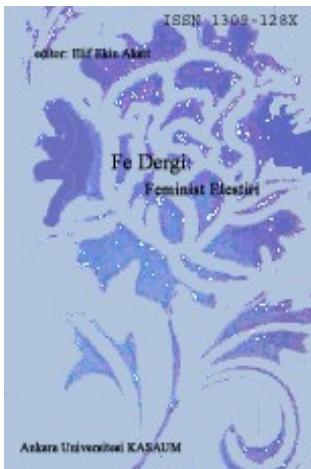


Yayınlayan: Ankara Üniversitesi KASAUM
Adres: Kadın Sorunları Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi, Cebeci 06590 Ankara



Fe Dergi: Feminist Eleştiri 14, Sayı 2
Erişim bilgileri, makale sunumu ve ayrıntılar için:
<http://federgi.ankara.edu.tr/>

Crossing the Borders of Genre and Gender: Jeanette Winterson's Redefinition of the Bildungsroman in Oranges are Not the Only Fruit

Dilek Öztürk Yağcı

Bölüm: Araştırma Makaleleri

Çevrimiçi yayına başlama tarihi: 15 Aralık 2022

Yazı Gönderim Tarihi: 31.07.2022

Yazı Kabul Tarihi: 28.11.2022

Bu makaleyi alıntılamak için: Dilek Öztürk Yağcı, “*Crossing the Borders of Genre and Gender: Jeanette Winterson's Redefinition of the Bildungsroman in Oranges are Not the Only Fruit*” *Fe Dergi* 14, no. 2 (2022), 78-89.

URL: http://federgi.ankara.edu.tr/en/2022/12/12/28_6/

Bu eser akademik faaliyetlerde ve referans verilerek kullanılabilir. Hiçbir şekilde izin alınmaksızın çoğaltılamaz.

**Crossing the Borders of Genre and Gender: Jeanette Winterson's Redefinition of the Bildungsroman in
Oranges are Not the Only Fruit***
Dilek Öztürk Yağcı**

*This study focuses on the appropriation of the Bildungsroman genre in Jeanette Winterson's first book *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit* (1985), a novel which is often referred to as the fictionalization of the author's upbringing. The novel traces the coming out story of the lesbian protagonist Jeanette who struggles to live in a fundamentalist evangelical community that fails to embrace Jeanette's sexual orientation and denounces it as "unnatural passions." This conflict on (sexual)identity between the protagonist and society, the main feature of the traditional Bildungsroman genre, is represented as the core element of *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit*. In the novel, strictly religious public space constantly works towards constructing Jeanette's identity defining the limits of normal and natural for her. However, Jeanette tries to deconstruct and reconstruct that given identity and attain subjectivity by discovering her sexuality and creating a homespace for herself amidst possibilities. Like Jeanette who rejects heteronormativity and rewrites her own story, Winterson challenges the normativity of Bildung narratives and pushes the boundaries of the Bildungsroman for redefinition. For all these reasons, drawing on Jeanette's Becoming within the dynamics of her social space, this study aims at discussing Jeanette Winterson's subversion of the classical male-centred narratives of self-development and her revision of the Bildungsroman within a feminist framework in *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit*.*

Keywords: Jeanette Winterson, bildungsroman, coming of age, gender, lesbian writing

Edebi Türün ve Toplumsal Cinsiyetin Sınırlarını Aşmak: Jeanette Winterson'ın Tek Meyve Portakal Değildir Romanında Bildungsroman'ın Yeniden Tanımlanması

Bu çalışma, Jeanette Winterson'in ilk romani olan ve genellikle yazarın öz yaşam öyküsünden yola çıkarak yazıldığı düşünülen Tek Meyve Portakal Değildir (1985) romanının Bildungsroman (*Oluşum Romanı*) edebi türünün özellikleri bağlamında yeniden yorumlanması incelmektedir. Roman, lezbiyen bir kadın olan Jeanette'in, onun cinsel yönelimini kabullenmeyeip "anormal tutkular" olarak nitelendiren kökten dinci bir toplulukta sürdürdüğü yaşam çabasının, diğer bir deyişle, oluşum öyküsünün izlerini sürüyor. Geleneksel Bildungsroman türünün de başlıca özelliklerinden birisi olan kahraman ve toplum arasındaki (cinsel)kimlik üzerindeki bu çalışma Tek Meyve Portakal Değildir romanının temel ögesi olarak temsil edilir. Romanda, aşırı dinci toplumsal alan Jeanette için normal ve doğal olanın sınırlarını belirleyerek sürekli olarak onun kimliğini inşa etmeye çalışır. Buna karşılık Jeanette da cinselliğini keşfederek ve kendine olasılıklar arasında bir yuva alanı açarak bu kimliği yeniden oluşturmaya ve öznelligine kavuşmaya çabalar. Nasıl ki Jeanette heteronormatifliği reddederek hikayesini yeniden yazıyorsa, Winterson da oluşum anlatılarının geleneksel kaliplarına meydan okuyarak Bildungsroman türünün sınırlarını yeniden tanımlar. Tüm bu nedenlerle, bu çalışma Jeanette Winterson'ın Tek Meyve Portakal Değildir romanında Jeanette'in toplumsal alanın dinamikleri içindeki oluşum hikayesinden yola çıkarak, yazarın eril merkezli oluşum anlatısı geleneğini ters yüz ederek Bildungsroman anlatı türünü feminist bir çerçeve içinde yeniden tanımlamasını ele almayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Jeanette Winterson, oluşum romanı, yetişkinliğe geçiş, toplumsal cinsiyet, lezbiyen yazın

*An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 15th International IDEA Conference, May 11th-13th 2022, Mustafa Kemal University, Hatay/Turkey.

**Dr., Istanbul Technical University, School of Foreign Languages, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9573-1444>, dilekozturk@itu.edu.tr

Introduction

*Oranges are Not the Only Fruit*¹ opens with the narrator character Jeanette's description of her mother's rather schematic notions of what life and social relations can be. The mother, informed by her religious and cultural background in her Pentecostal community, defines the world through a divided conception of enemies and friends and sets up a series of rigid binaries for Jeanette: "Enemies were: The Devil (in his many forms), Next Door, Sex (in its many forms), Slugs. Friends were: God, Our dog, Auntie Madge, The Novels of Charlotte Brontë, Slug pellets" (Winterson 1987, 3). Jeanette, instilled with such moral absolutism and developed her first understanding of the world in binaries, constantly works towards unsettling those opposites and rearrange them in both/and structures. Realizing that the interests of her mother and the Church clash with her female desire upon discovering her lesbian identity, she gradually moves away from the Grand Narrative of the Church towards more liberated narratives of the self, writing a story of her own, a story of the making of her "self." Like Jeanette who challenges the heteronormative codes of her evangelical community, Winterson, in *Oranges*, undermines the normative form of the classical Bildungsroman and reworks its genre conventions by presenting the coming out and be-coming story of a lesbian woman within the margins of a fundamentalist evangelical community.

A significant point with much of scholarly work on *Oranges* in relation to its generic features is that it is often classified in diverse ways such as a "semi-autobiographic Bildungsroman" (Antakyalioglu 2009, 4), a "quasi-Bildungsroman" (Antakyalioglu 2009, 5), a "lesbian Bildungsroman" (Andermahr 2009, 51), or a "lesbian coming out" narrative (Palmer 1993, 100).² These contentions, though seemingly distinct from one another, serve clarifying the ideas about the form of *Oranges* because both autobiography and Bildungsroman as methods of (self)representation can be considered within the broad category of "coming of age" narratives. However, to Winterson, the novel has never been that straightforward to be categorised as autobiography or fiction.³ Ironically, it is "not at all and yes of course" an autobiography (Winterson 1991, 17). The novel cannot be considered as purely autobiographical because it may or may not be the whole and the true account of the author's own life, a feature which is associated with the autobiography genre in general. Therefore, to Winterson, *Oranges* is actually "a fiction masquerading as a memoir" (Winterson 1997, 94). Winterson's ironic remarks here regarding the novel's controversial generic qualities indicate how she undermines the possibility of absolute truth by clouding the distinction between fact and fiction, autobiography and Bildungsroman. Leaving the space as liminal, Winterson actually clears the ground and opens it for myriad possibilities outside the authorial control of the genres and the truth. As an author who challenges the constructed nature of denominations, Winterson, instead of categorizing *Oranges* as a Bildungsroman, or an autobiography, in fact, dances with the possibility of these two forms along with many others and comes to rework⁴ them, which reveals her critical approach to all kinds of constructions through dominant discourses- texts, spaces or subjects.

In her "Introduction" to the Vintage edition of *Oranges* in 1991, Winterson explains the narrative form and the stylistic features of her novel as follows:

Oranges is an experimental novel: its interests are anti-linear. It offers a complicated narrative structure disguised as a simple one, it employs a very large vocabulary and a beguilingly straight-forward syntax. This means that you can read in spirals. As a shape, the spiral is fluid and allows infinite movement. But is it movement backwards or forwards? Is it height or depth? Draw several, each drifting into each and all this will be clear. (Winterson 1991, 14)

As we read along and make endless moves in the space of this experimental piece and journey through Winterson's narrative maze, what becomes clear is not only the required helical reading strategy but also various generic elements which are woven into the text. In *Oranges*, Winterson offers a blended version of the fact and fabrication through her apparent fictionalised (auto)biographical writing, her parodic treatment of the grand narratives through patterning her novel after the first eight books of the Bible, and by integrating various subnarratives such as myths, fairy tales and fantasies into the main body of her text. Such interpolation of diverse narratives into the piece manifests Winterson's rejection of the central role of any genre or truth. Rather than designating her novel as one thing or the other, Winterson instead draws attention to the infinite possibilities that the text might offer once freed from labels and reworked. At this juncture, Winterson's revision of the Bildungsroman genre in *Oranges*, which this study aims to discuss, proves noteworthy because it reveals how

the author draws attention to the significance of calling into question the dominant subject positions and discourses in fiction and provides alternative frames of reference in a postmodern context. Before moving on to Winterson's reworking of the Bildungsroman genre in *Oranges*, the following section offers a brief development history of the Bildungsroman, its main features, and its transformation over the years, which proves useful to enhance the reading of the text in terms of the form and the context.

The Bildungsroman Form and its Transformation

Bildungsroman or “novel of formation” originated as a new type of novel in the second half of the eighteenth century in Germany with its widely accepted first example as Johann Wolfgang Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*⁵ (1795-6). The classical Bildungsroman traces the *bildung*, the education and becoming of a young protagonist who develops physically, psychologically and in the spiritual sense as he tries to emplace himself in society defining his identity and his place in the world. In this respect, the main focus of the classical Bildungsroman has always been the interaction, relation or conflict between society and the self, and the protagonist’s formation against the background of rapidly changing, progress-oriented, gender and class-conscious society of the Enlightenment period. For Mikhail Bakhtin, the Bildungsroman is a distinct type of the novelistic genre, namely the biographical novel, which focuses on the becoming of the individual within real historical time. In Bakhtin’s definition, the development of the individual, or the “emergence” in his words, is in synchrony with the world which is regarded as “an experience” and “a school” (1986, 23). To Bakhtin, in a Bildungsroman,

[The character] emerges along with the world and he reflects the historical emergence of the world itself. He is no longer within an epoch, but on the border between two epochs, at the transition point from one to the other. This transition is accomplished in him and through him. He is forced to become a new, unprecedented type of human being. What is happening here is precisely the emergence of a new man. . . . It is as though the very *foundations* of the world are changing, and man must change along with them. . . . The image of the emerging man begins to surmount its private nature . . . and enters into a completely new, spatial sphere of historical existence. (1986, 23-4)

Fifty years later Franco Moretti, in *The Way of the World* deviates from Bakhtin’s mimetic imperative and situates the Bildungsroman genre in the premises of the modern culture considering it as an inevitable outcome of the social struggles, the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution, and, therefore, the “symbolic form” of modernity (1987, 5). To Moretti, despite its various definitions and generic transformations, Bildungsroman still remains as a form which reconciles the gap between “*individuality*” and “*authority*,” the characteristics of the modern bourgeois society (1987, 15). However, as Moretti concludes, Bildungsroman as a symbolic form had its end in the early twentieth century because the very foundational idea that “*the biography of a young individual was the most meaningful viewpoint for the understanding and the evaluation of history*” could no longer apply to the “new world” with its fragmentary characters and fragmented image of history (1987, 227).

It should be contended that Bildungsroman as a symbolic form if not yet ended, it actually has evolved and transformed, especially in the 1980s and 90s, diversifying into different forms of narrative as coming of age, coming out or lesbian. As Tobias Boes observes, what gave way to the evolution of the term Bildungsroman and its definition was the increasing amount of scholarly work in feminism, postcolonial theory and minority studies in the late twentieth century. In parallel with this change came another revision regarding the scholars’ deployment of the conventions of the genre. There was now a move from “traditional metropolitan novels of formation and social affirmation to increasingly global and fragmentary narratives of transformation and rebellion” (2006, 231). Accordingly, the twentieth century appropriations of the genre witnessed a break away from the conventions of the traditional Bildungsroman employing anti-linear narratives and fragmentary subject positions paralleling the changing notions of selfhood and identity in modernism and later in postmodernism. In her chapter titled “The Female *Bildungsroman* in the Twentieth Century,” Maroula Joannou explains that the characteristic features of the classical Bildungsroman have been challenged by various twentieth century women writers such as Dorothy Richardson, Doris Lessing, Angela Carter, Jeanette Winterson and Sarah Waters. These writers problematized the “temporal logic” of the form and its “ameliorative optimism” (2019, 200). To rework the classical genre, they have also avoided realistic elements through deployment of various non-realistic forms

as the fairy tale, the fable, the fantastic, the gothic and the grotesque, the utopian and the dystopian (Joannou 2019, 200). In the light of these views, it can be concluded that Winterson's *Oranges* sets off from such a revision and lends itself into a discussion in which the blurred lines of the Bildungsroman, its transformation and revision over time are revealed.

Playing with the Binaries: *Oranges* as “not at all and of course” a *Bildungsroman*

In *Oranges*, Winterson introduces a female protagonist reworking the traditional Bildungsroman genre which often traces the personal growth and maturation of a male hero in his search for the ideal self and universal truth. Along with presenting a male protagonist story, such novels of formation would often be peopled with male characters all playing their roles in the protagonist's growth and maturation. The women, however, would often be portrayed as subsidiary characters or companions learning to accommodate themselves in the phallocentric ethos. By presenting the coming of age journey of Jeanette, Winterson displaces the male-centred nature of the form and rewrites its gender politics. For instance, the opening line of the novel emphasizes clearly how Winterson plays with the gender binaries in the family: "My father liked to watch the wrestling, my mother liked to wrestle" (Winterson 1987, 3). This sentence actually serves as a symbol of Jeanette's becoming, her self-formation which she achieves through a constant grappling with her mother while her father only remains as an onlooker. Unlike the traditional Bildungsroman pattern where the father acts as the phallic power posing obstacles, in *Oranges*, it is actually the mother who owns traditionally masculine characteristics. Determining Jeanette's path to follow, Jeanette's mother Louie bars her child's imagination and condemns her to a life of struggle. This positioning of the roles of the mother and father as reversed challenges the universal, masculinist frame of the classical Bildungsroman serving Winterson's aim of the subversion of the patriarchal myths of literature.

In addition to putting women at the centre, Winterson also problematizes the role of men in society and in the formation of the protagonist. In other words, as Gabrielle Griffin suggests, the novel "translates itself into a counter narrative of men as insignificant and / or grotesque" (1994, 83). In *Oranges*, Jeanette's environment is surrounded by various female figures including her mother, Elsie Norris, Miss Jewsbury, Mrs Virtue, Melanie and Katy, who eventually shape her character and destiny playing their roles as friends or foes. However, the patriarchal figures, usually the law makers are literally there, but they are not present practically. Their existence is either ineffective or parodied. For instance, Jeanette's father Jack is absent from the majority of the novel, and the readers do not have any insights into his mind except for a couple hints by Jeanette herself: "Poor Dad he was never quite good enough" (Winterson 1987, 11). Though he is most of the times an ally to Jeanette against her mother's reign, he is never a competent father nor an active agent in Jeanette's development. Naturally, the father's passive role in the novel can be linked to Winterson's own agenda regarding the displacement of gender binaries. Apart from Jeanette's father, there are also the leading patriarchal figures Pastor Finch and Pastor Spratt whose role in the novel is also undermined. Winterson treats these so-called holy figures with ridicule limiting their essence to their absurd behaviours and comical sermons. A case in point is the trial scene at the church in the "Joshua" episode where Jeannette is assaulted for her sexual orientation and forced to repent: "These children of God . . . have fallen under Stan's spell." "These children of God have fallen foul of their lusts." "These children are full of demons!" . . . Upon hearing these insults, the so-called demonic child yells at the men in rage: "To the pure all things are pure" . . . "It's you not us." (Winterson 1987, 104-105). With such parodied male figures as Pastor Finch and Spratt and their ineffective lengthy lectures on "unnatural passions and the mark of the demon" (Winterson 1987, 105), Winterson weakens the authority of the Church and the dominant religious discourses as well as challenging the male-dominated nature of the Bildungsroman genre.

Winterson's problematization of the role of men in society also finds an echo in Jeanette's conceptualisation of men and marriage. The novel presents various occasions signifying that Jeanette has no sexual interest in men, and she is rather horrified by the very idea of marriage. For Jeanette, the word "man" has bestial connotations of abjection and repulsion, while marriage means the union of women and beasts. "The Numbers" episode serves as an example of Jeanette's unsympathetic approach towards the idea of marriage, which opens with Jeanette's recounting of the dream she has had for days. In the dream, Jeanette walks up the aisle in difficulty as her golden crown gets heavier and heavier, and her pure white dress makes it more and more difficult to walk in as she tries to reach the altar:

Somehow I made it to the altar. The priest was very fat and kept getting fatter, like bubble gum you blow. Finally we came to the moment, ‘You may kiss the bride.’ My new-husband turned to me, and here were a number of possibilities. Sometimes he was blind, sometimes a pig, sometimes my mother, sometimes the man from the post office, and once, just a suit of clothes with nothing inside. I told my mother about it, and she said it was because I ate sardines for supper. The next night I ate sausages, but I still had the dream. (Winterson 1987, 71)

Jeanette’s description of her husband amidst possibilities such as blind, pig-like or in her mother’s silhouette explains how she conceptualises marriage as delimiting, something only people with impaired vision and limited worldview like her mother or obnoxious men would enter into.

Apart from this horrid dream which Jeanette frequently has, she is also disturbed by everyday incidents concerning men and marriage. For instance, her mind is often preoccupied with the story of a woman in their street who told them that “she had married a pig” (Winterson 1987, 71). Moreover, she describes the man running the post-office as “bald and shiny with too fat hands for the sweet jars” (71), and she hates when he gives her heart-shaped sweets accompanied with his sexist statement: “Sweet hearts for a sweet heart” (71). She is also quite distanced from his Uncle Bill, and she feels repulsion towards him because of the fact that “he was horrible, and hairy” (72). She even “half expected him to have a tail” (73). Jeanette’s idea of men as unpleasant and degrading types, and her “beast theory” that all innocent women are finally ending up with marrying beasts (73), her avoidance of men, and her natural reserve when she is around them actually demonstrate how she rejects conforming to the prevailing ideas and practices in society, namely the heterosexual norms. As Merja Makinen claims in *The Novels of Jeanette Winterson*, this rather negative notion of men as animalistic and “physically grotesque” figures actually “run[s] counter to the usual heterosexual romance script where the male body is what the young woman covets” (2005, 6). The idea is however in line with the happily-ever-after ending of *Jane Eyre*, Jane next to St John Rivers, which was rewritten by Louie specifically for Jeanette.

Jeanette tries to communicate with her mother articulating her concerns about men and her dreams but she is often silenced by her mother’s offering her either oranges or the alternate ending of *Jane Eyre*. Many years later when she is “literate and curious” (Winterson 1987, 74), Jeanette rereads *Jane Eyre* and discovers the original ending of the novel that Jane reunites with Mr Rochester rather than marrying St John. She describes the effect of this day it had on her like the day when she found out about her adoption while looking for a pack of playing cards. She feels betrayed resolving never to play cards again or read *Jane Eyre*. Nevertheless, it is actually long before this incident that Jeanette starts to read against the grain and resists stories with happily-ever-afters. For instance, when she mentions her beast theory, her aunt simply laughs telling her that there is enough time for her to “get a boy.” To this, she firmly replies: “I don’t think I want one” (Winterson 1987, 73). Jeanette does not conform to her aunt’s theory of “there’s what we want . . . and there’s what we get” (Winterson 1987, p.74). She assures us that it is not men she actually desires but women: “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” (Winterson 1987, 170). In this sense, Winterson’s protagonist discards the conventional “rhetoric of happiness” in the classical Bildungsroman which is based on the idea of “marriage as a metaphor for the social contract” (Moretti 1987, 22). Jeanette does not believe in the power of marriage as a long-established tradition which serves as a pact between the individual and society. Her way of negotiating a place for her self and sexuality in an evangelical community actually entails subverting heterosexual standards for identity rather than conforming to such norms.

Winterson’s portrayal of the formation of a young girl in the fashion of the Bildungsroman genre brings the issue of “education” into the foreground. The early examples of Bildungsroman usually focused on presenting the educational and / or spiritual development of wealthy, privileged young men from upper classes. However, as Richard Salmon explains, the late 1840s saw the emergence of a new type of English Bildungsroman, which, unlike the novels of the previous decades, portrayed men and women of lower classes desiring to improve themselves (2011, 95-96). This new type, as Salmon notes elsewhere, is often associated with the words “self-culture” and “self help,” the former, meaning “aesthetic education” or the notion of *bildung* in German, and the latter symbolizing a means for “social mobility,” relating to lower and middle-class culture in the Victorian age. The forerunner of this new novel type is considered to be Samuel Smiles who in his famous advice book *Self-Help* (1859) draws attention to the mutual role of “manual employment” and “mental culture,” the components of self-help, in the formation of the self (2019, 64-65). To Salmon, this “Victorian ideal of ‘self-

help', like the German concept of *Bildung*, privileges an informal, organic, and internalized model of personal development over formal education" (2011, 95-96).

Salmon's contentions regarding the Victorian notion of "self-help" leads directly into a consideration of Jeanette's story of formation which is thoroughly based on self-help and self-improvement rather than the formal education which she longs for, accesses quite late, yet finds unpromising. Jeanette defines her school experience in rather negative terms: "I didn't find many explanations at school . . . it only got more and more complex. After three terms I was beginning to despair" (Winterson 1987, 32). She does not receive a proper formal education as she is at first hindered by her mother who has always regarded school as "Breeding Ground" thinking that her daughter would be led astray there (Winterson 1987, 16). When it is finally decided that Jeanette should start her formal education upon the authorities' request, she feels relieved: "I whizzed into the toilet and sat on my hands; the Breeding Ground at last" (Winterson 1987, 17). However, the school does not offer her a different space than that of the family house or the church because her thoughts and conducts are always informed by religious discourse, the doctrines of the church and the principles of her mother. Unfortunately, "at school [she] could not seem to learn anything or win anything" (Winterson 1987, 37). The teachers do not approve of her conducts which they regard to be "terrorizing" and "upsetting" for other children (Winterson 1987, 41,42). Her projects always fall short of the expectations of the teachers even though they "got everything adventure, pathos, mystery" (Winterson 1987, 44). The school, (like the Church) becomes a place for Jeanette where her imagination is constantly restricted and her wishes are taken as unnatural passions. Consequently, Jeanette cannot benefit from formal education since, to her, "at school there was only confusion," and she was "tired of being bullied" (Winterson 1987, 33). She educates herself through hard-work, determination and observation instead, which shows her rich potential for self-cultivation. At school she does her best to win a prize, and at the church she works ardently. For instance, even though everyone thinks that she could not read or write because she has not been to school early enough, Jeanette proves she has "quite unusual" (Winterson 1987, 41) reading skills. When she places too much of hope on her school projects yet none of them grant her any prize; and when her ideas and imagination are barred; she does not judge her teachers at once but tries to understand the reasons for their rejection. For example, failing in Easter egg painting competition and finding that the most unpromising project in the class won, Jeanette states: "I was not a selfish child and, understanding the nature of genius, would have happily bowed to another's talent, but not to three eggs covered in cotton wool, entitled Easter Bunnies" (Winterson 1987, 48). Similarly, when she proudly enters her sample, the black and white embroidered biblical text with "mythical counter-relief" (Winterson 1987, 44) for the needlework class prize, Mrs Virtue thinks her work unworthy of prize because she cannot understand the black figure of "terrified damned" in the corner. Going back to her desk upon the teacher's request, Jeanette sits pondering over the issue:

What could I do? My needlework teacher suffered from a problem of vision. She recognized 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. (Winterson 1987, 45)

Disappointed as she is, Jeanette contemplates on Mrs Virtue's intolerance of difference, her unwillingness to accept views or beliefs outside the norms of society, which she defines as "a problem of vision" (Winterson 1987, 45). This lack of insight which Jeanette associates with her teacher actually becomes the symbolic description of an impairment from which the whole community suffers. In this sense, by exposing and problematizing the loopholes of grand institutions like school, the family and the church, Winterson here draws attention to the becoming of the protagonist through self-help.

Jeanette learns more through her skills of observation and deduction than through her experience at school. One significant thing to be noted concerning her self-formation is her creativity, her ability to invent things, find solutions; and, most importantly, her gift in making up and narrating stories. For instance, when Jeanette gets temporarily deaf and left alone at the hospital, since she does not have anything to read, she invents a play for herself: "I tried to build an igloo out of the orange peel but it kept falling down and even when it stood up, I didn't have an Eskimo to put in it, so I had to invent a story about "How Eskimo Got Eaten" (Winterson 1987, 27). The Eskimo story which she makes up out of boredom would open a wider narrative space through which she would come to realise her quest for identity and need for finding a way out from the constraints of

society. This would actually be a shift, as Silvia Antosa claims, “from the patriarchal and monolithic perspective of the Old Testament to a personal journey made by the young girl into the external world” (2008, 30).

Another significant point to note regarding Jeanette’s journey is that Winterson juxtaposes Jeanette’s trajectory with that of her mother, who invades and maps Jeanette’s space from the very beginning. Louie dreams a dream that “she would get a child, train it, build it and dedicate it to the Lord . . . , so Jeanette “had a way out now, for years and years to come” (Winterson 1987, 10). Therefore, choosing Jeanette’s path in life, Louie tries to write her rather than trying to read her. Through this, she imagines that she could construct a subject, a desired Jeanette, yet she fails. On another level however Jeanette makes her own path, re-forms her identity and subjectivity through the stories she recounts. She comes to realise her self and sexuality along with the bodily paradigms inscribed on her. Through these stories, Jeanette learns to “comprehend the world in its complexity and fluidity and to reject the totalizing and absolutist categories of truth and falsehood, of good and evil” (Makinen 2005, 39). In a sense, by granting her the gift of storytelling, Winterson allows her protagonist to nullify the Word and the “words” (Winterson 1987, 161) imposed on her and write a story of her own. Accordingly, through these alternative tales that are subversive of the stories which Jeanette used to listen to, as Dunn Bailey states, “Winterson deconstructs Jeanette’s received ideology and demonstrates the ways in which self and reality are narrative constructions” (2006, 61). Jeanette herself elaborates on these notions of reality, history and storytelling in the “Deuteronomy” episode where she succinctly expresses their constructed nature:

Of course that is not the whole story, but that is the way with stories; we make them what we will. 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 that everybody 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 for certain is how complicated it all is, like string full of knots. It's all there but hard to find the beginning and impossible to fathom the end. The best you can do is admire the cat's cradle, and maybe knot it up a bit more. History should be a hammock for swinging and a game for playing, the way cats play. Claw it, chew it, rearrange it and at bedtime it's still a ball of string full of knots. Nobody should mind. (Winterson 1987, 93)

Stories open the way for Jeanette to a world full of possibilities and alternatives. Her multiple and multi-layered narratives with no fixed ends are always in the making like subjectivity itself which is always in flux and in process, in a constant becoming. Unlike the classical *Bildungsromane* with realistic finale and well developed, rounded characters, Winterson’s *Oranges*, therefore, draws attention to the unfinished and fragmentary nature of the self and history through the protagonist’s storytelling.

Winterson colours Jeanette’s story of formation with various narratives including fairy tales, fantasies, romance, myths, biblical stories, and dreams fashioning the novel into a pastiche of literary models. Through this, she creates a kaleidoscope, a constantly changing pattern and sequence of events juxtaposing reality and fantasy in the quest/narratives of the protagonist. These sub-narratives open a significant space within the narrative allowing the protagonist and the reader to roam freely eschewing the spatiotemporal constraints and to enjoy different visions, views and truths beyond the infallibility of the church and social norms. Jeanette’s stories present an alternative world view outside the ultimate truth of the male church, the biblical narratives of her mother and the male-authored and male-centred nature of the *Bildungsroman* genre. As Mara Reisman puts it, “By replacing the dominant narratives with stories of her own invention—a skill that develops throughout the text—Jeanette . . . constructs her own story and survive” (2011, 13). Moreover, since these alternative sub-narratives of Jeanette are blended with the realistic details of her life, in the novel the primary narrative, unlike the conventional *Bildungsroman* proceeds in a non-linear way. Although, at a first glance there seems to be a chronological order, the text is antilinear and as Winterson herself reminds us it has a spiral pattern. There are time shifts, various flashbacks and interruptions; and, narrative leaps a space of seven years upon Jeanette’s exile and her homecoming. In a way, as Antakyaloğlu states, “Winterson moulds the linear, teleological aspects of time with a Nietzschean appreciation of time as eternally repeating itself” (2009, 3). Like the novel itself, Jeanette’s stories also proceed in a circular way. The fairy tales with their “once upon a time” nature indicate a repetitive, nonlinear, constant movement which goes in line with the Jeanette’s formation and the novel’s temporal structure. Accordingly, with her persistent storytelling, Jeanette moves through both time and space creating various selves and roles for herself in her dreams and fantasies. Her movement is circular, transgressive

of the linear pattern of the traditional realist and conclusive texts which usually proceed from an *origin* towards a *telos*. Jeanette, in a way, reconfigures what Kristeva has identified in “Women’s Time” with regards to female subjectivity and *monumental time* which is eternal, cyclical, intuitive and associated with *woman* (1981, 14). In line with Kristeva’s statement about women’s time and female subjectivity, it can be posited that Jeanette’s cyclical stories and myths allow her to realise the desired self, escape the boundaries of her sex and society and experience the possibilities of her subjectivity. As Palmer suggests, “Jeanette, instead of uncovering a single, static identity, constructs for herself a series of shifting, fluid selves by means of the acts of storytelling and fabulation in which she engages” (1993, 101). In this sense, stories, fairy tales and the myths are of the essence for Jeanette to continue her journey to the self. By creating various narratives, her own Arthurian myths and her Orange demon, she allows the reader to observe her quest for the self thoroughly and embrace her lesbian sexuality, as indicated in her assertion to the Orange demon: “I’m not getting rid of you, this is the best way I can think of” (Winterson 1987, 109).

Jeanette knows that she has to continue with her quest decisively transgressing the walls that “protect and limit” her (Winterson 1987, 112). For instance, during the trials when her mother and the pastors make Jeanette give in and exorcise her lesbianism, she feels desperately betrayed. However, she does not give up her identity but decides to step into a world on her own in which she would be granted the chance to construct her subjectivity anew. She knows that she has to find her own way and her own answers in the world. As she advises in the “Deuteronomy” episode, “If you want to keep your own teeth, make your own sandwiches . . .” (Winterson 1987, 95). Accordingly, like Sir Perceval in Jeanette’s mythic story who gives up the security of the round table and the love of King Arthur and sets off to attain the Holy Grail, Jeanette, parting with her mother, sets out to explore her subjectivity only to be able to experience a homecoming and reconciliation later. As her homecoming following an unspecified time span suggests, like the sorcerer in the Winnet story who ties an invisible thread around Winnet’s button, Jeanette is tied to her home and her mother with a hidden tie. This tie serves as a symbol of her blurred feelings towards her mother and her homecoming which she expresses as such in the final episode “Ruth”: “Families, real ones, are chairs and tables and the right number of cups, but I had no means of joining one, and no means of dismissing my own; she had tied a thread around my button, to tug when she pleased” (Winterson 1987, 176).

At this point it is worth elaborating on the “Ruth” episode to complement the picture Winterson draws regarding family relations and the significance of mother–daughter bonding. The Book of Ruth is a story about female loyalty and solidarity concerning Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi. This biblical text, though Winterson does never refer except for the title, shares thematic associations with Jeanette’s Winnet Stonejar story and the myth of Sir Perceval. The text also emerges in parallel lines with the ending of the novel which depicts Jeanette’s return to her adoptive mother. Winterson’s use of this final biblical text to highlight the protagonist’s return to the mother can be regarded as a challenge to the classical examples of Bildungsroman which often celebrate the protagonist’s Oedipal break with the mother for development and maturation and cherish this idea throughout suggesting a move towards the external world. However, as Laurel Bollinger states in “Models of Female Royalty,” for *Oranges*, “maturity consists in the continuation, not the elimination, of mother-daughter relations” (1994, 364). Bollinger considers *Oranges* as one of the few examples portraying a strong mother–daughter relationship which is celebratory in terms of lesbian maturation. She further posits that the “leaving home” motif in the conventional Bildungsroman occurs in different ways considering male and female development. The male figure usually goes through an oedipal struggle with the mother or the nourisher concerning their physiological differences before defining his gender and identity. However, the female figures usually have the tendency to stay close to the family and voice their concerns and opposition so as not to break the familial ties. Therefore, the idea of “the need for connection within female development” is not usually a topic of discussion in conventional stories of growth and maturation because they usually emphasize the need for an “exit solution” (1994, 363). Nevertheless, to Bollinger, *Oranges* is one of the few narratives which presents the maturation story of a young lesbian who engages in a struggle with her self and sexual orientation along with her mother’s rejection of her lesbian identity (1994, 364). Winterson, rather than doing away with the mother suggests a sisterhood between the mother and the daughter by rendering it possible for the protagonist to return to her home. Therefore, echoing Hélène Cixous’ contentions in “The Laugh of Medusa” (1976), Bollinger concludes, by emphasizing the significance of mother–daughter bonding, that *Oranges* “moves toward a space where subjectivity can be constructed out of female connection rather than exclusively through separation and silencing” (1994, 375).

Winterson closes the novel with an ending which allows for sympathy for Louie who has now come to the conclusion that “oranges are not the only fruit” (Winterson 1987, 172). Jeanette has embraced her lesbian identity which is treated as a dream, a possibility not fully realised, but eventually regarded as *normal*. Such portrayal of Jeanette with possibilities and alternatives is yet juxtaposed with the expectations of society which is after moral perfection and infallible narratives of the Bible. The conventional Bildungsroman ends with a compromise and mutual understanding between the protagonist and society when the protagonist finally finds a way of striking a balance between his desires and the expectations of society. However, Winterson does not make her protagonist yield to societal norms but blesses her with a feeling of self-assurance and confidence. Pondering upon the question what would have happened if she had stayed, Jeanette states:

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 has 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. (Winterson 1987, 161).

Now Jeanette reflects on this possibility, the blurred lines of the subject echoing Catherine Belsey’s argument that being a subject means being in a process in the dialectical relationship between lack and desire. For the subject is “the site of contradiction, and is consequently perpetually in the process of construction, thrown into crisis by alterations in language and in the social formation, capable of change. And in the fact that the subject is a *process* lies the possibility of transformation” (Belsey 1997, 661). Jeanette feels deeply satisfied that she has danced with various versions of her self within a state of always-now becoming so as to experience the promised chance of transformation. As she clearly puts it:

There's a chance that I'm not here at all, that all the parts of me, running along all the choices I did and didn't make, for a moment brush against each other. That I am still an evangelist in the North, as well as the person who ran away. Perhaps for a while these two selves have become confused. I have not gone forward or back in time, but across in time, to something I might have been, playing itself out. (Winterson 1987, 169)

Last but not least, though Jeanette has always had a different version of *Jane Eyre* in her mind, it is now her turn to rewrite the story, to revise the Bildungsroman. She returns to the origin, to her mother, yet her quest for the self does never come to an end. It remains open-ended, subject to new readings and writings, and the story continues to unfold. In the end, Jeanette becomes the “new mestiza” in Gloria Anzaldua’s terms. Learning to be a woman in a patriarchal domain, a lesbian in an evangelical community, and juggling all, she develops a “tolerance for contradictions [and] ambiguity” (Anzaldua 1987, 79). She now “has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode— nothing is thrust out, the good, the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else” (Anzaldua 1987, 79) much like Winterson who queers the Bildungsroman genre itself.

Conclusion

Winterson, in *Oranges*, by presenting a female protagonist who is in the process of awakening to her lesbian identity, problematizes the already settled, seemingly unshakeable, realist features of the Bildungsroman and refashions its masculinist form into a feminist text. In contrast to the classic portrayals of the “universal man” in conventional Bildungsroman, Winterson draws the picture of a young woman who has achieved self-realization and is in a state of constant Becoming. While narrating the story of Jeanette whom the early critics unanimously take it to be the author itself, Winterson/Jeanette experiments with various narratives including biblical accounts, mythical stories and fairy tales and fantasies through which she blurs the line between her Self and her invented Self as Jeanette and shows how subjectivity is formed and reformed in a state of constant becoming. Moreover, as an episodic text patterned on the first eight books of the Bible, Winterson’s novel also challenges the power and authority of the Grand Narrative of Scripture in a humorous and parodic manner. As this study foregrounds, through the revision of the Bildungsroman and its patriarchal norms, and the parody of biblical events, historical accounts and places, Winterson draws attention to the constructed and questionable nature of meta narratives and

totalizing discourses and transgresses generic boundaries as her protagonist crosses the threshold towards her journey of becoming.



¹Hereafter *Oranges*.

²The early critics and the editors of the novel pointed out the autobiographical and Bildungsroman elements in the novel namely departing from the “fact” that Winterson herself, like the protagonist of her novel, Jeanette, was brought up in Pentecostal evangelist faith by her foster parents in a working-class community in Lancashire. She left home after the revelation of her lesbian identity, and before studying English at Oxford, she worked in a variety of places as a domestic worker, mortuary makeup artist and a delivery driver (Onega 2006, 18; 1995, 136).

³In an interview with the Australian critic Margaret Reynolds, Winterson elucidates what prompted her to create a fictionalised version of herself in *Oranges* and engage with autobiography:

In *Oranges* the narrator has my name, because I wanted to invent myself as a fictional character. There has been some confusion around this, because people have thought, ‘Well, it must be autobiography.’ In part it is. Because all writing is partly autobiography in that you draw on your experience, not in a slavish documentary style, but in a way that transforms that experience into something else. I saw myself as a shape-shifting person with many lives, who didn’t need to be tied to one life. (Reynolds and Noakes 2003, 17).

As the above statement indicates, Winterson acknowledges that *Oranges* bears some elements pertaining to the autobiography because it transcribes and transfigures the life experiences of its author; however, it should not be labelled as autobiography only because the author pushes the boundaries of self to the fictionalised realm. To Winterson, narratives of the self are constructions much in the same way texts are processes open to interpretation and reinterpretation rather than end products with fixed characters, mimetic representations, and generic tags, which validates her motive for reworking literary genres in *Oranges*.

⁴Along with Bildungsroman, this article also incorporates discussions relating to autobiography in order to justify how Winterson plays with various literary genres in a postmodernist manner, questions their validity and reworks them. However, a complete survey of the autobiography genre and its revision in *Oranges* is out of the scope of this paper. See Zekiye Antakyaloğlu’s article “Telling the Temporary as Permanent: Jeanette Winterson’s Re-Working of Autobiography in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit and Weight*: The Myth of Atlas and Heracles,” for a more detailed analysis on Winterson’s reworking of the autobiography form.

⁵Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, first translated into English by Thomas Carlyle in 1824.

References

- Andermahr, Sonya. *Jeanette Winterson*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Antakyaloğlu, Zekiye. “Telling the Temporary as Permanent: Jeanette Winterson’s Re-Working of Autobiography in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit and Weight: The Myth of Atlas and Heracles*,” *Winterson Narrating Time and Space*, edited by M. J-M Sönmez and M. Özyurt Kılıç. (Cambridge Scholars, 2009), 2-17.
- Antosa, Silvia. *Crossing Boundaries: Bodily Paradigms in Jeanette Winterson’s fiction 1985-2000*. (Aracne Editrice, 2008).
- Anzaldua, Gloria. *Borderlands/la frontera: The New Mestiza*. (Aunt Lute Book Company, 1987).
- Bailey, Peggy Dunn. “Writing ‘Herstory’: Narrative Reconstruction in Jeanette Winterson’s *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*,” *The Philological Review*, 32.2, (2006): 61-78.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhailovich. “The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism.” *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*, edited by C. Emerson and M. Holquist. (University of Texas Press, 1986), 10-60.
- Belsey, Catherine. “Constructing the Subject, Deconstructing the Text.” *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, edited by R. Warhol and D. Herndl, (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1997), 657-673.
- Boes, Tobias. “Modernist Studies and the Bildungsroman: A Historical Survey of Critical Trends,” *Literature Compass*, 3/2, (2006), 230-243.
- Bollinger, Laurel. “Models for Female Loyalty: The Biblical Ruth in Jeanette Winterson’s *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*,” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, Vol 13.2, (University of Tulsa, 1994), 362-380.
- Griffin, Gabrielle. “Acts of Defiance: Celebrating Lesbians.” *It’s My Party: Reading Twentieth-Century Women’s Writing*, edited by G. Wisker (Pluto, 1994), 80-103.
- Joannou, Maroula. (2019). “The Female Bildungsroman in the Twentieth Century.” *A History of the Bildungsroman*, edited by Sarah Graham (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 200-217.
- Kristeva, Julia. “Women’s Time.” Translated by Alice Jardine and Harry Blake. *Signs*, Vol. 7, no.1, University of Chicago Press, 1981), 13-35.

Makinen, Merja and Nicolas Tredell. *The Novels of Jeanette Winterson*. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

Moretti, Franco. *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*. (Verso, 1987).

Palmer, Paulina. *Contemporary Lesbian Writing: Dreams, desire, difference*. (Open UP, 1993).

Reisman, Mara. "Integrating Fantasy and Reality in Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*," *Rocky Mountain Review*, vol.65, no.1, (2011). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41289361>

Reynolds, Margaret and Jonathan Noakes (eds.). *Jeanette Winterson: The Essential Guide*. (Vintage, 2003).

Salmon, Richard. "The English Bildungsroman." *The Nineteenth-Century Novel 1820-1880*, vol. 3., edited by J. Kucich and B. Taylor, (Oxford University Press, 2011), 90-105.

Salmon, Richard. "The Bildungsroman and Nineteenth-Century British Fiction." *A History of the Bildungsroman*, edited by Sarah Graham (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 57-83.

Onega, Susana. *Jeanette Winterson*. (Manchester University Press, 2006).

Onega, Susana. "I'm Telling You Stories. Trust Me. History/Story-telling in Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit*." *Telling Histories: Narrativizing History, Historicizing Literature*, edited by Susana Onega. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995), 135-145.

Winterson, Jeanette. Introduction. *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. (Vintage, 1991). eBook.

Winterson, Jeanette. *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. (The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1987).

Winterson, Jeanette. *Art Objects: Essays on Ecstasy and Effrontery*. (Vintage, 1997). eBook.