SYNOPSIS

The is the story of Jeanette, adopted and brought up by her mother as one of God’s elect. Zealous and passionate, she seems destined for life as a missionary, but then she falls for one of her converts. At sixteen, Jeanette decides to leave the church, her home and her family for the young woman she loves.

Innovative, punchy and tender, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* is a few days’ ride into the bizarre outposts of religious excess and human obsession.

KEY CHARACTERS

Jeanette – the narrator of the story; a young girl adopted by a fervently religious woman, trained for the ministry but ultimately shunned by the church for her sexuality

Jeanette’s mother – in actuality Jeanette’s adopted mother; deeply religious, she adopts Jeanette to fulfil the role of a missionary that she herself has not been able to

Elsie Norris – the old woman from the church who befriends and accepts Jeanette as she is, often attempting to help and guide Jeanette, but is repeatedly ill and so not always there to help

Melanie – converted to the church by Jeanette, and Jeanette’s first love and lesbian relationship

Miss Jewsbury – a woman from the church who, like Jeanette, is also lesbian

Katie – another of Jeanette’s converts and Jeanette’s second relationship

Pastor Spratt – the minister who first converted Jeanette’s mother and who works abroad as a missionary; although he never physically appears in the present narrative, his presence is there throughout

Pastor Finch – the minister of Jeanette’s church who attempts an exorcism on her

‘Always dextrous, fluent, joyful, gorgeous’

*Guardian*
‘Oranges is written in the first person, it’s direct and uninhibited, but it isn’t autobiography in the real sense. I have noticed that when women writers put themselves into their fiction, it’s called autobiography. When men do it, such as Paul Auster or Milan Kundera it’s called meta-fiction.’ Jeanette Winterson

The novel is to a large extent based on Jeanette Winterson’s own experience as a child. Does this change how you read it? Would you have read it differently if it was an autobiography? What do you think is the significance of Jeanette Winterson having used her own name in the novel?

As the title suggests, oranges play a significant role in the story. What would have been the significance of using a different fruit? In particular, what would have been the significance of using an apple? What do you think is meant by the title statement, which only appears in the novel as a throwaway statement from her mother?

There are no strong male characters in the book – the only men to make an appearance are the two pastors; do you think that these pastors have much influence over the women of the church? Why do you think that Jeanette’s father is such a background character? Do you think that Jeanette’s mother loves her husband? When Jeanette asks her mother why she married her father her mother responds “We had to have something for you” – what do you think she means by this?

At the end of ‘Exodus’ the narrator states that ‘no emotion is the final one’. What was the overriding emotion that you were left with from this book? Why?

What is the significance of the Biblical structure of the novel, naming the chapters after the opening books of the Old Testament? Do you think that the novel portrays Christianity in an unremittingly negative light? Are there redeeming features displayed within the church?

In the Bible Jesus does a lot of his teaching through stories and parables. Jeanette Winterson does something similar throughout her novel, what do you think she is trying to tell the reader through the extended narrative of Winnet and the sorcerer in the final chapter, ‘Ruth’? What are the parallels between Winnet and Jeanette, and between the sorcerer and Jeanette’s mother?

‘When thick rinds are used the top must be thoroughly skimmed, or a scum will form marring the final appearance.’
From *The Making of Marmalade* by Mrs Beeton

Discuss this quote in relation to Jeanette and how she changes between the opening of the book and the close.

**RECEPTION & REVIEWS**

‘She is a master of her material, a writer in whom great talent abides’ *Vanity Fair*

‘Many consider her to be the best living writer in this language... In her hands, words are fluid, radiant, humming’ *Evening Standard*

‘Even at a time when so many good and interesting novels are coming out, hers stand out as performances of real originality and extraordinary promise’ John Bayley

‘Wonderful rites-of-passage novel… where the author’s blossoming Sapphic nature leads her to eschew her mothers proffered favourite’. Mariella Frostrup

‘Still extraordinary, still brilliant’ *Metro*

‘An novel that deserves revisiting…Winterson maintains a balance of tone, a trueness of voice… It remains one of the finest things Winterson has written’ *Observer*
BIOGRAPHY

Jeanette Winterson OBE is the author of ten novels, including *Oranges are not the Only Fruit*, *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry*, a book of short stories, *The World and Other Places*; a collection of essays, *Art Objects* as well as many other works, including children's books, screenplays and journalism. Her writing has won the Whitbread Award for Best First Novel, the John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial Prize, the E. M. Forster Award and the Prix d'argent at Cannes Film Festival.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Passion
Sexing the Cherry
Written on the Body
Art and Lies
Gut Symmetries
The World and Other Places
The Powerbook
Lighthousekeeping
Weight
The Stone Gods
Art Objects
Boating for Beginners
Tanglewreck
The King of Capri

Visit www.vintage-books.co.uk for more reading guides, news, competitions, podcasts, videos and much more from Vintage Books and our authors.