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"I wrote a story I could live with": Trauma and Autofiction in Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*

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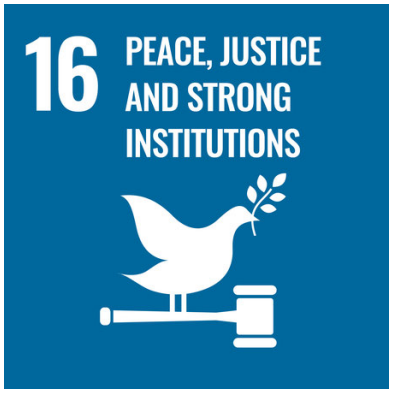

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Signatura:

To my mother, who has taught me compassion
and always encouraged me to look beyond the surface.

To my father for his unconditional support of my literary passions.

To my friend Sara for her aid and insight on a psychological approach
to my reading of this wonderful novel.

To Alfonso and Guillem Martí for the love and contentment they
offered me in my research journey.

To Jaume for telling me all about that little lemon every time
I needed to hear it,

and to everyone who has supported me along the way.

This work could not have been completed without them.

Abstract

Title: "I wrote a story I could live with": Trauma and Autofiction in Janette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit.*

Abstract: With a close reading of Jeanette Winterson's novel, *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, this paper aims to establish the underlying relation of its autofictional genre with the traumatic aspects of Winterson's life that are explored in the text. Using C. Caruth and G.H. Hartman's trauma theories as the main pillars for the theoretical framework, an analysis is carried out on the different fictional tools employed by Winterson in order to regain agency over her story. Moreover, an exploration regarding the traumatic aspects of her upbringing is researched with Erikson's theory of vital stages of development as an additional supportive framework. This analysis concludes that the disruptiveness with her community, which occurred in Jeanette's adolescence, constructed a traumatic situation that could only be revisited through the fictionalisation of events.

Key words: autofiction, trauma, identity, fiction, survival.

Título: "Escribí una historia con la que podía vivir": Trauma y Autoficción en la novela *Fruta Prohibida* de Jeanette Winteron

Resumen: A partir de una lectura detallada de la novela de Jeanette Winterson, *Fruta prohibida*, este artículo pretende establecer la relación subyacente de su género autoficticio con los aspectos traumáticos de la vida de Winterson que se exploran en el texto. Utilizando las teorías del trauma propuestas por C. Caruth y G.H. Hartman como pilares principales del marco teórico, se realiza un análisis de las diferentes herramientas ficcionales empleadas por Winterson para recuperar la agencia sobre su historia. Además, se investigan los aspectos traumáticos de su crianza con la teoría de Erikson sobre las etapas vitales del desarrollo como marco de apoyo adicional. Este análisis concluye que la ruptura con su comunidad que ocurrió en la adolescencia de Jeanette, construyó una situación traumática, la cual sólo podía revisitarse a través de la ficcionalización de los hechos.

Palabras claves: autoficción, trauma, identidad, ficción, supervivencia.

Contribution to the SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs)

Focusing on Jeanette Winterson's exploration of a traumatic past with the use of fiction as a tool for survival and understandment, this paper contributes to the goal of fostering peaceful, just, and inclusive societies. Winterson's exploration of her past sheds light on how damaging restrictive and controlling environments can be for a child, while also highlighting the trauma that may result from it. In the novel, and on her further commentary on her own experiences, Winterson condemns the abuse she went through in her infancy on behalf on religious institutions and her mother's rearing, which aligns with some of the targets of goal 16 for peace, justice and strong institutions:

> 16.2 End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children.
>
> 16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels.
>
> 16.B Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development

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1. Introduction

Published in 1985, Jeanette Winterson's first novel *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* deals with autobiographical elements as well as fictional ones in order to explore the author's painful and traumatic past. Raised in a Pentecostal community in northern England, Jeanette learned to view life from a binary position where there was only good and bad, things to love and things to hate. Living under her mother's harsh doctrine, she grew up in a rather odd environment that was structurally Biblical, and many times abusive and bizarre. Such nurture, alongside her later discovery of her lesbian identity, brought great destabilisation to the character of fictional Jeanette, as well as to the real one. With this novel, Winterson conducted an auto-exploration of her past that largely relied on fiction and imagination, therefore, deviating from conventional autobiographical conceptions and participating in a new innovative tradition for the era.

Winterson attributes the title of her book to the figure of Nell Gwynn, a seventeenth-century English actress and celebrity who briefly worked as an orange seller and was one of the so-called 'orange girls'. However, there is no evidence that Gwynn has ever said this, which remained unacknowledged by the author up until she wrote about it in the introduction to the 2014' Vintage Books Edition of the novel: "I thought she might have said oranges are not the only fruit, but she didn't. What is the point of being a fiction writer if you can't make things up?". From the very beginning of the novel, before we even begin to read the first chapter, Winterson is already establishing a blurred line between facts and fiction, which later functions as the structural thesis for the whole story of Jeanette. I thought this aspect was the most interesting one in the novel, and, aiming to analyse the purpose with which this exercise was carried out, I began my research. In my reading of the text, the use of fiction in *Oranges* is rooted on the traumatic aspects of her upbringing and her identity formation process — the impossibility to express such a distressing past heavily relies on fictional elements that offer Winterson a new understanding and recreation of her past.

Supporting my reading from her later claim in her memoir *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* (2011) regarding *Oranges* where she states: "I wrote a story I could live with" (5), an analysis of the novel is proposed in close relation to trauma theories and psychological

theories of identity and development, focusing on the negative consequences of their disruption.

2. A play on form

> "I want everything in my work — I want the whole thing, the whole gamma."
>
> (Winterson, 1994)

2.1 Defying genre

The notion of *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* being an autobiographical novel has been rejected by Winterson on multiple occasions; she herself has described the work as a "play on form"(1994), a challenge of genre, a story that, although it has Jeanette herself as its main character, is largely described as an invention and formally categorised as fiction. Therefore, it would be a wrong interpretation of the text to conceive it as an autobiographical novel or an entirely fictional one, *Oranges* is a mixture and subversion of the two.

Aiming to establish the basis of what an autobiography is, Philippe Lejeune's definition will be taken as a starting point; according to him, an autobiography might be "a retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality" a description that (although male centred language wise) seems to perfectly fit *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* from a surface level. The novel does discuss the story of a girl who not only carries Jeanette's name but has a very similar background and upbringing as the author had, focuses on the development of her personality and it is a retrospective prose narrative; it is regarding the fourth minimum requirement: "focusing on his individual life" where the issue arises. During an interview with Jeremy Isaacs in 1994, she described her writing of *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* as "telling the truth but with a large wing" where she invites intimacy and offers confidence but in a playful way that does not accurately describe her life and upbringing in a truly authentic way. For instance, in the character of little Jeanette we see a vision of the world and an interpretation of the different events described containing a sophistication and culture which the real Jeanette was denied of growing up working class - therefore, this character is not a legitimate description of herself but rather a fictionalisation. Fictional

Jeanette is a very witty and strong character who undergoes many bizarre situations which, speaking from a 21st century perspective almost forty years after the novel's original publication, we can describe as exaggerations or lose inspirations on the writer's actual experiences. Such information can be gathered based on what she has said during the years regarding her own biography in interviews, personal writings, and on her memoir *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* published in 2011. Moreover, the novel contains fantastic elements such as the fairy tales included in some chapters and conversations she has with implausible characters, which further deviate it from its categorisation as an autobiography. Most of *Oranges* has been largely described as an invention but, simultaneously, we see a main character that shares multiple similarities with the real Jeanette Winterson as both, real and fictional Jeanette, grew up in a Pentecostal community with a very harsh and authoritative mother and struggled to come to terms with their sexual identity as a lesbian. This proves to be a challenge of the autobiographical genre since the novel strongly and explicitly deviates from it, therefore, a new classification is needed to categorise the text; *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* is better classified as an autofiction − a concept which the following paragraph aims to explore.

First coined by French writer Serge Doubrovsky in 1977, autofiction became the label given to those narratives that explored the author's real experiences but could not be classified within the autobiographical genre since they also contained fictitious features. Although a definite description for what can be considered an autofictional novel is still up for debate, texts that are classified inside the genre consist of a narrative where there is correspondence between the author, the narrative voice and the protagonist. In these texts many of the events depicted are drawn from the author's personal life experiences, but it differs from an autobiography since it contains numerous non-fictional elements. This use of authentic paratextual material combined with fictive discourses is employed by autofictional authors with a purpose, which can vary from text to text, but it is usually done in an attempt to accurately represent the self (Srikanth, 2019).

These literary works prominently emerged by the end of the 20th century, heavily influenced by the previous thinking currents that came before, and can be understood as a continuation of them. Frequently drawing a considerable amount from post-structuralist and post-modernist texts, there are lots of notions that can also be found at the basis of autofictional theory which heavily correlate with psychoanalytic ideas of the partition of the

self. This correspondence exists as autofictional works are often read as capable to offer self-understanding from an outward perspective. Doubrovsky defended the “dual nature” of self-knowledge where the self can only be known “through the recognition by the other" in his writing “Autobiography/Truth/Psychoanalysis" where he further expands on this idea and the interrelation of psychoanalytic concepts with autofictional exploration, which seems asserted since the activity of turning oneself into a fictional character can be perfectly read as an outer understanding of the self, trying to re-read ourselves from the outside. Moreover, without aiming to dwell on psychoanalytic theory too much, Shirley Jordan assesses autofiction as “appropriate to the unsettled post-Freudian subject whose confidence is placed in the ‘act-value’ rather than the ‘truth-value’ of narrative”, a very interesting and insightful approach that perfectly aligns with that of Winterson. In the same aforementioned interview from 1994, the author discussed this by stating that every author (inevitably) draws inspiration from their own lives no matter what they are writing, but she strongly defends the importance of imagination in literary works. She rejects mere representation, separates herself from the autobiographical canon, and advocates for the greatness that resides outside of it - which can be accessed through fiction and the use of imagination. Winterson attempts to shatter this conventional distinction between “truth” and “fiction” and defends the idea that these are more interrelated than one may think by associating fiction to “that which is spiritual, which is cerebral, which is intellectual and [which] has purely to do with ideas" (Winterson, 1994). In her writing, she sees those parts of the novel that declassify it as an autobiography not as a deviation from the truth (a common description and understanding of fiction) but as being an indispensable part for the retelling of her story and of the process of constructing her identity. *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*’s fictitious elements do not occur in parallel to her exploration of her past and present self but in tandem with it, making it a perfect reflection of what Srikanth and Jordan have defined as an autofictional work.

There is still a larger analysis to be conducted regarding Winterson’s use of fiction, and a further connection which relates it to the traumatic events depicted in *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*. The retelling of her struggle to break from her mother’s harsh strictures and her coming to terms with her lesbian sexuality, which caused Jeanette a lot of pain, are directly connected to the fictional aspect of the novel. In *Oranges* there is a clear use of literary language and elements to express those inexpressible events endured in traumatic situations.

2.2 Autofiction and Trauma

> "An event that defies all representation will be best represented by a failure of representation. What is called for, then, is the disruption of the conventional modes of representation- which can be found in literature." (Bond & Craps, 2019, *Trauma*)

Some areas of trauma studies relate the unrepresentability of a traumatic event to literary language, as the quote above suggests, and conceive it as a medium where one can find the words and elements to express such torment that are not to be found in everyday life. This section of the work proposes a reading of Jeanette Winterson's use of fictional elements as an aid to retell those traumatic experiences endured in her childhood. Moreover, it offers an exploration on the relevance of autofiction as a genre to deal with biographical traumatic events.

A traumatic event is commonly defined as a series of painful experiences undergone by an individual which are not normally registered as traumatic upon a first encounter but create a "wound of the mind", as defined by Freud, that continues to haunt said individual. Traumatic experiences linger inside the traumatised person's mind and tend to frequently reappear and be re-lived, creating more pain and distress than the one which was originally inflicted. Accordingly, it is very difficult to discuss or represent traumatic episodes, if not impossible, because these cannot be fully comprehended by the individual. These horrific events defy conventional representation as they do not have a place to reside inside current societal norms and its language, therefore, a link is drawn to fiction and fantasy as an appropriate tool for its expression. Such a connection has been proposed even in the early stages of trauma studies, psychoanalysts like the aforementioned Freud and Lacan (both pioneers in psychological trauma studies) have established a connection between trauma and fantasy from the very beginning. However, the way to interpret the possible interrelation of the two concepts has varied ever since; we can find numerous interpretations which have been put forward on the way literature relates to trauma, but our focus will just be narrowed to one of those perceptions which views literature as something that is more than just a medium to express traumatic events since the use of figurative language and imaginary concepts gives the traumatised author a new agency over their past, a new way of understanding it.

Critic G. Hartman discusses this relationship in his article "On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies" which begins to formulate his theory on the basis of two differential kinds of knowledge: the experiencing and the understanding; the latter encompasses thoughtful naming where words are used to replace things and, ultimately, offer a new kind of view of the original phenomenon, which is acquired through knowledge of experiencing. He deems the understanding as being "what figurative language expresses and explores" (540), that leads to "a literary construction of memory which is obviously not a literal retrieval but a statement of a different sort"(540), the starting point to his upcoming connection to trauma theories:

> "Trauma theory throws a light on figurative or poetic language, and perhaps, symbolic process in general, as something other than an enhanced imagining or vicarious repetition of a (prior) non-experiencing."

Acknowledging the power of poetic language, he makes a strong disjunction between the two kinds of knowledge and defines the understanding as being something distinctive from the experiencing, not simply an echo of the original phenomenon saved in memory. He follows a very Lacanian doctrine where he conceives figurative language as an essential part to truly "*listen* and *hear* of words within words"(541), which as a result, offers a greater openness to testimony of traumatic events. The way he sees it, "in literature, we find a way of receiving the story, of listening to it, of drawing it into an interpretative conversation"(541); literature thus becomes an almost essential tool in the discussion of trauma. Moreover, Hartman recognises that in traumatic writings the artist is its initial recipient who aims to externalise an internal state; the mixture of the artistic and the traumatic conspire to produce a new mode of recognition where the artist has complete agency over their own story to be properly heard. Through the use of the poetic and the literary, traumatic experiences find a way back to the subject, the stories of trauma, previously incomprehensible and detached from the self, are returned to the individual.

Hartman claims: "Literature [functions] as a testimonial act that transmits knowledge in a form that is not scientific and does not coincide with either a totally realistic (as if that were possible) or analytic form of representation." (552), therefore, binding contacts between imagination and "the real". Two concepts that, contrary to popular belief, do not provide a binary opposition. There is a lot of imagination in memory, once an experience is stored in

our consciousness it gets constantly re-imagined as it is being recalled and the lines between fact and fiction become more blurry over time. I doubt one would refer to their own memories as completely factual and accurate representations of past events, it is almost a secret convention among human beings that memories are largely constructed by the blurred line that lies in between fact and fiction. We normally define these terms as being opposed to one another but fact and fiction are constantly merging in our memories. Memory is crucial to our identity and our understanding of the world, we construct ourselves from self remembrance of past actions and decisions, from the knowledge that we store about human life and our universe. It, accordingly, constructs our balance, the core of our beings and it is what allows us to make sense of the world. Something as primordial and basic to our humanity as it is our memory is not invaded but flooded with imagination, therefore, establishing a harsh contrast between realism and fictionalisation would be inherently mistaken. Fiction is way more ingrained in our perception of reality than most of us are aware of. This inherently makes it a very sensible tool to be used in the representation of the past, and a highly resourceful one for the traumatic ones.

The fictitious and the autofictional genre offer, therefore, a resource and a formal style of representation within western societal conventions, but to relate the novelistic and fictitious to the recalling of authentic life events is not an innovation of any kind. We, as human beings, have been intertwining fantastic and realistic elements since the beginning of time - it can be spotted in our collective memory (epic poems such as the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and multiple other core texts on the building of countries and national identities) as well as in our individual memory. Therefore, to intertwine these two concepts is something that comes very natural to us indeed. Memory and imagination are concepts that already come hand in hand, it is in autofictional writings where we see this taken to an extreme with the purpose of conducting a further introspective analysis. In Winterson's case, *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* explores the fantasy that lies in memory, and it highly embraces it in order to help Winterson face the traumatic aspects that saturate her memories. It is in autofiction where Jeanette Winterson finds a new way to understand her past, to retell it and to regain agency over it despite the pain.

3. First attempts to endure the horrors: Playing the fictional game

> "I suppose that the saddest thing for me, thinking about the cover version that is *Oranges [Are Not The Only Fruit]*, is that I wrote a story I could live with. The other one was too painful. I could not survive it."(p.5)
>
> From *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?*

Twenty-six years after the publication of *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, Jeanette Winterson wrote this reflection in her memoir, which relates to the previously discussed more theoretical ideas on trauma and representation. This makes a direct allusion to the autofictional aspect of the novel and how the original story needed to be intervened in order for her to be capable of exploring it, sharing it, comprehending it as her own and, ultimately, making it suitable for her to live in. In the first two chapters of the novel, Winterson offers our first encounter with the description of a harsh, constraining and authoritative world which shapes Jeanette's cosmovision, while there is a simultaneous use of the fictitious and literary resources. These serve the purpose of not only making the story more bearable to both the writer and the reader, but also possible for the writer to express those events that moulded her childhood. In "Genesis" and "Exodus" we see how she successfully turns herself into a fictional character and employs both elements of fictional and comedic relief to cope with the traumatic upbringing that is being explored.

3.1 Turning yourself into a fictional character.

The novel opens with a rather ironic discussion of her family life and the rough personality that her mother has: an authoritarian person of firm beliefs that she likes to impose and someone who "had never heard of mixed feelings" (5), "she loved and she hated" (8). Throughout the first chapter, we see how her mother's views have completely shaped Jeanette's existence as she learns to view and understand the world through them. Additionally, we are introduced to "the bizarre outposts of religious excess" (2014, Vintage Books edition) that conduct their lives and the many reality-constraining rules that come with them. "Genesis", in correspondence to the biblical book for which it is named, tells us the

origin story that creates the fictional world where the story of *Oranges* is constructed. Through her mother's eyes, Jeanette learns what to love, what to hate, what is right and what is terribly, terribly wrong as her mother is extremely haunted by sin, hell and "eternal damnation". Moreover, we are told her creation story through a fictional tale that begins: "Once upon a time there was a brilliant and beautiful princess, so sensitive that the death of a moth could distress her for weeks on end" (13) who leaves her palace and sensibility behind in order to assist an old hunchback and on the organisation of a small village. This princess is then given a child by a star that guides her to an orphanage where the baby resided, a child whom would be "train, built and dedicated to the lord"(13), "a missionary child, a servant of God, a blessing" and ultimately "a gift from the Lord"(14). However, when the child was given to the princess it cried for seven days and seven nights, but the new mother sang to her baby through the whole week "stabbing the demons - jealous the Spirit is of flesh"(14), and in the end, the baby stopped crying and the mother had "a way out" (14), a child who, although not affiliated with her by by birth, was connected to her by the same vision they both shared. In this story we encounter the first example of fantasy through the characters of the princess - a figure who can be read as a representation of Mrs. Winterson, and the baby the Lord sent as a gift - Jeanette. It is in this instance where we get the first externalisation of Jeanette as a, more explicitly, fictional character, which opens up the space for our discussion on the subject.

Although the baby from the fairy tale is undoubtedly a fictionalisation of Jeanette Winterson, so is the little Jeanette who has lived for a long time with her mother and father. Winterson turns herself into a fictional character in order to see her story from an outside perspective, which offers her a new interpretation of her own past and functions as a tool to avoid "the shock" that characterises the remembrance of traumatic experiences. Facing the "unrepresentability", she cannot use realism as a source and cannot mould the story around it either, the writer needs to write what they *can* with the words and concepts they can find. As was previously discussed, it is in literature and art where we find access to a traumatic reality which cannot otherwise be witnessed (Bond & Craps, 2019) and for that she needs to construct a new Jeanette and to externalise the real one from the story. Through this fictionalisation in writing, she sees a "precocious mode of witnessing -of accessing reality-when all other modes of knowledge are precluded" (Felman & Laub, 1992). She is capable of understanding how her own story was written in the first place; as she constructs the character of her mother and the one based off of herself the audience comprehends the

reasoning behind the decision-making (although we might not find it sensible, we find it plausible and reasonable).

Focusing on the audience, another interesting aspect provided in theoretical analysis of post-traumatic writings is that these texts construct an audience that includes the artist as the initial recipient (Hartman, 1995). Therefore, through the fantastic, Winterson is not only making the story reasonable for us but also for her. Little Jeanette is trapped inside the constraining world her mother has created for her, however, she does not feel its restraints as she believes her mother a "beautiful princess" and she is herself a gift from the Lord, a child who could not "recall a time when [she] did not know that [she] was special"(6). Fiction offers us both: the possibility for Winterson to break through her past and the chance for her to write an explanation for it all. She is exhibiting her origin story explored from a future perspective as there is yet another layer to the fictionalisation of herself: through the voice of fictional Jeanette we can hear both present-day Jeanette and her past self. The narration is full of ironic and sarcastic remarks where the voice of present-day Jeanette echoes, and we get a glimpse of what the author's future interpretations will be to the events endured in her childhood. This last resource is key to the fictionalisation of herself, it offers a crucial tool in her self-exploration, to be further explored in this paper.

3.2 Understanding the world through stories

> "'There's this world,' she banged the wall graphically, 'and there's this world,' she thumped her chest. 'If you want to make sense of either, you have to take notice of both.'" (*Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, 43)

During the first two chapters of *Oranges* we get a description of her childhood where the traumatic is to be expected and can be read between the lines of the authoritative upbringing where she was raised out of fear and constraints rather than affection and love. The stakes where the main character is to develop her identity are described, and after a close reading we can also see the various resources that little Jeanette uses to find the comfort that her own household lacked.

In the novel's second chapter, the biblical parody continues as in 'Exodus' we see Jeanette's escape to school (Cosslett, 1998) and through it, Jeanette's separation from her mother's doctrine and her encounter with "the real world". As she attends "the Breeding Ground", she gets away from the restrictiveness of her household and finds different world views that offer fictional Jeanette new perspectives and understandings of her own life and religious practices. 'Exodus' begins with Jeanette contradicting her mother as they watch a programme about the family lives of snails, which her mother considers an "abomination, it's like saying we come from monkeys" (30) to which Jeanette replies "No mum, it's not like that at all"(30). This exchange is key to the development of this chapter as Jeanette's response is unnoticed by her mother, who continues to preach the words of the Lord afterwards as if nothing had happened, because during the course of 'Exodus' we will see Jeanette's first awakening: she slightly begins to doubt and question the notions which she was raised on. She does so in a very subtle way, an explicit reflection of this is not yet offered to us but we begin to read the disparities between herself and her mother.

However, although the rupture in the relationship between Jeanette and Mrs. Winterson begins to be hinted at, what 'Exodus' explores more deeply is the loneliness that Jeanette experienced as a child. She portrays a friendless childhood that lacked any kind of warmth or basic child care from her parents as she describes: "[struggling to get out of her pyjama top] An old woman had made it for me, and made the neck hole the same size as the arm holes, so I always had sore ears. Once I went deaf for three months with my adenoids: no one noticed that either."(31). This shocking experience of her life suddenly going "very quiet"(31) was conceived by her mother as a religious episode, Mrs. Winterson attributed it to the Lord "working in mysterious ways" and everyone in her church, as well as Jeanette herself, believed her to be in a state of rapture. Accordingly, nobody spoke to her during these months as they believed she was having a divine experience, she was "full of the spirit"(33) and should not be disturbed. Little fictional Jeanette undergoes this bizarre incident almost completely on her own until another grown up, Ms. Jewsbury, realises the seriousness of the situation and takes her to the hospital. While she is in the hospital, she undergoes great distress as she is abandoned by her mother, who has other things to take care of and cannot stay with her. However, she is not completely alone: she has the support of Elsie Norris, an old woman who is part of her church and serves as a companion to fictional Jeanette. In the novel, Elsie becomes almost a mother figure to Jeanette, she cares for her, really talks to her, validates her feelings, and during the hospital episode, Elsie teaches Jeanette perhaps one of

the most important notions that rule over Jeanette's life: "She said stories helped you to understand the world."(39). Through Elsie's voice we get to hear one of the key ideas that shapes the entire novel and the most significant resource employed by Winterson when faced with the task of writing a story that tackled her traumatic past.

Jeanette learns to find comfort in fiction and arguably uses it as a resource for survival; in the text, fiction offers her an eternal comfort that enables her to understand her world as well as her own existence. Fictional Jeanette resorts to stories and literature often during 'Exodus': in the hospital she invents a story to entertain herself, when she was sad she was read *Goblin Market* by Christina Rosetti, she was also read W.B. Yeats poems by Elsie when she came to visit and introduced to William Blake. Moreover, all throughout the text, other writers are also mentioned by the narrative voice as referents, like Charlotte Brontë and John Keats as well as the aforementioned, which allowed her to discover the power that books carry. We see how both, Jeanette the author and Jeanette the character, rely on literary figures and their stories throughout the novel, not to mention the constant allusion to the Bible which mostly functions as another literary piece to Jeanette. In the further construction of her character that takes place in the following chapters up until the end of the novel, we see how she has always carried Elsie's advice with her: she uses stories to help her understand the world and to find the answers she could not find at home. Furthermore, the use of allegorical fairy tales further exemplifies her treatment of stories to help her understand the world while also aligning with the concept of fiction as a way to express and explore the traumatic. For those instances where the story gets too heavy on her, she results in allegorical fairy tales in order to conduct an exploration.

This understanding of fiction as a companion to Jeanette throughout her life offers another interpretation to the role of the biblical structure in the novel, as well as the fairy tale allegories as further pillars of support for the narration of the story. The Bible has always been part of Winterson's life, she read it every day as a child and on posterior interviews she has mentioned how she is really thankful to have grown up with the King James's version of the Bible, in 1994 she mentioned that there is "no better book to be brought up on" and described it as a "magnificent work of literature",

> "I grew up hearing a language that was special and intimate, which was detached and had presence and had authority and yet spoke to me

> directly [as] it speaks to millions of people directly. [It is] this wonderful tension what a writer seeks. Writing literature it's lover's talk, it's whispers in the ear and that's what the Bible offers."

Such a positive conception of the Bible and the fact that for her it served as a literary companion allows us to conceive this as a further resource of familiarity employed in the writing of *Oranges*. The harsh exploration of her past and her trauma uses the Biblical structure as a parody and comedic device, but also as a familiar element that offered further support for Winterson. As she is exploring a story that is her own but simultaneously feels alien to her due to many traumatic underlines, she uses the Bible as a powerful pillar of support. Based on the notion that fiction offers the words to explore the traumatic, intertextuality furtherly offers a contentment for Winterson to endure such exploration. Through fiction and intertextuality she brings this bizarre story that sometimes feels estranged to her area of familiarity and warmth in order to regain control over it and make it her own.

4. Turning yourself into a strong fictional character

During 'Exodus' we begin to see disparities between Jeanette's own beliefs and those of her mother and the church in a more subtle way, while in 'Leviticus' and 'Numbers' this imbalance starts to take control over the text. These two chapters dwell more into the traumatic aspect of her upbringing and begin to name the abuse in a more straightforward way. 'Leviticus' and 'Numbers' offer a continuation of Jeanette's ongoing quest for identity, with lots of fictional intermission amongst the traumatic. In this instance, she is no longer the child who narrated the first two chapters, which wreaks new sorts of emotions on her as she begins to form her identity during her early adolescence. As she comes to terms with her sexuality and starts to identify the abuse, Jeanette develops her new adolescent identity in opposition to the values offered by her community, which bring great distress and confusion to our main character. In these chapters the traumatic facet of the novel as well as the aspects of her nurture that really scarred Jeanette Winterson begin to show: the harsh rupture with her community (with everything she had ever known) where she now found herself as not only

an outsider but a foe which brought great distress and chaos, alongside gaining awareness of all the abuse that she endured.

4.1 A young girl with the emotional resources built-in

'Leviticus' is named after the biblical book that describes the numerous rules God gave to the people of Israel for them to live a holy life, and in this chapter of *Oranges* we see some of the rules that Mrs. Winterson taught Jeanette to live by. Opening up the chapter with the humorous event of Mrs. Winterson's horrified reaction to the noises of fornication from their next door neighbours, *Oranges*' third chapter continues to reveal the traits that shape her mother's personality and her demented scriptural reading of the world (Walezak, 2018). Mrs. Winterson kept a "War Cupboard, and every week she bought a new tin to put in it, in case of the Holocaust" (70), prayed on the downfall of her enemies and constructed her entire perception of her existence in relation to "the End". As her daughter, Jeanette acquired these values during her childhood; she not only lived by them but also identified her mother's beliefs as her own, like every child does. However, during 'Leviticus' she begins to be able to identify the abuse that arose from those conventions endured by her mother which, inevitably, pushed her against Mrs. Winterson's dogma. On the description of an event where she was obligated to yell and inform passer-by about a conference (aimed to bring new people to the church) where she had a bad time, Jeanette says: "I didn't mind the abuse, I was well-used to it and never thought it personal, but it was raining, and I wanted to do a good job."(77). For the first time, there is a direct recognition of abuse in the text, and not only that, but we also see her attempt to normalise such behaviour as she "never thought it personal". Such identification can have diverse consequences on the mind of a young person who is beginning to form their own identity, which will be discussed, and in the case of fictional Jeanette it brought her to develop disagreements with her mother and the religious institution.

On enduring a traumatic past and the formation of identity, Berman claims that trauma can alter the course of identity development by destabilising existing identity commitments. This aligns with Erikson's theory of identity development that recognises different phases in one's vital stages, the most impactful being the changes that are undergone during adolescence.

Teenagers are assumed to enter adolescence with a set of commitments in salient ideological and interpersonal identity domains that are often based on parental values and norms (Crocetti, Rubini, & Meeus, 2008), and identity formation is considered to take place in a dynamic between identity synthesis (or identity certainty) versus role confusion (or identity uncertainty; Erikson, 1968) (Betchel et al., 2016). In the case of fictional Jeanette, we do not see the common pattern of an identity crisis developing from this dissonance, she is a character who is beginning to develop an identity uncertainty as she grows out of existing identity commitments inherited from her mother and the church but, nevertheless, she is always sure of herself. Fictional Jeanette identifies the abuse and is very firm on her own beliefs, she does not doubt herself or sees herself as the problem, instead she develops "theological disagreements"(78) and begins to distance herself from her community without underestimating her own views. Her previous identity commitments are accordingly destabilised as a result of the trauma endured, but this has little effect on fictional Jeanette's self-esteem who begins to form a rebellious identity she can comfortably exist in.

This is not to say such identification comes with no adversities or ill feelings, she is lonely and confused as she sees herself distancing from her community but she never identifies the issue in herself, a common path that trauma victims tend to go through. Fictional Jeanette recognises the differences and her response to them is to begin a new self formation where her feelings are validated, where she creates contentment and seeks shelter from the pain that brings to find oneself in such a vulnerable place by developing a strong identity that does not inflict self-doubt. However, this can be read as part of the fictional game employed by Jeanette Winterson in her retelling of her own experiences as a teen. Going back to the themes explored in the first section in regard to autofiction and trauma and the quote from *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* that was discussed in the second section, we can read this attempt to write a story she could live with in *Oranges* in her constructing a character who was strong enough to put up with such distressing situations as a resource for the retelling. We, as an audience, have had no direct confession of Winterson on this aspect of her life (meaning, what she was *really* feeling when she began to notice the disparities and what was her initial attitude towards it) but we can theorise that real Jeanette probably did not have the immediate strength that fictional Jeanette possesses as it is extremely difficult for a child in a situation of abuse to have such a resilient response from the get-go. My reading of the character of Jeanette that we see in 'Leviticus' is that of a strong and resourceful girl that manages to face the adversities, a character that (in this aspect) is not based off of the real

pre-adolescent Jeanette Winterson but a fictional construction of the author that granted her the capacity to tell her story. Aiming to tie this view with the previously explored elements of comfort that allow her to explore her past, strength of character is another support pillar that makes the list. We further see an exemplification of the comfort that she has always found in fiction alongside the comfort offered by a character who is capable of validating her own feelings and world views in the fairy tale that is narrated at the end of the chapter, which begins with: "Once upon a time, in the forest, lived a woman who was so beautiful that the mere sight of her healed the sick and gave a good omen to the crops." (78). The inclusion of this fairytale allows Jeanette to articulate her unease and her rejection of the pastor's sermon, endorsing her own views and simultaneously empowering her as it ridicules the pastor's preaches (also functioning as another comedic resource) alongside displaying the importance of fantasy in her construction of the self and of Jeanette's adolescent psyche (Castaño Méndez, 2010).

One of the many aspects that Winterson transferred from her 24-year-old self to this fictionalisation of her child self is the strength and confidence that we see in the fictionalised version of Jeanette, who again, proves to be an idealised form that helped the author to portray a rendition of her story she could be able to bear. Aiming to stir away from the pain and identity uncertainty she must have suffered, Winterson writes into fictional Jeanette the necessary personality traits needed to survive such a harsh environment.

4.2 A strife for independence and her own truth

Opening up the fourth chapter with a recurrent nightmare about her wedding day where she ends up married and forever tied to horrible suitors, Jeanette's narrative voice reflects on how difficult she thought it was to find the right man she has always been told to seek. She compares horrible men to pigs - "What do you do if you marry a pig?"(93), and positions herself in a confused state in relation to the positive light everyone around her shredded to the institution of marriage and, moreover, heterosexuality. We hear her doubtful and challenging voice all throughout this reflection and yet again when, later, she discusses this issue with her mother and suggests that she does not believe she wants a husband. To this, Mrs. Winterson simply responds "There's what we want [...] and there's what we get, remember that" (95) and drives the topic away, assuring Jeanette she will be fine. Mrs. Winterson supports her

argument by reminding Jeanette of the end of Charlotte Brontë's novel, *Jane Eyre*, one of the few books that were available for Jeanette to read in their household. However, when Mrs. Winterson makes reference to the ending of *Jane Eyre,* she is alluding to the ending she has written herself where Jane ends up marrying St John instead of Mr. Rochester and becomes a missionary. Upon hearing her mother's mention of the famous novel, she reflects internally on her awareness on how her mother had altered the text, but does not say anything to her. Through this exchange we get a new insight on Jeanette's cosmovision: she is now aware of the controlling practices of Mrs. Winterson, and she is anxious to escape them and to see beyond them as she then claims: "She thought I was satisfied, but I was wondering about her, and wondering where I would go to find out what I wanted to know."(96). The independent aspect of Jeanette we have been able to read in previous chapters is now clearly exemplified as she refuses to blindly accept her mother's conventions, she wants to get out there and make her own discoveries.

As she begins to notice certain disparities, we follow our heroine-like main character in a search for her own truth. The text does not dwell on the harm and turbulence this may have brought Jeanette but leans, once again, into other personality traits that lead to the main character's liberation out of the abusive household. Because up to this point she is still very young as to have the possibility to physically escape this environment, through the personality traits granted to her character she is able to do it psychologically. Moreover, this reaction does not imply passiveness of state as she shamelessly affirms her hatred for Mrs. Winterson and the resentment that she starts to form against her in the narration (a reaction to Mrs. Winterson's daily ill-treatment of her daughter, the recurrent abandonment and the constant lying and manipulation, especially when Jeanette finds her adoption papers).

Moreover, one of the most important aspects of the novel occurs in this chapter as we see Jeanette engaging in the greatest act of survival and independence as well as humanity: she falls in love with Melanie. In her relationship with Melanie, she finds a new companion who offers her a love and sense in her life that Jeanette had never experienced before, which ultimately gives her a new kind of strength and validation of her own identity. She finds happiness in her relationship with Melanie, but this does not exclude the confusion as she knows the sinful underlying of homoerotic relations within the church, however, both of them decide not to lean into them and find happiness in one another. When we reach the ending of the chapter, we see such exchange:

> "'Do you think this is Unnatural Passion?' I asked her once.
> 'Doesn't feel like it. According to Pastor Finch, that's awful.' She must be right, I thought." (103)

She aligns Melanie inside her religious structure, and Jeanette does not see themselves as outsiders to the community yet. Furthermore, she then exhibits a familiar understatement of herself, her relationship with Melanie and the church:

> "When [all of the members of the church] arrived and started to pass the potato pie, we stood on the balcony, looking down on them. Our family. It was safe." (103)

However, although we are offered this positive reflection, the chapter does not end in such a positive tone as in the fairytale that takes place right after this quote we are suggested how this might be the beginning of the end for an unavoidable destabilisation of her Christian and lesbian identity's coexistence. After the end of this fourth chapter we have been exposed to the foundational elements that built up Jeanette's surroundings and personality, and readers can clearly see what the most traumatic aspect of the novel is: the distress caused by the abuse and the crisis that arose from the destabilisation between herself and her community during her adolescence.

5. A traumatic destabilisation of identity

For a proper analysis, Erikson's theory of development and approach to identity will be taken as our framework to furtherly explore how this imbalance scarred Jeanette. Psychoanalyst Erikson based his theory of development and identity formation focusing on how experience and nurture affect human beings, and in relation to this he formulated different stages of development with distinctive conflicts. In Erikson's theory we can identify what is required during the child's upbringing for them to develop a strong self-concept. Following his psychosocial approach, social interactions and relationships are always at the centre of each stage. He proposes that, when nurtured with care, babies develop a sense of trust with their surroundings that brings comfort and hope, which later forges the base for their exploration

of autonomy and purpose during infancy. At this stage positive reinforcement in activities of adventure and play are very important for them to gain initiative and independence. Afterwards, as they become kids and attend school, they start to discover and explore the world that exists outside of the family home which serves to construct their self esteem as they recognise themself either as part of the industry (they positively situate themselves within their school environments, among their peers, in their neighbourhood, etc.) or as outsiders. When children see a correspondence between themselves and their surroundings they effectively achieve a positive self esteem meanwhile those who do not see themselves within these structures develop a feeling of inferiority. Later, during adolescence this sense of belonging becomes one of the most important aspects to their development: teenagers begin their identity exploration process by finding correspondence with their surroundings, which offers security and contentment in order for this exploration to fruitfully continue. Adolescents stride on a long quest for identity and direction during their teens which later allows them to successfully morph into their adult, grown-up selves.

Following this framework, we can make an analysis of why Jeanette's upbringing was so traumatic. The trauma does not arise solely out of the authoritative nurture which has been explored, but because most of the values she was taught during her infancy crumbled completely during her adolescence. During infancy she developed a sense of trust in her mother, she believed she was special and chosen by God as Mrs. Winterson has always told her. Later, she felt an outsider at school, which did not matter because she knew she was destined to do great things, to become a missionary. Jeanette's understanding of her identity arose from the bizarre world views that Mrs. Winterson built for her, and through them she also gained autonomy, purpose and a sense of belonging. Posterior to *Oranges'* publication, author Jeanette Winterson had this to comment on her childhood:

> " J. Isaacs: Was your childhood happy?
>
> J. Winterson: Yes, my childhood was happy. I was a happy child, largely because I believed I was special, chosen by God, that my relationship to the world was unique and that I had a place in it and that place was to change what I saw around me. And I think if a child has a strong framework, even if it's a difficult one, that is a help to the child, and if a child grows up in a loving atmosphere no matter how bizarre the child will be

> happy. I look back [and] I know it was bizarre, but to me I thought everyone lived like that." (1994)

Jeanette grew up in an unusual environment, however, she "thought everyone lived like that" and this unusualness caused her no great harm during her initiative developmental stages. She acquired the values that the Eriksonian's approach considers to be needed for the formation of a strong self-esteem, and, accordingly, constructed such a confident personality. She was "a happy child", and if she had continued to live under her mother's strictures and as a devout follower of the church she would perhaps had also been a happy teenager and young adult. Unfortunately, it was during this period where she underwent a very destabilising process which brought great pain and confusion on Jeanette.

In the course of the period of her identity exploration process she came to realise the untruthfulness and her personal rejection to her mother and the church's values. Upon discovering her adoption papers and, almost simultaneously, her mother's manipulation of her surroundings, her conception of the world trembled. Jeanette started to doubt everything she thought was true, which brought great distress to a young girl at such a vulnerable age. Having always conceived herself as "chosen by God", the realisation that she was in fact not "chosen" and, moreover, not even her mother's child was ultimately traumatic for her. During a stage of development where great vulnerability is being experienced at the quest for identity and self-construction, to have the most important "facts" about yourself be put into question undoubtedly causes great unsettlement. Furthermore, the other crucial aspect that teenagers rely on during this vital stage is the sense of belonging to a community, a relationship which was also damaged as she was deemed unholy and a sinner by her church. This last aspect was particularly hard on her because she not only found herself as an outsider to her community but as an enemy to it, she was considered to have fallen "foul to her lust" (134) and "full of demons"(134).

All of these conceptions deeply scarred Jeanette because at that time she had simultaneously and abruptly lost the two things which were the most important for a girl of her age: a sense of belonging and a notion of identity. The place where she had always resorted to to find comfort, her mother and the church, now rejected her and continued to abuse, betray and hurt her. With no one else to turn to and lots of confusion, Jeanette underwent a great suffering during this era. This situation brought pain and loneliness to Jeanette as she was going

through a lot by questioning her identity as a "messiah" and her mother's daughter, but on top of it, she was also eventually exiled. It is this experience which rejects all kinds of representation, the ache and wound that cannot be put into words and calls for the help of fiction.

6. Gaining agency over her story

> "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." (*Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, 119)

When faced upon the task to express the traumatic, and to also endure it, Jeanette forges her own cosmovision to help herself and her character survive within the uprising confusion and destabilisation. "Deuteronomy", the novel's fifth chapter, is perhaps the most powerful chapter in my reading of the novel as a strife for survival and a quest for agency in her own traumatic story. In it she forges her own cosmovision outside the institutions and the values of those who do not accept her, which later allows her to face the church in defence of her lesbianism and her love for Melanie in the following chapters. This approach forms part of the fictional game that Winterson plays to regain agency over her own story: as she forges her own set of rules for the functioning of the world she gains agency and validation.

Winterson views fiction as a place where everything is possible, and makes use of this to her advantage throughout the whole text. She fictionalises herself and her life, gaining the possibility to rewrite them both. She is able to squeeze new interpretations that are only acquirable through the over-fictionalisation and over-imagination of it all. Alongside, she proposes a cosmovision that arranges everything into mere stories, which takes the hardship away and challenges truth values. This defiance proves to be a logical survival resource to her crisis of destabilisation; she does not see herself as "unholy" despite what everyone around her says. Such realisation brings us to a further questioning of just how much *truth* lies in the original conception of what is deemed holy and what is not. Aiming to deconstruct these

truths, the text shines an inquisitorial light not only on the ideal of holiness and its construction but also on the notion of rules, laws, and historical facts.

As she begins to formulate these questions, the previous notions that ruled over her life begin to lose value; they stop being undoubtable certainties and become just one possible interpretation. Such realisation brings us to the consideration that everything is, thus, malleable, open to interpretation and subjectivity. Truth values become more flexible, they stop being universal and are now free to be rearranged in the way that suits herself and the reader the most. With this new acquired free will, Jeanette Winterson proposes a new conception during "Deuteronomy" that rejects the separation from fiction and storytelling, and storytelling from history and *facts*. She claims that "there is an order and a balance to be found in stories" (122). She encourages the readers to "[know] what to believe" (120), to choose what to believe as she has made "a sandwich laced with mustard of [her] own." (122) This new interpretation of the world proves to be very powerful as through it she regains agency, contentment and validation in her exploration of her past; she offers herself the contentment that her surroundings did not give her through this new understanding of the world.

Such interpretation offers not only agency but a very resilient approach to her own story as in it lies the notion that she is not "the devil", but neither are those who abused her. Upon the realisation that everything is subjective, we come to understand that everyone structures their lives on the truth values that they choose — everyone makes their own sandwiches. Hence, Jeanette finds peace of mind as she realises her family and community are not *evil*: it is just a matter of subjectivity. She chooses to construct her own path, and understands that her community has done the same thing, but because these paths are opposites to each other she has to distance herself from her community to find her own way. This is another tool of survival that she has acquired throughout her life, as she later claims in her memoir:

> "I can't remember a time when I wasn't setting my story against hers [Mrs. Winterson]. It was my survival from the very beginning. Adopted children are self-invented because we have to be; there is an absence, a void, a question mark at the very beginning of our lives. A crucial part of our story is gone, and violently, like a bomb in the womb." (4)

This is, with all of its use of the fantastic, the sarcastic, the real and the bizarre, the result of a story that began to be written by Winterson in her early twenties in the search of an answer for the question that roamed around her head at the time: “how did I get here?” (1994). She plays the fictional game and relies on imagination to gain self-recognition, explore her past and understand her present. With all of these resources, she writes a story that makes it bearable for her “to live in" and that offers an answer to her original question. Moreover, Winterson continues to follow this understanding of the world in later works, as in her novel *Art and Lies* she claims “there is no such thing as autobiography, there is only art and lies” (1994) — which also functions as a perfect description for the autofictional work in *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*. The framework explored can be interpreted as Jeanette Winterson’s personal way of understanding her surroundings and her art. Also, as a characteristic of herself that she has passed on to her fictionalised version so she can survive this story too, allowing Winterson to retell it, now, as her own.

7. Conclusions

Traumatic experiences call for a subversion of representation that distances them from authentic, life-faithful descriptions. To revisit her trauma, Jeanette Winterson defies forms and conventions, rejecting autobiography and descriptive correspondence with real life events in favour of autofiction. *Oranges’* exploration of a traumatic past aligns with theories on trauma that highlight the importance of literary language as a safe place to explore such pain as it offers the possibility for a restructuration of events. Winterson heavily relies on fiction to delve into her past, which in turn offers her a new agency and understanding over her own story.

This is successfully achieved by Winterson as she plays the fictional game of turning herself into a strong fictional character who possesses all of the emotional resources needed to survive the hardships as a way to cope with her past. Fictional Jeanette takes assertive decisions which are uncharacteristic of her own infant self, and rather belong to her grown-up identity. Winterson turns herself into this strong fictional character as a way to face her trauma and regain control over her story. As her past is too tough to be simply re-explored, Winterson must rely on a new re-inventing of it where the pain is not as

unbearable as it was for her originally. To face her past she uses fiction both as a writing tool to reshape her story, and also as a pillar or support that offers familiarity and comfort to the writer. In her use of poetic and literary language and her reliance on imagination, Winterson finds not only autonomy but a much needed ease that helps her explore her story through and with fiction. Mimicking a Biblical structure, she is accompanied by a familiar figure but also challenges and redefines one that ultimately scarred her deeply and represents the institution that was largely responsible for her trauma.

Moreover, upon the exploration of this trauma, the research examined the negative weight that the rupture with her community had in her life as a pivotal aspect on the traumatic exploration of the novel. Despite the controlling rearing of her adoptive mother, the more traumatic aspect lies on this fracture that Jeanette faces with her environment as a teenager. As she experiences an already vulnerable vital stage, everything she has ever known begins to crumble all around her and the most foundational aspects of her identity are now questioned. This proved to be extremely hard for the real Jeanette, but not so much for the fictional one who swiftly constructs a new cosmovision that offers her understandment and security. Such a resource is also part of her construction of a story she "can live with", as well as a resilient tool that allows her to live with her past without anger or resentment; after this autofictional exercise carried out in *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit,* Jeanette Winterson gained understanding and ownership of her past and her story.

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