



# Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?

*Jeanette Winterson*

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## Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal? Jeanette Winterson

In 1985 Jeanette Winterson's first novel, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, was published. It was Jeanette's version of the story of a terraced house in Accrington, an adopted child, and the thwarted giantess Mrs Winterson. It was a cover story, a painful past written over and repainted. It was a story of survival.

This book is that story's the silent twin. It is full of hurt and humour and a fierce love of life. It is about the pursuit of happiness, about lessons in love, the search for a mother and a journey into madness and out again. It is generous, honest and true.

## Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal? Details

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# From Reader Review Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal? for online ebook

•Karen• says

What a fierce child young Jeanette must have been. A small warrior, blazing with desire for life, battling the sheer bloody awfulness of her upbringing and the narrowness of her surroundings, protecting herself from further rejection by preventive strike. Spiky.

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SPOILERS!!

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The first half of this book feels raw; but this can only be the illusion created by the rough language, the short sentences, the baldness, the bleakness of her life reflected in terse, sparse prose. This brings startling, swirling effects when contrasted with the rhythms of the King James Bible or John Donne. For the story that is skirted and prodded at here is the material of *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit*, published 26 years ago. She calls *Oranges* the cover version. "I wrote a story I could live with. The other one was too painful. I could not survive it." Here is the painful story, the one that no-one could survive. Jeanette Winterson's adoptive mother, called Mrs Winterson throughout the book, was a fervent convert to the Elim Pentecostal Church who believed and declared that Satan had led her to the wrong crib, who read *Jane Eyre* to Jeanette, but changed the ending so that Jane married sanctimonious St John Rivers and went on missionary work with him, who burnt the books hidden under Jeanette's mattress because "The trouble with a book is that you never know what's in it until it's too late," who locked Jeanette out all night, who kept a revolver in the duster drawer, who believed Jeanette's sexuality was a demon to be exorcised.

The second half of the book IS raw. It is written in real time, as Jeanette Winterson rides out the storm of a complete breakdown, steadfastly waiting huddled below a wall outside her house in the country, looking at the view and waiting for the pain to pass. A new relationship with the writer and psychologist Susie Orbach and the search for her birth mother drags her out of despair, but equally harrowing is the Kafkaesque tale of how bureaucracy throws stumbling blocks in the path of that search. When she does find her birth mother, there is a strong sense of her having to re-calibrate her life to accommodate not only a mother but half siblings too. She ends "I have no idea what happens next."

Throughout, what shines through is survival through literature, and the complexity of feeling that allows the reader to feel sympathy for the ineffective father and even for the monstrous Mrs Winterson. There are ripples of delightful humour among the bleak:

*The only time that Mrs Winterson liked to answer the door was when she knew that the Mormons were coming round. Then she waited in the lobby, and before they had dropped the knocker she had flung open the door waving her Bible and warning them of eternal damnation. This was confusing for the Mormons because they thought they were in charge of eternal damnation. But Mrs Winterson was a better candidate for the job.*

The title, by the way, is the real question asked by Mrs Winterson when Jeanette walked out at the age of sixteen in order to be happy with her first girlfriend, Janey. What mother does not want her child to be

happy?

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## **Sophie Carlon says**

Read this if you want your heart broken. Read this if you need it healed.

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## **Paul Bryant says**

This is about a girl who was adopted by a religious lunatic and who realised she was a lesbian.

Yes.

Uh oh.

It's a squirmy, maddening, elusive, full-frontal, raging, psychonewagebabbly, moving, heartfelt, essential memoir. I was going to be cute and say that in 1969 The Beatles decided to release an album on which there were no overdubs, no studio tricks at all, but the resulting album *Let It Be* broke its own rule by containing overdubbed strings & harps & choruses; so many years later Paul McCartney fixed this dishonesty by producing a new version, called *Let It Be...Naked*, which really is a no-overdub live-in-the-studio Beatles album - the truth at last! And I was going to say that *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit* is *Let It Be* and *Why Be Happy when you Could be Normal?* is *Let it Be...Naked*. But it's not true.

(analogy does not hold water, says GR reviewer)

Yes, you find out that in *Oranges* (and I'm thinking that you need to have seen the tv series or read the book first, both recommended, so no hardship) a lot of punches were pulled; but no, the whole picture is still not revealed, and JW uses the full panoply of 32 track overdubbing, phasing, extreme stereo panning, hotshot studio musicians, the works, in her new version of the old story of her crazy childhood. It's not a simple tale.

In fact it's like Hilary Mantel's frankly weird memoir *Giving up the Ghost* and even Bob Dylan's glorious *Chronicles* – certain parts of the lives in question are given *the full treatment*, the significant bits, and others are blanked, bits which the reader might object to – hey, what about this thing and that thing and whyja do that and what happened here? Memoirs are for readers who can contain their irritation at being fed only what the author wants them to be fed. We are often left panting with our tongues lolling and whining. Poor memoir readers! That's the name of the game.

So, *Oranges* is great but the other two JW novels I read (*The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry*) each earned two meagre stars – fully of gorgeous paragraphs they may be, but I could not make head nor tail of them. This has happened to me before. I love early Joni Mitchell, but then she took a bad turn and produced *Hejira* and *Don Juan's Reckless Daughter* – mama mia! Horrible stuff! (Oh - you love those albums? Sorry!)

(this is where the rot set in)

So I'm not a JW fan, except that she occasionally appears on political discussion shows on the BBC, and I LOVE hearing her, she cuts through the nonsense like laser surgery.

*She was a monster, but she was my monster.*

JW says this about her adoptive mother who she consistently refers to as "Mrs Winterson". This mother was physically huge and a religious fruitcake, a key member of an evangelical sect who had strict rules about everything. So on top of the dire poverty of working class England in the 60s and 70s, you had another whole set of deprivations imposed. However, here's JW on the subject of growing up in a crazy Christian cult :

*It is hard to understand the contradictions unless you have lived them : the camaraderie, the simple happiness, the kindness, the sharing, the pleasure of something to do every night in a town where there was nothing to do – then set this against the cruelty of dogma, the miserable rigidity of no drink, no fags, no sex (or if you were married as little sex as possible), no going to the pictures, no reading anything except devotional literature, no fancy clothes (not that we could afford them), no dancing...no pop music, no card games, no pubs. TV was OK but not on Sundays. On Sundays you covered the set with a cloth.*

Here's the young JW walking through town (Accrington) with her mother:

*We went past Woolworths – "A Den of Vice". Past Marks and Spencer's – "The Jews killed Christ". Past the funeral parlour and pie shop – "They share an oven." Past the biscuit stall and its moon-faced owners – "Incest". Past the bank – "Usury." Past the Citizens Advice Bureau – "Communists". Past the day nursery – "Unmarried mothers".*

This book is full of great, pained observations on the English working class of the 60s and 70s :

*A lot of women had moustaches in those days. I never met anyone who shaved anything, and it didn't occur to me to shave anything myself until I turned up at Oxford looking like a werewolf.*

Less great was the banging on about love, which is JW's first, second, third and 10th commandment. Love thyself, love others, learn how to love, love is all you need, love loves to love love. It probably comes from listening to too much pop music, but love gets on my wick when it's promoted into a mystical panacea. But JW is all about the love, the difficulty of it, the elusiveness of it, the overwhelming blah blah blah of it. (She says she reads a lot of "MindBodySpirit stuff" - I wouldn't touch that stuff with YOUR bargepole, never mind mine.)

(not with my bargepole!)

I would have liked less of that kind of blather and more of why she consistently describes herself as "difficult" and also there's a startling paragraph where she says that as her adoptive mother wanted a boy but got a girl ("The Devil led us to the wrong crib" – she actually said that to Jeannette) and (maybe) dressed her in the already-bought boy baby clothes, *then that's what made her into a lesbian... ! Really?* ("I am not

much a believer in the gay gene” she says).

Okay – as you see, hampers full of food for thought and many hoots of laughter to be had are right here – a lovely book.

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### **Bookdragon Sean says**

Books mean a great deal to me. Are you surprised to hear me say this? I think not. As a consequence, I really enjoy reading books about people who really enjoy books. It’s just how these things work. And Jeanette Winterson really, really, likes books. When she had nothing, she always had her books: they gave her courage and strength. This is a book for those that love reading and writing; this is a book for those that understand why someone would spend their entire life doing such things: it is a book that speaks directly to the book lover.

Jeanette had a very cold childhood; her mother was a depressive who had a very warped mind set. She was devoutly religious but rather than seeing religion as a means of spreading love and understanding, she saw it as a way to chastise people. She was a misanthrope, a hater of mankind. When she looked at society all she saw was a wretched cusp of civilisation that needed to be punished. It was unworthy of God’s teachings, of the word of the Bible. And she was obsessed with the Bible, reading it multiple times each year. She attempted to limit her daughter’s faculties by not letting her read beyond its pages.

So Jeanette read in private, hiding her collection of books under her bed. One day her mother found them and burnt them all in the back garden. She destroyed the books of Jeanette’s youth, but she couldn’t destroy her. Jeanette began to learn literature by heart because that could never be taken away from her, and then she set out to write her own story. This book would become her first novel *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* which, if you didn’t already know, went on to win numerous literary awards along with establishing Winterson as a successful writer.

Her writing is highly autobiographical, drawing on her own experiences to create her narratives. *Oranges* focuses much on sexuality, gender and the restrictions of religious belief. This, on the other hand, centralises the relationship between Jeanette and her mother within the narrative. It builds on the themes established in *Oranges* and addresses them in a much more intelligent voice. Twenty-five years have passed in between books, and her mother has died since, and as a result Winterson addresses the themes with more clarity and retrospective wisdom.

She both hated and loved her mother. Jeanette was adopted, and she has always felt unwanted and incapable of accepting love: she has always felt empty inside. The coldness of her adoptive mother has been to blame for much of this, but her actions created the writer. Without them, Winterson would never have established her literary voice. She would never have read so widely and so voraciously and set her on the path to finding her voice. She knows exactly what her mother was to her:

“*She was a monster, but she was my monster.*”

So this is a deeply personal account about Winterson’s life; it is revealing and powerful. I admire her courage to not only write such fiction, but to impart so much of herself to her readers. It’s very brave writing, highly successful too.

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## **Iris P says**

I usually don't read lots of memoirs and biographies, in general I prefer fiction or non-fiction, but I must say thought that this is one of the most genuine and emotional memoirs I've ever read.

Jeannette Winterson was born in Manchester, England, and grew up in Accrington, Lancashire after being adopted by Constance and John William Winterson in the early 1960's.

This book recounts her quest for her identity, origin, her (birth) mother and ultimately for love and acceptance.

It's a different kind of memoir in that it doesn't follow a chronological structure. She jumps back and forth between different periods in her life, and that's probably why the book feels so authentic, you have a sense that you are sitting down with a good friend while she is telling you her story.

The author comes across as a clever, witty, and as a person in search of answers. At times she writes with great urgency, almost desperation. It feels as if she's running out of time and wants to explain things to you, she wants to make sure you understand her history. Which I suppose is one of the reasons why people write these type memoirs, I think that this process provides for many emotional closure.

Winterson has a great sense of humor and is a wonderful conversationalist. Throughout the book she takes time to explain some of the cultural, religious and political ethos of these times in the UK.

There are also quite a few extremely funny anecdotes. I love that in the middle of such a difficult upbringing, the author has the capacity to laugh at some rather peculiar and crazy circumstances.

The center theme of the memoir is her descriptions of her very peculiar Pentecostal upbringing as well as her tumultuous relationship with her adoptive mother, whom she calls throughout most of the book "Mrs. Winterson".

Mrs. Winterson is described as an "out of scale, larger than life" woman who at times sounds pretty much deranged. A woman opposed to any sort of intimacy, sexual or otherwise, she casts a huge shadow on the Winterson's household, and little Jeannette doesn't feel loved by either parent. Her father is a withdrawn, simple man who has been belittled by his wife and is incapable of standing up for himself, let alone for his adoptive daughter.

Little Jeannette is abused, both emotionally (her mother constantly alludes that in her adoption process "the Devil led us to the wrong crib") and physically, she is beaten, forced to sleep outside of the house, and pretty much left to her own devices at a very early age.

In Mrs. Winterson's ultra fundamentalist version of Christianity, there's no room for reading secular books, so she forbids Jeannette from reading anything other than the Bible. Jeannette doesn't obey, of course, and when Mrs. W discovers dozens of books hidden under Jeannette's mattress, she burns them all. This was to me a painful passage to read (as I am sure it would be for most readers)

Later on, Mrs. Winterson discovers that Jeannette is attracted to women and has in fact started a relationship

with a girl that also attends her church, this sets in motion a series of events, culminating with the spectacle of a 3-day exorcism performed by the pastor who tries to, to put it on contemporary terms "pray the gay away".

When Jeannette is 16 years old, she is evicted from her home after Mrs. W discovers a 2nd girlfriend, initially she lives in her car, but shortly after she gets under a roof, when a sympathetic teacher takes pity on her and allows her to stay in her house.

Jeannette starts reading English Literature in Prose A-Z, as she calls it. There's a very good public library in her town, and she's determined to read all the available authors in alphabetical order. "A book is a door," she discovers "You open it. You step through."

Eventually she applies "to read English at Oxford because, "it was the most impossible thing" she could think of; she graduates, she writes books and becomes a well known and successful author.

The memoir then makes a big jump, and for whatever reason the author decides to take her story 25 years later, when she has just broken up with her girlfriend of 6 years. This is when her writing becomes more introspective, a search to connect the past with the present.

By now, Mrs. W has passed away and Jeannette has managed to maintain an almost normal relationship with her father.

The author then begins the search for her birth mother, which is perhaps where the reader can feel a deeper sense of empathy and connection with her. She is desperate to find that final link to her past, yet she's also petrified by fear of what she might find. Who can't relate to that feeling?

After jumping many hoops throughout the inept and insensible bureaucracy that apparently rules the adoption system in the UK (I suspect, the same is true in the US and other Western countries), she manages to find Ann, her birth mother, makes peace with her and her decision to give Jeannette away.

Of course, this being real life, there's not exactly a happy ending, not in the strict sense of the word anyway, so after her first meeting with Ann, she quickly comes to the realization that the instant connection she might have been anticipating does not come.

Finally, I think that what saves Jeannette Winston is that she possesses both a very clever and inquisitive mind as well as an indomitable and defiant personality.

By the end of the book, she appears to have accomplished an exorcism of her own: what starts as a detailed and painful description of the horrible mother, ends with a sense of closure and forgiveness.

When referring to a discussion she had with Ann, she says "I notice that I hate Ann criticizing Mrs. Winterson. She was a monster but she was my monster". We humans are full of contradictions, aren't we?

Jeannette Winterson is the audiobook narrator of her memoir, I am for the most part, not a fan of authors narrating their own books and I do prefer that they leave this to the professionals, with that said, Winterson really did a wonderful job. Perhaps because of the 1st person narrative and also because her writing style is so intense, I don't imagine anybody else being able to narrate this book as well as she did.

This is an unforgettable and extraordinary memoir.

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## **Fionnuala says**

There are some authors who are continually writing and rewriting the same story, continually sanding down the same hard facts, continually polishing the remainder until they arrive at the final version when it has the perfectly smooth shape of an egg, newly laid. And at whatever angle you choose to view that egg, it remains perfect, impossible to add to or take away from. I'm thinking here of John McGahern in particular, who worked on the hard facts of a lonely, repressed, religion dominated childhood in many and varied pieces of fiction until he produced his final novel, *That They may Face the Rising Sun* by which time he had worked through all his anger, all his loss, all his disappointment and could finally offer us, while still using many elements from his earlier works, a simple meditation on nature and the cycle of life and death. I am confident that Jeanette Winterson will also arrive at a point where she will be able to offer us her own piece of perfection. This present book is a stage on the way towards that point, full of the promise of even better things to come. It is also a beautiful and necessary commentary on her first novel, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, and it is full of insights from her continually active writer's mind, insights on reading, on writing, on religion, on nature, on time, on life and on death. These two writers have so many things in common but the key to both their writerly talent can be found in their early exposure to books, Winterson, in the public library in Accrington, McGahern by means of a kind neighbour's personal library, both reading their way steadfastly through the canon of English literature in secret. Both saved by books.

I heard Winterson give a very inspirational talk on writing in Shakespeare and Co in Paris a couple of years ago but had no idea at the time what she'd been going through in her personal life during that very period. She's a fighter and I salute her.

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## **Melissa says**

It pains me to give Jeanette Winterson's memoir a poor review. It pained me so much more to read this book. This, from a writer who is absolutely without peer in storytelling, language and the details of excruciating heartbreak.

To be fair, I did really enjoy the first 2/3 of the book. She writes in a frank and conversational style describing her early life and referencing her early books. I recognized her voice immediately and I settled in, catching up with an old friend.

Unfortunately as her story continues it becomes more of a search for the grail (a concept she mentions several times), a mapping of the early hurts she experienced (an infant put up for adoption) as evidenced in her present day relationship failures and what she describes as an inability to love. She "goes mad", begins a search for her birthmother and the narrative becomes rather self indulgent and whiny in the process. Her knight in shining armor (new girlfriend and psychoanalyst) appears and by then I was feeling quite betrayed by the mediocrity of it all.

Yes there is a genre for books that go there (self help, recovery, personal growth) and there is a language for this too ("I'm no longer a victim, I'm a survivor") but I didn't want Jeanette Winterson to write it.

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## **Cecily says**

**Beautifully written, engrossing, and suffused with a love of the saving power of literature.**

This is the truer, grittier, more analytical version of **Oranges are Not the Only Fruit** (my review [HERE](#)),

with an update of Winterson's very recent attempts to trace her birth mother, and interspersed with thoughts on words, writing, literature and a dash of politics of family, class, feminism and sexuality. It is better if you are familiar with *Oranges*, but not essential. There also seem to be significant autobiographical aspects to **Lighthousekeeping**, as explained in my review [HERE](#)).

#### NOT "MISERY LIT"

When I read *Oranges* many years ago, it was before the vogue for "misery lit", a genre I have avoided. However, reading this, I realise that despite the erudition and humour, both books are perhaps in that category. Don't let that put you off. Much of Winterson's upbringing was awful: neglect, psychological bullying, deceit and most importantly, lack of love, and yet she comes through it all the stronger and even when she has a major breakdown in later life, still realises that her pain has made her who she is.

#### PLOT SUMMARY

The story is now well-known, but to recap, Jeanette was adopted by a poor, middle aged, dysfunctional couple who belonged to a Pentecostal church. Most of the time, they all act as if their quirks and cruelty are entirely normal. She escaped into forbidden books and grammar school (an academically-focused school), but fell foul of her family when she fell in love with a girl.

#### PARENTS = MRS WINTERSON and DAD

Her mother is almost entirely referred to as "Mrs Winterson" (just occasionally "my mum", but never just "Mum"), whereas her father is "Dad" and mostly in the background until old age. Mrs W is the far more vividly drawn character:

*"a flamboyant depressive... I think Mrs Winterson was afraid of happiness".*

She was also hypocritical (a supposedly secret smoker who neither believed nor practised all the teachings of her chosen church) and who had unexplained disappearances, whereas Dad is just weak, or perhaps too peaceful to stand up to her, who "hated him - not in an angry way, but with a toxic submissive resentment".

*"My father was unhappy. My mother was disordered. We were like refugees in our own life."*

*"There was a barrier between us, transparent but real."*

*"She was her own Enigma code and me and my dad were not Bletchley Park."*

And specifically about Mrs W:

*"Our conversations were like two people using phrase books to say things neither understands."*

But despite all the pain, as a middle aged woman, Winterson notes:

*"I hate Ann criticising Mrs Winterson. She was a monster but she was my monster."*

#### ABANDONMENT

The undercurrent of the book and Winterson's life is abandonment: given up by her birth mother, unloved and abused by her adopted mother, and abandoned by her first lover as soon as they were caught. In her troublesome teens, she wonders:

*"Were we endlessly ransacking the house, the two of us, looking for evidence of each other? I think we were – she, because I was fatally unknown to her, and she was afraid of me. Me, because I had no idea what was missing but felt the missing-ness of the missing."*

As an adult:

*"I have never felt wanted... And I have loved most extravagantly where my love could not be returned... but I did not know how to love."*

## LOVE OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

*"Books don't make a home – they are one, in the sense that just as you do with a door, you open a book, and you go inside. Inside there is a different kind of time and a different kind of space."*

One of the aspects of this book that I most enjoyed was Winterson's feel and passion for language and literature, enhanced by the lengths she had to go to to enjoy them.

*"She [Mrs W] knew full well that writers were sex-crazed bohemians who broke the rules and didn't go out to work. Books had been forbidden in our house."*

The perverse exception was murder mysteries:

*"The trouble with a book is that you never know what's in it until it's too late."*

But for Winterson:

literature *"isn't a hiding place. It is a finding place... She was right. A book is a magic carpet that flies you off elsewhere... Do you come back?"*

She was not a high flier at school, and yet:

*"I knew how words worked in the way that some boys knew how engines worked."*

The best thing about Oxford University was:

*"Its seriousness of purpose and the unquestioned belief that the life of the mind was at the heart of civilised life... It was like living in a library and that was where I had always been happiest."*

Writing is even more powerful, and there are two kinds: "the one you write and the one that writes you. The one that writes you is dangerous." The other side of that coin is that at her lowest point, which is brutally and bravely documented, "language left me". Terrifying for anyone, let alone a writer. And not for the first time, it is poetry that rescues her, "All that poetry I learned when I had to keep my library inside me now offered a rescue rope... If poetry was a rope, then the books themselves were rafts. At my most precarious I balanced on a book, and the books rafted me over the tides of feelings that left me soaked and shattered". "The poem finds the word that finds the feeling."

Winterson also analyses the narrative of her own life, "Adopted children are self-invented... adoption drops you into the story after it has started". Regarding Mrs W's reaction to Oranges, "What you leave out says as much as those things you include... Mrs W objected to what I had put in, but it seemed to me that what I had left out was the story's silent twin." And both twins change when she traces her birth mother. Until then, "My whole identity was built around being an orphan – and an only child". The meeting is visceral, traumatic, comic, but ultimately somewhat unresolved.

A couple of other wonderful books that have this theme in different ways:

**Stoner**, my review [HERE](#)

**Cold Mountain**, my review [HERE](#)

## ANALYSING HERSELF

*"I would rather be this me... than the me I might have become without books, without education."*

That education comes to the fore towards the end, in a short chapter called "The Wound" where she compares lots of myths about wounds (literal and metaphorical), adoption, mistaken identity etc. It's a powerful and erudite exploration of some of the themes in the book, but doesn't quite fit in style.

There is understandable bitterness towards Mrs W, but despite rejecting the church, she is also grateful to it in some ways. Belief in God helped her when she was small ("God made sense of uncertainty") and she saw

many working class people "living a deeper, more thoughtful life than would have been possible without the church... Bible study worked their brains". An unintended consequence being that familiarity with the 1611 Bible and daily use of thee and thou in their own speech, made Shakespeare was relatively accessible.

She documents the contradictions of her church (some unpleasant, some merely comical) with a degree of fondness. When homeless and living in a car, she observes, "I was lucky in one way because our church had always emphasised how important it is to concentrate on good things"! In a similar vein, "The one good thing about being shut in a coal hole is that it prompts reflection"! I'm not sure that would be benefit enough to appease a social worker.

## PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

Her life is about the pursuit of happiness, "life-long, and it is not goal-centred". She says that as a child, she always wanted to escape her life, as did Mrs W in a different way (every night she prayed "Lord, let me die"). However, she also says, "I don't know anyone, including me, who felt trapped and hopeless", albeit more in terms of church putting poverty into perspective.

Applying to Oxford was apparently not so much about escape but "because it was the most impossible thing I could do". In working class areas of the north in the 1970s, men were still in charge, and women undervalued, "My world was full of strong able women who were 'housewives' and had to defer to their men". The result of this strange and traumatic upbringing is that:

*"The things that I regret in life are not errors of judgement but failures of feeling."*

## TYPES OF ENDING

*"When we write we offer the silence as much as the story. Words are the part of silence that can be spoken. Mrs Winterson would have preferred it if I had been silent."*

It would be easy to summarise the book in the lines:

*"She longed for me to be free and did everything she could to make sure it never happened."*

and:

*"All she ever wanted was for me to go away. And when I did she never forgave me."*

However, that would do it a disservice, because it is really far more about the necessity of love – understanding it and fully experiencing it.

Winterson herself categorises three types of ending: revenge, tragedy and forgiveness; this book contains all three.

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## Petra X says

If you read *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit* then this just reads like an early version before the editor said to the author, "You can't write *that*, no one will believe you." The cliché goes that truth is stranger than fiction and this book is definitely stranger than *Oranges*. It is hard, for instance, to believe that the author, as an adult, never addressed her mother as anything but Mrs. Winterson.

Small personal anecdote that has nothing whatsoever to do with the book other than it's a bit about Winterson's famous girlfriend who was much celebrated and made a lot of money from her book on fat and feminism, but there you go, when did my reviews ever stick to the point?

Years ago, having quite a lot of money and not much sense of what to spend it on I decided physical

perfection was all and took myself off to a health farm, or 'spa', in Malta to lose some weight and tone up. It was a sleazy dump with hardly any facilities and was in fact a money-laundering operation for a body-building company in the UK that mostly sold steroids. There weren't many clients and all of us were there to lose weight which bewildered the few staff who didn't seem to know what to do with us other than to feed us very little and tell us to swim in the algae-green pool. In other words, a perfect place to hide out. The author of *Fat Is a Feminist Issue* was there, the girlfriend of Jeanette Winterson. Not such a feminist issue, eh?

Can you trust any author to be who they say they are or is it all just for effect? I guess so long as the money keeps rolling in its all 'true', and when the money stops - maybe that's time for a tell-all autobiography with tv interviews revealing all the psychological problems that stopped the author from telling the truth in the first place. I'm thinking now of Orbach, but it applies to any author, maybe even Winterson. (If a tell-all doesn't bring the cash in and the fame back, then there's always reality tv).

*Edited* because I was apparently very insulting with two words, so I took them out. What a laugh to complain about that though!

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## **Fiona says**

When Jeanette Winterson tried to tell her adoptive mother, always in this autobiography referred to as Mrs Winterson, that she loved her girlfriend, that she made her happy, Mrs W's response was 'Why be happy when you could be normal?'

This book has lain on my bookshelves unread for years. I don't know why except that, possibly, it's because I have never managed to engage with JW's fiction, with the exception of *Oranges*, the book that she hates to be defined by. I don't think you have to have read her fiction to read her autobiography, although I dare say it helps with some of the references.

JW was adopted by the Wintersons when she was six weeks old. Ahead of her lay a life of complexity, Pentecostal extremism, loneliness and abuse. Her Dad did nothing to stop Mrs W's abuse of their daughter, standing by when she was left on the doorstep or in the coalshed overnight. He stood by while she was exorcised, possession by Satan being the only possible reason for her homosexuality.

Half of the book is about her childhood and eventual arrival at Oxford University, achieved through her own hard graft and the support of one or two adults who recognised her abilities, the other half is about her adult search for her self and eventually for her birth parents. It's a painful journey, so painful that she misses out around 25 years saying that maybe one day she will revisit them but not now.

In many ways, this book is a difficult read because it is so full of raw emotion. It's balanced by humour and by thought processes that make you stop to examine your own journey through life. JW's view of time is that it is not linear, that we are all at one and the same time a baby, a 3 year old, a 15 year old, an adult. We may grow older but these selves are always with us.

An easy 5 stars for me and recommended whether or not you have read her other work. I guarantee, however, that after reading this you will want to put that right.

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## Sinem says

bu kitaptan önce tek meyve portakal de?ildir'i okumak iyi olur, çünkü bu kitapta epey at?f var tek meyve'ye. özya?am öyküsünü tüm içtenli?i ile yazm?? Jeanette han?m, kendisiyle tan??m?? samimi olmu? gibi hissediyorum. anlatt??? öykü epey dramatik ve beni duygusal olarak zorlad?. kitaplarla ve edebiyatla olan ili?kisi ve onlara tutunabilmi? olmas? oldukça etkileyici. en k?sa zamanda tek meyve'yi hem okumak hem de izlemek istiyorum.

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## Joan says

Very funny and well written. First Person. British novelist who is adopted by working-class evangelical parents who never loved her.

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## Oriana says

I finished this book on a frigid Sunday afternoon, lying lazily on my too-deep couch, covered in a ridiculously soft blanket, with my boyfriend cackling in the other room while watching "news fails" on YouTube and my little dog curled up by my side, lending me his warmth.

I have had such an easy life, it is sometimes difficult to fathom.

Jeanette Winterson has not had an easy life. Or anyway she had an almost impossibly surreal / awful childhood (adopted by a frighteningly inconsistent and extremely religious mother, who regularly locked her in the coal shed overnight), an adolescence during which she lived in her car (after mom kicked her out for being a lesbian), and a young adulthood wherein she took her impoverished, working-class self all the way to and through Oxford, despite staggering sexism, homophobia, and snobbery (they told her she was their "working-class experiment," and her best friend was their "black experiment"). She has spent her life overcoming—overcoming abandonment and adoption, overcoming a lack of love, overcoming poverty, overcoming provincialism, overcoming heteronormativity, overcoming the judgments of the entire world.

And yet this memoir, which I expected to be agonizing, is instead matter-of-fact, witty, piercing, and generally triumphant. Jeanette is not a dweller or a wallower, at least not anymore; she is frank about the difficulties she has gone through, relating even rather harrowing anecdotes with grace and compassion. Hers is a journey, always, toward understanding: trying to figure out those around her, saving herself through literature, learning how to love by piecing it together day by day.

The book is in two parts. The first, from birth (more or less) to college, has a narrative tone that is at a slight remove from the story. Jeanette is, of course, a writer, with a writer's sense of pacing, of plot arc, of what to reveal and when to reveal it, of the flourishes necessary to a tale well told. She relates most of the anecdotes from her childhood smoothly—after all, she's spent her whole career polishing and retelling them. This part of the story is moving but a bit pat; it is clever and rather self-aware, although it is certainly devastating and illuminating in turns.

But then—after a two-page "interlude" that encompasses about twenty-five years—the second half of the book is practically in the present, starting maybe five years ago, and it encompasses Jeanette's search for her

birth mother. And suddenly the narrative becomes ragged, jagged, raw. This is the story Jeanette is still living, and it has not been rehearsed; it has barely even got done being lived.

She navigates the Kafkaesque bureaucracy of the British legal system with a somewhat crazed frenzy, and with the help of kind souls along the way. She opens up her brain and her body and lets us look right in, into her hysterical fears, her calcified anger, the wailing hopefulness she has spent her whole life tamping down into frustration. I can't even describe it; it's devastating, enraging, anxiety-ridden, and so so intense.

And even still, clever! Her writing style throughout is very British and dry, no-nonsense-y and simple but shot through with literary allusions, with whole quoted poems and passages. And *funny*, I can't stress that enough, because it was the last thing I was expecting. I'm tempted to start quoting lines, but I'd wind up transcribing pages and pages, and I haven't got the time.

But listen: this book is really brilliant. I am now going to sink right back into my too-deep couch, grab the cuddly dog, and start rereading *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. And after that I'm going to Netflix the BBC movie of it, and then I'm going to comb my shelves and my friends' shelves for all her other books, which I've either never read or haven't read in years.

Jeanette, I love you. You are astonishing.

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## Maciek says

I haven't read anything by Jeanette Winterson before, and I had no idea that *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* was her memoir - the non-fiction counterpart to her first novel, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. Having read it I think it was a great introduction to her person and writing, and would like to read more of her work.

*Why Be Happy...* begins with Jeanette being raised in the small English town of Accrington in the 1960's, and focuses on her relationship with her adoptive mother, Mrs. Winterson, and survival - survival of poverty in the industrial North of England during the 1960's and 70's, the many abuses at the hands of incredibly religious Mrs. Winterson, Jeanette's discovery of literature at the Accrington public library and her road to becoming a writer; the discovery of her sexuality and the fact that she's a lesbian, and the quest to find her birth parents.

The character of Mrs. Winterson - physically and emotionally hovering over the whole household, destroying both her marriage and her adopted daughter with her religious fundamentalism - dominates this memoir. She is openly abusive towards young Jeanette, often locking her outside for hours and not allowing for anything which would contradict her dogma - especially books. When Mrs. Winterson found Jeanette reading novels which she hid under the mattress, she destroyed them - but she bloody well couldn't stop her from remembering what she read, and desiring to write her own stories. This memoir is testament to the horrors of religious abuse as portrayed by Mrs. Winterson, but it is also a testament to the power of books and the necessity of public libraries - there's a sad fragment when adult Jeanette revisits Accrington as an adult, and finds the library stripped of many titles, which have been replaced with DVDs and computer terminals. As a young boy, I have been lucky to have a library on the way to school, and I stopped to borrow new books every day - this is how I became a reader, as I would never be able to afford to buy all of them on my small allowance. Sadly, this library has since been closed and moved to another place - and future children will probably walk by another bank or store. Each erosion of a library is a small tragedy for

developing readers - I dread to think what would have happened to Jeanette if there was no public library in Accrington, a small town "where there was nothing to do".

*Why Be Happy* is also a good portrayal of working class life in the North of England, and the extreme poverty suffered by it in one of the world's richest countries - and the first industrialized one to boot. Accrington is not far away from Manchester, the great city where Industrial Revolution began and where the oldest public library in the English speaking world is located - the place where Marx and Engels wrote *The Communist Manifesto*; yet from Jeanette's memories you would think that it's in another world. The Guardian recently ran an photo article which showed British families living in poverty during the 1960's, the time when Jeanette was born - as if to confirm her words. You can see it here:

<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesi...>

Even in these dark memories there are glimmers of light - one of the more beautiful memories of young Jeanette involves her aunt Nellie, who would have a sort of an open house for local children. Although she was poor as her house was small and with just one window, she would cook onion soup and all the kids would come with their own cups and there would somehow always be enough for everyone. The kids would sometimes bring snippets of whatever food they had, and everybody would share - aunt Nellie would tell them Bible stories and teach them song, and her small, crowded house would become the happiest place in the whole town.

Perhaps memories like this allowed Jeanette Winterson to write her story with moments of humor - black, but still humor. She really holds no punches and the whole book has a deeply personal, even confessional tone - she later reveals that it was written in real time, which makes perfect sense as gives this mood of waking up from a horrible nightmare. I didn't expect her memoir to affect me so strongly, which is only a testament to her character and talent - I only had to read it, while she had to live it.

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## Zanna says

**There is still a popular fantasy, long since disproved by both psychoanalysis and science, and never believed by any poet or mystic, that it is possible to have a thought without a feeling**

I might have expected the audacity of this book, but the humility startled me. I expected the old trauma, but the fresh wounds caught me off guard. I was reminded of *What to Look for in Winter: A Memoir in Blindness* which I didn't think much of at all; the trauma memoir is not a genre I get along with. I love the fictionalised version of Jeanette's growing up, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* so much; it's one of my favourite books, and here she shares that reading herself as fiction as well as fact was necessary and liberating. I think it was necessary for me to enjoy the story, too. I felt for Jeanette here, and I appreciated her insights and on-point mini-polemics, especially into politics and northern working class life, but I definitely got more out of *Oranges*.

When Jeanette went mad, she met the character Martha Hesse meets in her experiments with madness in *The Four-Gated City* That jolted me. Lessing knew what she was talking about. I was also furious about the callous bureaucracy Jeanette faced when trying to find her birth mother. What the hell?!? The naked honesty with which she admits her struggles to love and be loved is so humbling, almost intimidating. The social worker, thankfully, knew exactly what to say, though nothing could ever be enough. Most strangely I felt myself working towards some new spaces of creative self acceptance as I read. And most importantly, I



was reminded to let myself feel, to love life and be open even when it hurts to be open.

What else can I say? There are lots of quotables, particularly about books (as homes and hearths), but this is my favourite. I'm stashing it for later use, and I imagine I'll be pulling it out pretty regularly:

**When we are objective we are subjective too. When we are neutral we are involved. When we say 'I think' we don't leave our emotions outside the door. To tell someone not to be emotional is to tell them to be dead.**

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## Moira Russell says

This book came in the mail today, I opened the package, opened the book and looked at a few pages randomly, started reading, and about half an hour later turned back to the beginning so I could start reading it properly. That's as good a star ranking as anything, I think.

This book isn't really a memoir, (but then again, if you expect linear storytelling from Jeanette Winterson....): it skips twenty-five years of her life in an "Intermission" and the end is so open-ended a great breeze might come through (there's a lot about doors and thresholds, being locked out and being let in, in this book). What made it amazing for me is the power, the *fire*, of Winterson's descriptions of reading, her personal, visceral attachment to books. I imagine this is being sold as the dark-side-of-the-moon companion to *Oranges*, Winterson's first, most realistic and most openly autobiographical novel; indeed, my British edition of the book has a little round orange sticker declaring it to be "BY THE AUTHOR OF ORANGES ARE NOT THE ONLY FRUIT". Clever-clever, marketing department.

But this book is the story of what didn't get into the story of *Oranges*: raggedy, stitched-together, with great gaping absences, spurts of language and then painful silences, aporia, lacunae. Winterson called it the "backstory" of *Oranges* on her blog, which fits: it's the backstage story, the back of the tapestry, the story of how she got dragged back to what she describes as the central "wound" of her life, being given up for adoption. *Oranges* was a self-made origin myth; this goes back further, to the origin of that origin myth, and while the tale is still self-made, one of its larger points is how made we are by what happens to us, who brings us up, who nurtures us. Our background -- which she brings to the fore of her story.

This book is much more *angry* than *Oranges* (which had a kind of deliberately willed, *commanded*, courage and optimism which is part of Winterson's own defiant makeup; she charmingly explains the difference between her and her adopted mother in their choice of favourite hymns: hers is "Cheer Up Ye Saints of God," Mrs Winterson's is "God Has Blotted Them Out"). Winterson writes about the blighting of the industrial North of England -- her description of Manchester as the country's "engine" is stunning -- and Thatcherism, the tutor who said to her at Oxford, "You are the working-class experiment" (her best friend got "You are the black experiment"), and there's a striking paragraph-long explosion at cultural critics who called her "arrogant" after her books were published, who didn't understand that for a working-class girl daring to dream of being an author, that wasn't arrogance, it was "politics." Again from her blog:

*Shelagh Delaney, writer of A Taste of Honey, was so good, and she didn't get the support she needed to develop. She was a working class girl, before feminism, living in Salford, and she had incredible talent. She should have been up there in the theatre along with Osborne and Pinter. But although she got her break, she didn't get the crucial follow-up. She was born in 1939 and wrote A Taste of Honey as her first play when she was about 20. She co-wrote the movie with Tony Richardson and it won everything at Cannes.*

*Her second play faltered, and she went into film work. There was so much more she could have done and how amazing to see a woman at the centre of the Kitchen Sink Realism as well as all those male heroes... We have to look after people. Space, time, encouragement, there is no such thing as the lone genius or the lone talent.*

At the end of the book, Winterson meets her biological mother and half-brother, and a heap of other relations, and thinks sadly how intelligent they all are, how they're trying to read and study and learn on their own just as she did; and she beautifully describes being nurtured by a number of different women, from the female librarian who gave her a spare room to her present partner, Susie Orbach (warning: that interview will make you want to kick Aida Edemariam in the shins). A refrain in the book is about want -- *You were wanted, Jeanette* -- how her birth mother wanted but couldn't keep her, and "Mrs Winterson" had her but didn't want her. But, as Julie Myerson said:

*Of course, one of the book's queasiest ironies – and one you sense Winterson is fully aware of – is that it was Mrs Winterson who made her into a writer. By attempting to stunt her daughter's emotional and imaginative growth with fear and religion, she succeeded in doing the exact opposite. She created someone who learned to live in her head, and to love, trust and remember words: "Fuck it, I can write my own," was young Jeanette's thought as she watched her beloved books burn.*

Excerpt from the book in the Grauniad - this is what made me buy it from Amazon.co.uk because I couldn't wait to read it. I linked it to nearly every one of my friends. Its ending deserves to be quoted in full:

*I realised something important: whatever is on the outside can be taken away at any time. Only what is inside you is safe. I began to memorise texts. We had always memorised long chunks of the Bible, and it seems that people in oral traditions have better memories than those who rely on printed text. The rhythm and image of poetry make it easier to recall than prose, easier to chant. But I needed prose too, and so I made my own concise versions of 19th-century novels – going for the talismanic, not worrying much about the plot. I had lines inside me – a string of guiding lights. I had language.*

*....The books had gone, but they were objects; what they held could not be so easily destroyed. What they held was already inside me, and together we would get away. And standing over the smouldering pile of paper and type, still warm the next cold morning, I understood that there was something else I could do. "Fuck it," I thought, "I can write my own."*

And she did.

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## **Ilenia Zodiaco says**

Peccato per il quid non necessario di retorica di cui la Winterson si serve per interi paragrafi, suonando un po' troppo banale, per i miei gusti. L'uso eccessivo della prima persona plurale e qualche frase che sembra uscita direttamente dai manuali di autoaiuto non sono, però, bastati a rovinare un'autobiografia sviluppata in maniera non lineare, intermittente, con ironia e audacia. Il rapporto con la madre labirintica e vendicativa è la chiave che l'autrice usa per analizzare la sua storia e soprattutto la sua relazione con l'amore: l'amore verso le altre donne, verso la vita, verso i libri, verso il tempo. Notevole.

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## jo says

this book is a broken elegy to the north of england and a world of small shops, small communities, and simple habits that no longer exists. it's also a tribute to a hardy working class people who knows resilience, pluckiness, no-nonsensicality, and making a life out of what you are given. surprisingly, it's a vindication of the values of faith, which keep people under the direst circumstances out of the clutches of despair and of the feeling of being trapped. these are winterson's words. this truly abused kid never felt despair or a sense of being trapped while she grew up. there was faith for that. no one else felt it either.

have i read too little winterson to know that she writes like this? i remember her prose as lyrical and full of surprises. this is simple, direct, often hysterical in spite of all the horrors (i laughed out loud a lot), and wry. maybe all of her books are written like this and i don't remember. maybe this is written like this because there are only so many ways in which you can describe mayhem.

i have been reading three mother-memoirs in a row (cheryl strayed's *Wild* and alison bechdel's *Are You My Mother?* before this) and though all three of them are painful, this is the one that takes the cake for me (all three of them are great, too).

jeanette winterson was given up for adoption six weeks after she was born. in those six weeks she was breastfed and loved. the family who adopted her consisted of a factory worker and a homesteader. mrs. winterson was a true force of nature, not necessarily in a good way. she was definitely a withering and wintering force of nature for poor jeanette, who disappointed her mom (the book shows it could not have been otherwise) by being a girl (turns out the wintersons had settled on a little boy), by being herself a little concentrated force of nature, and by being the devil's spawn. it is not entirely clear what terrible things jeanette did, but she was often punished in unbelievably cruel ways, and she was never loved.

this book is in many ways mrs. winterson's story. she deserves a story and she is lucky her daughter is a fabulous writer. this terrible woman who loved all that is death-like in christianity and lived under the sign of the apocalypse, renunciation of all worldly pleasure, and doom, is described with great compassion. jeanette must have loved her very much. she must have wanted her very much. she must also have been furiously angry at her, but this book is about forgiveness, not anger.

when young willful jeanette falls in love with a girl mrs. winterson basically say it's either the girl or you and jeanette spends the following couple of years sleeping in a borrowed car while going to school full time and having a part-time job. she is sixteen.

then, because she is jeanette winterson and nothing but nothing will ever stop her from getting what she wants, she gets herself into oxford. if you read the first part of the book without knowing who jeanette winterson is, the fact that she got herself into oxford will make your jaw drop. how on earth could this working class girl who had lived in a place stuck several decades behind real time get into one of the most exclusive universities in the world?

well, she did.

in the second part of the book jeanette moves to the very near present and talks about a terrible breakdown she suffered when she was in her late 40s. i won't say what brought it on but it doesn't really matter. in

passing she also tells us that she had two more breakdowns and one psychotic crisis. also, she seems to be one of those people who hear voices without having other psychotic symptoms. apparently she heard voices all through her life. in Agnes's Jacket psychology professor gail hornstein debunks the myth that people who hear voices are invariably schizophrenic or bipolar and need to be medicated to kingdom come (i'm sure she's not the first to say so, but her book is the first where i read it). there are indeed people who hear voices but lead an otherwise normal life.

why JW had breakdowns; why she always had a terrible time sustaining loving relationships; why she was troubled all her life is not something that is very difficult to understand. she spent the first 16 years of her life not getting any love. this tends not to do wonders for one's psychological health.

this book is also an ode to books and words. books and words saved young jeanette, plain and simple. books and words have saved many unloved kids and will continue to do so as long as humankind exists, because there will always be unloved kids and works of literature. her love for and gratitude to literature could not be bigger. it's time for me to read all of her books.

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## Jennifer says

Review by Zoe Williams, The Guardian - she says perfectly exactly how I felt about this memoir.

"Jeanette Winterson's memoir is written sparsely and hurriedly; it is sometimes so terse it's almost in note form. The impression this gives is not of sloppiness, but a desperate urgency to make the reader understand. This is certainly the most moving book of Winterson's I have ever read, and it also feels like the most turbulent and the least controlled. In the end, the emotional force of the second half makes me suspect that the apparent artlessness of the first half is a ruse; that, in a Lilliputian fashion, what appears to be a straight narrative of her early life is actually tying the reader down with a thousand imperceptible guy ropes, so that when she unleashes a terrible sorrow, there is no escaping it and no looking away.

"Why be happy when you could be normal?" is the real-life question of her adopted mother, as Winterson is evicted, at 16, for taking up with a second girlfriend (the attempts to exorcise her sexuality after the first having been unsuccessful). There are passages and phrases that will be recognisable to anyone who's read *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*: this is not surprising, since that first, bold announcement of Winterson's talent was a roman à clef, and never claimed to be otherwise.

So anecdotes and jokes crop up in both books: the mother says the lesbian sweet-shop owners deal in "unnatural passions", and the young Jeanette thinks it means they put chemicals in their sweets; the gospel tent, the CB radio, all the memorable details of the first fictional outing come up again, but the point is not that this is repetitive. Rather, that the documents are intended as companions, to lay this one over the last like tracing paper, so that even if the author poetically denies the possibility of an absolute truth, there emerges nevertheless the shape of the things that actually happened. I had forgotten how upbeat *Oranges* was; it may have been peopled by eccentrics, with a heroine held in alienation by the aspic of impotent childhood, but there were upsides. "I suppose the saddest thing for me," Winterson writes now, "thinking about the cover version that is *Oranges*, is that I wrote a story I could live with. The other one was too painful. I could not survive it."

The upbringing as she tells it now is far bleaker; she was beaten, she was often hungry, she was left all night

on the doorstep by a mother whose religious excesses might even have been a secondary influence on the household the first being her depression, which was pervasive and relentless. She was not well loved. However, the story's leavened throughout by other observations. The geopolitics I sometimes found bold, and other times found too broad to be conclusive: "In a system that generates masses, individualism is the only way out. But then what happens to community – to society?" But it wriggles with humour, even as Jeanette describes Mrs Winterson, who, in between her violent homilies and dishonest violence, had like any good tyrant various crucial absurdities – "she was one of the first women to have a heated corset. Unfortunately, when it overheated it beeped to warn the user. As the corset was by definition underneath her petticoat dress, apron and coat, there was little she could do to cool down except take off her coat and stand in the yard." There is Winterson's quirky favourite hymn ("Cheer up ye saints of God," it starts, "There is nothing to worry about"), her loving, impressionistic descriptions of classic authors, from TS Eliot to Gertrude Stein, as she first encounters them. And even with all this new, distressing detail, the story of her childhood ends well – it ends in escape.

Then there's an odd page or two entitled "Intermission", which finishes: "The womb to tomb of an interesting life – but I can't write my own; never could. Not Oranges. Not now. I would rather go on reading myself as a fiction than as a fact ... I am going to miss out 25 years ... Maybe later ..."

And suddenly we are on to territory which is alarming, moving, at times genuinely terrifying; skip forward a quarter century, and Winterson has just split up from her girlfriend, the theatre director Deborah Warner. She finds her adoption papers in the effects of her dad, when he's moving to an old people's home. She has a nervous breakdown and attempts suicide. "My friends never failed me and when I could talk I did talk to them. But often I could not talk. Language left me. I was in the place before I had any language. The abandoned place." At times she describes the process with precision. Other times, though, the scars of this first abandonment are given in the most unadorned, uncharacteristic prose, as though she's trying to gnaw her way through her own sophistication to get to the truth of it. In a way, the presence in the narrative of Susie Orbach, with whom Winterson started a relationship just before she started looking for her birth mother, acts as a reassurance to the reader as much as to the author, a fixed point to whom we can return, whose very inclusion means that, whatever happens, a fresh abandonment won't be the outcome. Otherwise I genuinely think it would be unbearable. At one point I was crying so much I had tears in my ears.

There is much here that's impressive, but what I find most unusual about it is the way it deepens one's sympathy, for everyone involved, so that the characters who are demons at the start – her adoptive mother but also, to a degree, her acquiescent adoptive father – emerge, by the end, as simply, catastrophically damaged. In the process of uncovering that, she painstakingly unpicks the damage they wreaked on her. The peace she makes with her adoptive family is, in this sense, more important and evocative than the more complicated and double-edged peace that comes with tracking down her birth mother."

20 November 2011

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## **Kyriakos Sorokkou says**

Το πρ?το μου μυθιστ?ρημα που δι?βασα ποτ? (μ?χρι το τ?λος) στα Αγγλικ? ?ταν το Oranges are not the only fruit της Jeanette Winterson

Ε?ναι το πρ?το μυθιστ?ρημα της Winterson.

?να μυθιστ?ρημα με αυτοβιογραφικ? στοιχε?, μια ψευδο-αυτοβιογραφ?α ?που τα γεγον?τα

συνδυάζονται με τη μυθοπλασία.

Ασχολείται με μια λεσβία κοπέλα που ζει σε μια φανατική θρησκευτική κοινωνία σε μια προαστιακή πόλη στη βόρεια Αγγλία στα τέλη της δεκαετίας του 1960 με αρχές της δεκαετίας του 1970.

Το διβάσα τον περασμένο Απρίλη μαζί με μια πολύ καλή μου φίλη, της οποίας η Winterson είναι η αγαπημένη συγγραφέας.

Και έτσι λόγους μνές μετά ξεκινάσαμε άλλη μια συναντήγηση αυτή τη φορά του  
Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal

Αν τα Πορτοκάλια ήταν μυθιστόρημα με αυτοβιογραφική στοιχέα, αυτό εδώ είναι αυτοβιογράφια με μυθοπλαστική στοιχέα.

Αυτή τα δύο βιβλία πνέ μαζί.

Θα ήλεγα να διαβάζατε πρώτα το μυθιστόρημα (πορτοκάλια) και μετά συνεχίζετε με αυτό.

Αλληλοσυμπληρώνονται το ένα με το άλλο, ανακαλύπτεις τι έχει βίση την πραγματικότητα και τι την φαντάσα της συγγραφέως.

Εκτός απ' τη ζωή της μέχρι τα 16 της με τη σκληροπυρηνική θρησκώληπτη μνα της βλέπουμε επίσης τη μχη της με την κατ'θλιψη, την ανάζτηση της βιολογικής της μνας, την καριέρα της ως συγγραφέας.

Μιλεί επίσης για μεγάλα ερωτήματα στη ζωή, τη μνμή, την αγήπη, το σπ'τι (ως ννοια), την λογοτεχνία, θέματα φύλου και φεμινισμός.

Συνθως δε διαβάζω αυτοβιογραφίες δι'τι δε με ενδιαφέρει η ζωή του δημιουργού παρ' μνο το δημιοργήμ' του.

Αλλ' υπ'ρχουν εξαιρσεις.

Η πνα της Winterson είναι ήυπνη, αιχμηρή, καυστική και λει αρκετές αλθειες.

Αν ο συγγραφέας με ενδιαφέρει και ως ήτομο, τ'τε ναι, θα τον διαβήσω.

Πράσα καλή και νιθω είμαι ήτοιμος και για περισσ'τερη Winterson

Βαθμολογία: 8/10

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