she'd either not see it at all, or call it Mrs Jones and talk about fishcakes. But most likely, she'd do what most people do when confronted with something they don't understand:

Panic.

What constitutes a problem is not the thing, or the environment where we find the thing, but the conjunction of the two; something unexpected in a usual place (our favourite aunt in our favourite poker parlour) or something usual in an unexpected place (our favourite poker in our favourite aunt).”

I always enjoy Winterson's writing, and I've heard her tell her story in interviews but hadn't yet read this or *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* to see how she wrote about her past. How much of this is fiction and how much is her own, I don't know, but it's unusual, intriguing and well-written.

She describes the church deciding to cleanse her, save her through exorcism, and all sorts of strange goings-on. This seems to have led to dreams or hallucinations incorporating King Arthur and other mythology which added nothing to the story for me but might for a more discerning student of the book.

I suspect these are the hoopos referred to in the book.

<http://www.thewonderofbirds.com/hoopo...>

Richard Derus says

Rating: 5* of five

The Book Description: Jeanette, the protagonist of *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* and the author's namesake, has issues--"unnatural" ones: her adopted mam thinks she's the Chosen one from God; she's beginning to fancy girls; and an orange demon keeps popping into her psyche. Already Jeanette Winterson's semi-autobiographical first novel is not your typical coming-of-age tale.

Brought up in a working-class Pentecostal family, up North, Jeanette follows the path her Mam has set for her. This involves Bible quizzes, a stint as a tambourine-playing Salvation Army officer and a future as a missionary in Africa, or some other "heathen state". When Jeanette starts going to school ("The Breeding Ground") and confides in her mother about her feelings for another girl ("Unnatural Passions"), she's swept up in a feverish frenzy for her tainted soul. Confused, angry and alone, Jeanette strikes out on her own path, that involves a funeral parlour and an ice-cream van. Mixed in with the so-called reality of Jeanette's existence growing up are unconventional fairy tales that transcend the everyday world, subverting the traditional preconceptions of the damsel in distress.

In *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, Winterson knits a complicated picture of teenage angst through a series of layered narratives, incorporating and subverting fairytales and myths, to present a coherent whole, within which her stories can stand independently. Imaginative and mischievous, she is a born storyteller, teasing and taunting the reader to reconsider their worldview. --Nicola Perry

My Review: I was twenty-five when I read this for the first time, and now upon re-reading it at fifty-three, I am as impressed and more moved than I was even then.

No news to friends, I had a religious nut mother whose deeply insane reliance on a Manichaean gawd-versus-devil double bind system of understanding the universe screwed me up royally. Winterson, poor lambkin, had it even worse because her deeply insane mother was about as unloving as it's possible for a human being to be. There is nothing of tenderness in this rigid religiosifier.

I can't help myself, reading this in late middle years, from judging the mother more harshly than ever. To raise a child is hard, but to seek the job out by adopting and then to do it so harshly should be actionable. Not everyone should be a parent, and this old buster should not have been.

Winterson's writing is so low-key that it's easy to miss the felicities of expression and the sheer cliffs of peerless perception she scales:

There are many forms of love and affection, some people can spend their whole lives together without knowing each other's names. Naming is a difficult and time-consuming process; it concerns essences, and it means power. But on the wild nights who can call you home? Only the one who knows your name.

Breathtaking.

But where was God now, with heaven full of astronauts, and the Lord overthrown? I miss God.

I miss the company of someone utterly loyal. I still don't think of God as my betrayer. The servants of God, yes, but servants by their very nature betray. I miss God who was my friend. I don't even know if God exists, but I do know that if God is your emotional role model, very few human relationships will match up to it. I have an idea that one day it might be possible, I thought once it had become possible, and that glimpse has set me wandering, trying to find the balance between earth and sky. If the servants hadn't rushed in and parted us, I might have been disappointed, might have snatched off the white samite to find a bowl of soup.

Poignant. Also powerful.

If you've read the book at a younger age, revisit it as you would pay a call on your uncomfortably eccentric auntie. If you've never read the book, why ever not? Don't hesitate.

Duane says

This story is about a young lesbian girl, trying to navigate her way through a family, a background, and an era that refuses to recognize her, refuses to recognize her sexual identity and accept her as she is. Adopted, raised in a strict, religious household by a mother who was severe and domineering, this novel is partly autobiographical. This is a damn good book, first class story telling that you wouldn't expect to find in a first novel. Four solid stars.

Ariana says

I found this book completely baffling from beginning to end. I couldn't tell if it was because I wasn't raised religious, I wasn't raised in England, or because I wasn't raised by lunatics. I felt that something had been utterly lost in translation.

Sometimes I got the impression that the author had been issued a challenge to write sentences that no one in human history had ever written before. I started keeping a notebook of the strangest sentences. A few gems: "Our crocodile weaved in and out, ruining new shoes with sand and sawdust, sweating and sticking to each other." "I'll give you a cocktail stick only don't tell anyone what I use it for." "If she had taught me to read like other children had been taught to read, I wouldn't have these obessions. I'd be happy with a pet rabbit and the odd stick insect." "It were at Bingo 'ousie 'ousie three times." And my personal favorite: "It runs right the way through life, though it starts with hyacinth growing, passes through milk monitor, and finishes somewhere at half-blue."

There are themes here: Hating poor people, gay people, and non-believers. But all these subjects are only skirted around. There are huge sections of fairy stories that were supposed to be parables about the protagonist's life, only I didn't care enough to try to decipher them.

In short, I didn't get it, and I didn't care enough to read the whole damn thing over so I COULD get it.

Anuradha says

Oranges is a comforting novel. Its heroine is someone on the outside of life. She's poor, she's working class but she has to deal with the big questions that cut across class, culture and colour. Everyone, at some time in their life, must choose whether to stay with a ready-made world that may be safe but which is also limiting, or to push forward, often past the frontiers of commonsense, into a personal place, unknown and untried. Winterson writes in her introduction to *Oranges*, and in this semi-autobiographical novel, that's the clincher.

Before Jeanette Winterson became one of the better known names in lesbian literature, she was a devout Christian, being groomed for missionary work by her deeply religious and very obviously Christian zealot of a mother. Before Winterson graduated from Oxford and began to teach writing at the University of Manchester, she was practically illiterate - home-schooled by her mother, and her education, limited to religious texts. Winterson writes her own story as a novel, as fiction, because, as she says, fiction is easier to accept than fact. And also, for whatever reason, fiction has a greater outreach, or so I believe. **Fiction needs its specifics, its anchors. It needs also to pass beyond them. It needs to be weighed down with characters we can touch and know, it needs also to fly right through them into a larger, universal space.**

The chapters in the book are divided as chapters are in the Old Testament; from Genesis to Ruth. In *Genesis*, as the Biblical Genesis talks about the Origin, or history of mankind, Winterson talks about the story of her origins and her history, her background - her adoption, her daily routine that came to be, and her involvement in the church. She talks about how she was groomed to be a missionary, and how that was the only life she knew. For her second chapter, which she calls *Exodus* after the Book of Exodus, Jeanette's mother is forced into putting Jeanette into a school - literally, a movement from homeschooling to regular schooling. In the Book of Leviticus, the essence is mostly preaching - it is about rituals and morality, and about staying true to Christian principles. In *Oranges*, *Leviticus* plays quite the same role as in the Bible. In that, Jeanette's mother preaches about morality and religion and righteousness, while Jeanette talks about her mother's role in Church. Her mother also gives Jeanette instructions, advice on what she needs to do to fulfill her destiny as a missionary. One of the defining features of *Numbers* is the loss of faith in god by men, and their subsequent smiting. In *Numbers*, in a way, Jeanette perhaps starts losing faith in god. But more importantly, she loses faith in her mother for having lied to her. Just like the Israelis start doubting god for putting them through the tests that he did, subconsciously, Jeanette begins decoupling from the oppressive Bible herself, and for her, it starts by falling in love. With a girl. *Deuteronomy*. Part 5. A large part of the Biblical *Deuteronomy* deals with the journey aspect of Moses's journey and the Promised Land. In *Oranges*, Winterson focuses on the act of travel and how it relates to the larger picture. About how it enhances curiosity and discovery. Winterson also talks about another kind of promised land; about discovery of new lands, and about those lost cities that inspire stories, cities like El Dorado and Atlantis. In *Joshua*, Jeanette is exorcised for her "Unnatural Passions", and in *Judges*, her mother forces her to move out. The former perhaps has links to God instructing Joshua as it correlates to her demons instructing her, while the latter seems to draw from Israelis being oppressed by their kings, their judges; just like Jeanette is oppressed by her mother. In *Judges*, Israel is left to fend for itself after the events of the book, just like Jeanette is left to fend for herself after moving out. *Ruth* ultimately seems like a fitting end to this treatise because its eponymous book in the Old Testament remains among the most progressive of the Biblical books.

Oranges is a heartbreakingly, yet hopeful story of a young girl who discovers that she is more than the oppressive, fanatically religious household she grew up in. Jeanette is severely oppressed by her fanatically

religious mother and their equally fanatical community. A community that shuns people for having sex on a Sunday. A community that has taken upon itself to convert anyone who isn't a Christian. A community full of missionaries.

She had never heard of mixed feelings. There were friends and there were enemies. Jeanette's mother is a strong character, both in terms of her role in the book, and in Jeanette's life. Just, it's not a positive kind of strong. She's domineering and opinionated - while also being willfully judgemental and ignorant. She judged the poor for being too poor, and the rich for being too rich. *Since so many people we knew went there, it was hardly fair of her but she never was particularly fair; she loved and she hated, and she hated Maxi Ball.* Her next door neighbours for having too much sex, and two random women because she suspected (rightly) that they were lesbians. She was just another religious fanatic waiting for the end of the world while forcing her views on everyone else. Her singular aim in life? That Jeanette become a missionary. *We stood on the hill and my mother said, 'This world is full of sin.' We stood on the hill and my mother said, 'You can change the world.'* Her husband was far more docile and easygoing, but for the most part, because he had no choice, and also knew that raising his voice was futile. *Her husband was an easy-going man, but I knew it depressed him.*

Since I was born I had assumed that the world ran on very simple lines, like a larger version of our church. Now I was finding that even the church was sometimes confused. This was a problem.

Jeanette's mother was, of course, a creationist. *'Did you hear that?' she demanded, and poked her head round the kitchen door. 'The family life of snails, it's an Abomination, it's like saying we come from monkeys.'* And I'm sure she did not believe in educating the people about sex. Her homeschooling of her daughter resulted in her daughter being woefully backward in class. Her religious views, in her daughter terrifying the living daylights of her classmates. Jeanette's essays were inspired by Hell and other Biblical phenomena, as were her projects. I felt terrible for her, because her mother's lifestyle, so to speak, made her not only friendless, but also the butt of all jokes in school. *Over the years I did my best to win a prize; some wish to better the world and still scorn it. But I never succeeded; there's a formula, a secret, I don't know what, that people who have been to public school or Brownies seem to understand.*

Jeanette's mother's faith or fanaticism went to the extent that she refused to admit her daughter to the hospital when she fell sick. And had to be persuaded (by that, I mean someone else got Jeanette admitted) to do so. In the hospital, as at home, Jeanette was given oranges to keep her energy up. Because oranges are the only fruit. Her friend Elise, old, eccentric, and surprisingly more open minded than Jeanette's mother kept her company. Elise was lovable, despite all. *Elsie got very cross. She was an absolutist, and had no time for people who thought cows didn't exist unless you looked at them. Once a thing was created, it was valid for all time. Its value went not up nor down.*

Jeanette finds solace in books, and one day, quite by accident, as it always does, falls in love. With a girl. Of course, it doesn't sit well with the community, and she's exorcised before being kicked out for her 'sins'. She does odd jobs to support herself. She moves to a nearby city, but the questions plague her. Jeanette accepts herself for who she is, but doesn't renounce her faith, in that, she starts believing in a more abstract idea of god. Which, I'm agnostic, so I don't care, but it must have been a real task to reconcile that gap between who she was, who she is, and who she would become. *I could have been a priest instead of a prophet. The priest has a book with the words set out. Old words, known words, words of power. Words that are always on the surface. Words for every occasion. The words work. They do what they're supposed to do; comfort and discipline. The prophet has no book. The prophet is a voice that cries in the wilderness, full of sounds that do not always set into meaning. The prophets cry out because they are troubled by demons.*

Oranges may seem very simple at its outset, but it has to it layers. The subtle Biblical references interspersed with the more obvious ones. The degrees to all the characters. Granted, they're based from facts, but the nuances, the layers to what is a very simple story, make this book spectacular.

Oranges is comforting not because it offers any easy answers but because it tackles difficult questions. Once you can talk about what troubles you, you are some way towards handling it.

Jenn(ifer) says

I'll give this book a 3 orange rating (the little mandarin ones though, not the big California navels).

mmmm... oranges: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XUym7n...>

Oranges is a coming of age tale of a young woman in Britain raised by a Very Religious adopted mother. The chapters are aptly titled after books of the Old Testament (Genesis through Ruth). Winterson tells the story of Jeanette by juxtaposing myths and fairy tales with the life events of the protagonist. No, I'm not talking about Biblical stories, I mean *actual* myths and fairy tales. Same thing you say? Well who am I to argue. Anyway, Jeanette believes from an early age that she is meant to serve God; it is her calling. As she goes through adolescence, she struggles to come to terms with her sexuality which is demonized by the church, and her love of God and her relationship to the religious community.

Unholy Sinner!

Said to be autobiographical, Winterson denies this stating, "Oranges is the document, both true and false, which will have to serve for my life until I went to Oxford, and after that I daresay that whatever I tell you will be another document, one that is both true and false." Whatever the hell that means.

Now that I've told you a little something about the book, I will force my opinion down your throat like an evangelical Christian standing in front of a Planned Parenthood. It was just "okay." Honestly, I related more to the 13 year old boy in Mitchell's Black Swan Green than I did to Winterson's protagonist. I found the story to be a bit dry and lacking in emotional depth, as if Winterson was keeping us at an arm's length. Also, it's a very short novel, less than 200 pages, and I think it would have benefited from at least another 100 pages. You can't "come of age" in 175 pages Jeanette!

My advice to you, if you're interested in Winterson, read Written On the Body instead.

Zanna says

I've heard that her more recent take on the same material *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal* is even better. If that's true, I'm in for a truly superlative treat, because I loved this book to the bones. I want to read it again and again to savour its sweet delights.

Maybe Laura Doan's essay 'Sexing the Postmodern', about Winterson's work and theme development over this and two subsequent novels *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry* gave me a hunger to read this that made it taste so good ('hunger is the best sauce'). Maybe I felt along with Jeanette so keenly because working-class northern-ness and being in trouble for being queer and weird are familiar territory. Maybe because I grew up around Christianity from a position of looking on in mixed horror, contempt, admiration and amusement I was primed to laugh at all the jokes.

Being working class, living in scarcity, means sharing space, often uncomfortably. Jeanette and her father go outside to the bathroom for respite. The Sally Army banish Jeanette's inept tambourinists from their shared concert. Death meets ice cream. Poison meets progress. Unnatural passions.

There is a combination of elastic lightness and looseness of expression that makes for tiggerish bounding jollity, a feast of poetic allusions to lesbian love, and archly spoken cycles through remade mythology and fairytale. I don't feel this as *bildungsroman*; Jeanette travels around in her life as in a *tableau vivant* rather than being changed by or absorbing the world. Revelatory moments and drastic, transformative events seem carved in niches. Jeanette passes them, points them out, sails on.

Without this distancing and the comic tone to leaven, it would probably be an unbearable story. As straight memoir I don't think I could read it, but of course it's not straight in any sense, it's subjectively and structurally queer. It evades the snares of a heterosexist culture and its language by turning them aside: 'to the pure all things are pure' cries Jeanette of her love for Melanie, convinced it must, as all good things, be holy.

Perhaps the event has an unassailable truth. God saw it. God knows. But I am not God. And so when someone tells me what they heard or saw, I believe them, and I believe their friend who also saw, but not in the same way, and I can put these accounts together and I will not have a seamless wonder but a sandwich laced with mustard of my own

Vanessa says

A sad but also surprisingly comical exploration of a girl discovering her sexuality, throw in a very pious devout mother and a host of neighbourly church goers condemning homosexuality as a "sin" and you get a damn good book, the internal battle Jeanette has with her sexuality and her religious beliefs makes an interesting combination, with plenty of funny moments to lighten the mood. Her ability to stay true to herself and her god without any sourness in her heart even when rejected so harshly made me feel even more angry for the whole hypocrisy of it all. Minus a few unnecessary side parts that didn't feel cohesive to the story I enjoyed this a lot.

Bookdragon Sean says

Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit is a compelling novel about a young woman dealing with the pressures of conformity in a world that demands she be something she is not.

Jeanette is gay. The world she has known, the world of the church, shuns such behaviour. She was raised to be a missionary by her extremely controlling and zealous mother. Her path was laid out before her. And Jeanette was relatively obedient to begin with. She was ready to accept this life of servitude to God. She didn't know any different; it's the only path she believed was open to her. She didn't look outside it. But life isn't as simple as that. One day she meets someone who alters everything. She falls in love. She sees an alternative, and she runs away.

So this is a story about new beginnings; this is a story that shows us that we can break through the bonds of expectancy and be whomever it is we wish to be. We don't have to sit back and choke on the moral expectancies and norms of a society that controls our faculties. No. We can follow our hearts, and we can do what we know is right. This becomes a tale of self-realisation, one that's structure reflects the narrative progress of the Bible. It begins with Genesis and Winterson chooses to end it with Ruth, the story that recognises female achievement and is read by modern critics as a celebration of lesbianism.

Jeanette tries to find her own way in life through sexual experimentation and religious rebellion. And by the end, the full autobiographical impact of this is revealed:

“Everyone thinks their own situation most tragic. I am no exception.”

This was certainly a daring first novel, though, that being said, I've never really had any inclination to read anything else by this author. (I read this back in 2015.) I did enjoy this, and it is a very good tale, but much of the merit is on the surface level of the writing. It's very straight forward and clean-cut. I would have liked to see a little bit more depth in the language, and a few less puns on the title. Sometimes we don't need to explicitly say something for the narrative to carry the meaning.

Overall, it's a quirky little book, full of passion and self-revelation. But, for me, it was missing something I couldn't quite put my finger on. Perhaps the book needed more time to grow and develop, perhaps the story needed to be carried a little further. It's unusual for a first book, most authors, if they attempted something like this, it would be after they'd already released a few novels and were relatively established. But, again, that doesn't mean we should always follow the rules. I was certain on giving this four stars before I started writing but, by the time I came to the end of this review, it's ended up as a three.
