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The subversive politics of intertextuality: the construction of the (homo)sexual identity in Jeanette Winterson´s <i>Oranges are not the only fruit</i>
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The subversive politics of intertextuality: the construction of the (homo)sexual identity in Jeanette Winterson´s *Oranges are not the only fruit*, trabajo fin de grado
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Trabajo de Fin de Grado

**THE SUBVERSIVE POLITICS OF
INTERTEXTUALITY: THE CONSTRUCTION
OF THE (HOMO)SEXUAL IDENTITY IN
JEANETTE WINTERSON'S *ORANGES ARE
NOT THE ONLY FRUIT***

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ABSTRACT:

The following dissertation is intended to study the construction of the (homo)sexual identity through the intertextual aspect which manifests itself importantly and curiously in the first and controversial novel of the British writer Jeanette Winterson, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985). Such analysis covers both theoretical and applied sections: firstly, I highlight the importance of the study of the nature of intertextuality, together with its function and utilisation within the Postmodern scope, which has been quite influential in the last decades of the 20th century. Additionally, a brief overview about the most relevant theories on identity and gender will also be required. The second part is entirely devoted to the analysis *per se* of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, in which I revise the pseudo-autobiographical nature of the novel, the great significance of *The Bible* as the main intertext or narrative frame, together with other outstanding intertexts such as Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and the French writer Chrétien de Troyes' *The Story of the Grail*, to show that everything contributes to creating a complex textual web which corroborates little Jeanette's complicated process of maturation and quest for a lesbian romance.

RESUMEN:

El siguiente ensayo pretende ser un estudio sobre la construcción de la identidad (homo)sexual a través del aspecto intertextual que se manifiesta de manera importante y curiosa en la primera y controvertida novela de la escritora británica Jeanette Winterson, *Fruta Prohibida* (1985). Dicho análisis cubre unos apartados tanto teóricos como aplicados: en primer término, destaco la importancia del estudio de la naturaleza de la intertextualidad, así como su función y utilización dentro del ámbito del Posmodernismo, muy influyente en las últimas décadas del siglo XX. Por otra parte, una breve revisión de algunas de las teorías más importantes sobre identidad y género serán también necesarias. La segunda parte está enteramente dedicada al análisis *per se* de *Fruta Prohibida*, en el cual se revisa la naturaleza pseudo-autobiográfica de la novela, la trascendencia de *La Biblia* como principal intertexto o marco narrativo, así como también otros intertextos importantes como son *Jane Eyre* de Charlotte Brontë y *El Cuento del Grial* del escritor francés Chrétien de Troyes, todo ello contribuyendo a un complejo entramado de textos que corroboran el complicado proceso de desarrollo de identidad y la búsqueda del romance lésbico de la pequeña Jeanette.

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1. INTRODUCTION, OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

My first acquaintance with the British writer Jeanette Winterson was in the third year of my Degree in English Studies, when I took the course on “Narrativa actual en Lengua Inglesa”. Lectured by Professor María del Mar Asensio Aróstegui, the course had *The Passion*, Winterson’s third book of fiction (1987), as a compulsory reading. *The Passion* is a novel which takes you back to the Golden Napoleonic Times and introduces you to two different characters and their respective overwhelming stories, which make you reflect upon life itself. I was engulfed by the novel’s magic and enigmatic world to such an extent that I resolved to take the challenge and learn more about the author herself and about her fiction.

It was then that I came across *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, which was Winterson’s first novel, written in 1985. I read about the plot and it drew my attention so much that I decided to read the whole novel and delve more into it.

This dissertation aims to analyse a specific aspect of this novel: the subversive politics of intertextuality as a means to build up the protagonist’s own (homo)sexual identity along the novel. In doing so, I find it not only advisable but also necessary to provide a succinct theoretical overview of how intertextuality works within postmodernist literary criticism together with a brief description of gender and identity. Subsequently, the third part consists of applying these prior theoretical concepts to the particular case of Winterson’s novel in order to show the ways in which the author utilises this postmodern technique in order to encode her own work, which is made out of three important intertexts: *The Bible*, *Jane Eyre* and *The Story of the Grail*.

Firstly, *The Bible*’s presence undeniably lies at the very heart of the novel and consequently deserves analysis, since the first eight books of the “Old Testament” will subtly be utilised by the author to frame her novel. We shall see how Winterson parodies, without reaching full blasphemy, these different stages in the story of the people of Israel and, at the very same time, establishes a “controversial parallelism” with the life of its protagonist, Jeanette. Secondly, Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* and Chrétien de Troyes’s *The Story of the Grail* manifest themselves as grand discourses of universal

literary history and again are utilised by Winterson subversively to take the reader through her own steps.

Finally, and apart from these previous contributions, we shall be able to see that Winterson does not seem fully satisfied with this but, in an attempt to make her narrative more subversive, circular and innovative, she intersperses several fairy tales within the storyline.

Generally speaking, we shall see that Winterson presents her main character within different frames and under different “disguises” in order to evince the way a subject can never be fixed and unified and that it may change depending on time, space and its individual psychology, among other factors. Throughout *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, Jeanette Winterson presents her main character in search of her own sexual identity, as a character who is not satisfied with the long-established rules and attempts to challenge, and thus transgress, the boundaries between gender and identity, fact and fiction, canonical and popular literature.

2. A THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

Since I shall largely be dealing with terms such as identity, gender, intertextuality and parody, among others, throughout this study, I find it necessary, therefore, to provide a succinct theoretical overview of these aspects within the postmodern scope.

2.1 DESCRIBING A PHENOMENON: INTERTEXTUALITY AND ITS POLITICS WITHIN POSTMODERNISM

I have had to abandon the notion of ‘originality’, in which the personal style of the artist and his ego are the supreme values; the pursuit of the one-idea, uni-dimensional work and gesture which seems to have dominated the esthetics of art in the 20th century; and the received idea that it is necessary to divorce oneself from the past. (Dixon 1992: 141)

Quite frequently, we hear people talking about the notion of ‘originality’ in a given literary context and they may not be aware of the great difficulty that achieving such ‘originality’ implies. If ‘originality’ is acknowledged or understood as discovering something new, something that might impress the current readership and which, obviously, has not been said yet, they shall probably be mistaken. Everything or almost everything that we hear or say might surely have been said before. That ‘originality’ I am referring to does not reside in what you say but in how you say it, since we unconsciously tend to repeat, act or even imitate something previously done by others. The individuality of words and discourses is getting increasingly confined, despite social awareness. Sometimes we are listening to a programme and suddenly we stop to think about what they have just commented on and we may not be sure of what they were talking about, but we promptly start making connections in an attempt to grasp the meaning of those echoing words that enable us to understand the context more deeply.

According to Charles Bazerman (2011: 83), “we create our texts out of the sea of former texts that surround us, the sea of language we live in”. On the basis of this statement, we would be allowed to claim that there is a widely recognized phenomenon

clearly influencing the incapacity of producing completely new discourses without relating them to that sea of words; this phenomenon I am referring to is generally known as intertextuality.

Intertextuality can be defined, according to Bazerman, for instance, as “the relation each text has to the texts surrounding it” (84). Basically, this could be the definition given to a phenomenon that commonly occurs in literature. The analysis of intertextuality unavoidably leads us to the examination of other texts that somehow relate to the one we are actually analysing. However, this analysis will not only imply spotting those texts involved in such phenomenon but also will lead us to attempt to “examine the relation of a statement to that sea of words, how it uses those words, how it positions itself in respect to those other words” (84); to put it differently, the way the current text uses those words is crucial to understand the purpose of such phenomenon. Drawing on other texts is not always done in the same manner, since this phenomenon captures different dimensions and aspects. As Bazerman theorizes in his article “Intertextuality: how texts rely on other texts”, intertextuality consists of:

explicit and implicit relations a text or utterance has to prior, contemporary and potential future texts. Through such relations a text evokes a representation of the discourse situation, the textual resources that bear on the situation, and how the current text positions itself and draws on other texts. (85)

From these basic definitions arise further theories closely related to the study of intertextuality. As it is widely known among scholars, the emergence of poststructuralist critiques —Hermeneutics and other studies associated with the rejection of previous formalist and ‘New Criticism’ approaches—, which stuck to textual/meaning immanence, gave rise to ‘interpretative’¹ and deconstructive theories. Some contemporary philosophers, writers, and essayists, such as Roland Barthes, published some articles and essays on this matter; for example, in his essay “The Death of the Author”², Barthes puts forward how humans have traditionally been representing the

¹ By ‘interpretative’ I directly refer to Hermeneutics, defined as the theory of text interpretation. By means of this approach, a text can evoke a myriad of meanings throughout times, obviously depending on each critic. But unlike formalist approaches, which barely gave importance to meaning since it was rigid and fixed, Hermeneutics has freed texts to open up to the ‘world’.

² In view of the growing influence of Jaques Derrida’s deconstructionist philosophy, Barthes’s best-known essay “The Death of the Author” meant a turning point in his career since Barthes seemed to draw aside structuralism and approached poststructuralist theories.

subject through the figure of the author; in other words, that the readers have not played any role in the interpretation of a text and that the author has behaved as the 'owner/creator' of the words he produced. However, "the resulting emphasis on writing and reading as production necessarily lead to a critique of the 'work' as that entity complete in itself, and encapsulating a meaning that transcends time and history" (Marshall 1992: 121), without necessity of the author as mediator.

This is precisely what this essay pursues; the meaning encapsulated in Winterson's novel stemming from the 'entanglement' of several interwoven texts is exposed to interpretation.

Despite the fact that he belonged to the structuralist movement, Roland Barthes was also concerned with this phenomenon and, consequently, contributed to providing a 'working' (122) definition of intertextuality:

We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single "theological" meaning (the "message" of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture. (1968: 146)

Subsequently, and with the rising development of European deconstructivism and other poststructuralist philosophies, a number of their most outstanding figures, namely Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, respectively, also argued about this phenomenon and came to the very same conclusions about its nature, for example:

The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full-stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network. (Foucault 1974: 23)

As appreciated hitherto, the varied statements and arguments on which this phenomenon is grounded encompass the very same ideas of multidimension, non-originality, multiplicity of meanings and multiple interrelations, among others.

We have so far been examining *grosso modo* the basic understandings of intertextuality as a phenomenon that almost occurs innately, although self-consciously many times, in current narratives and discourses; but in the light of recent emergences and developments in aesthetic fields, especially in art and literature, owing, to a large

extent, to the deconstructivist philosophical movements, postmodernist fiction “has certainly sought to open itself up to history [...] but it seems to have found that it can no longer do so in any remotely innocent way” (Hutcheon 1988: 124).

Linda Hutcheon, a Canadian professor, writer and essayist, has theorized on Postmodernism and everything it deals with. According to her, postmodernist fiction comes to challenge grand discourses by situating itself, in certain cases, within historical discourse, for which Hutcheon herself would later coin the term “historiographic metafiction”. But, leaving historiographic metafiction aside, Postmodernism, as a recent artistic and critical movement, is often associated with poststructuralist and deconstructive theories on account of the period in which it appeared (second half of the 20th century). Particularly, postmodernist fiction is commonly characterized, among many other things, by two lineaments: the first is its sceptical philosophy which, simultaneously, intends to deconstruct and debunk those grand discourses and narratives born from Western thought as well as the idea of the subject as a unified and fixed entity which is, as Susana Onega (1994: 178) deftly points out in view of Jameson’s contention on ‘the unity of the self’³, “one of the most cherished artificial constructions both of the patriarchal system and of realistic fiction alike”. The other feature refers to the continuous struggle to reinstate and provide alternative realms for free expression and social recognition to what Hutcheon denominates “the ex-centric, off-center and de-centered” (1988: 130), always on the margins of the dominant “andro-(phallo), hetero-, Euro-, ethno-centrism” (61).

Given all these contexts, intertextuality comes to play an important role within this multifaceted movement that Postmodernism is and, as I have pointed out above, it is postmodernist fiction that comes to use, wittily and critically, strategies such as parody which, along with intertextuality, become mightily subversive.

Postmodernist writers often use intertextuality parodically in an attempt to rescue certain texts from the past and to return them “to the ‘world’ [...] but not the ‘world’ of ‘ordinary reality’ [...] the ‘world’ in which these texts situate themselves is the ‘world’ of discourse, the ‘world’ of texts and intertexts” (125). Indeed, this return to the ‘world’ sometimes makes those intertexts somehow enact the ‘alternative realms’ I mentioned in the above-paragraph; parody contributes to doing so and allows the writer to act freely on their material. When people refer to parody, they always tend to think of

³ For an in-detail analysis of his philosophy on ‘the self and subject’, see Jameson (1984).

it as a 'mockery' or 'lack of respect' for something, but parody within Postmodernism is something much wittier and subtler: "to parody is not to destroy the past [or a given classic narrative]; in fact to parody is both to enshrine and question it" (125). Through parody, the postmodernist writer does not mean to destroy the importance of, in this case, a given intertext but to question or to bring to attention some of its aspects.

We should not forget that Postmodernism is largely an aesthetic movement but also has its 'political' side or purpose. The aim of postmodern intertextuality and parody is to re-define, re-interpret (even re-present)⁴ and re-contextualize, by means of "ironic allusions" (126), those ideas of a given intertext within postmodernist texts. This is what Hutcheon mainly discusses about intertextuality, she claims that among the many things that postmodern intertextuality challenges are both closure and single, centralized meaning; this, again, refers back, in a way, to what has been argued in previous paragraphs; e.g.: Barthes' "The Death of the Author" precisely problematizes the confining relationship 'author-text' and, as a consequence, pursues a re-definition or revision of the concept of interpretation by means of suggesting a new relationship, that of the 'reader-text' which enables it to open up to a much wider readership.

To conclude this section, postmodernist fiction, not surprisingly, often and self-consciously brings about a lurking purpose or politics. For example, intertextual parody of grand discourses, such as classic American or European narratives, is, in Hutcheon's terms, "a mode of appropriating, re-defining and re-formulating –with significant change– the dominant white, male, middle-class, heterosexual, Euro-centric dominant culture" (1988:130).

⁴ According to Linda Hutcheon (2002: 29), postmodernist representation is self-consciously –image, narrative and (most important) product of (and producer of) ideology.

2.2 GENDER AND IDENTITY THEORIES

If Lacan presumes that female homosexuality issues from a disappointed heterosexuality, as observation is said to show, could it not be equally clear to the observer that heterosexuality issues from a disappointed homosexuality? (Butler 1990: 49)

This section primarily theorizes on the notions of gender and identity both in general terms and within a poststructuralist and postmodernist philosophical scope. For the sake of conciseness, this point shall mostly be grounded on the theories and discussions of two scholars: Judith Butler (University of Berkeley) and José Angel García Landa (University of Zaragoza).

Both ‘identity’ and ‘gender’ have been notions attached somehow to one another, indirectly but at the same time directly. From the very beginning of our History and as a question of cultural tradition, there was an attempt (or obsession) to establish fixed attitudes in an individual based on its gender; in other words, History has made an individual adopt a certain behaviour according to their sex⁵ and gender. The consolidation of the idea of fixed attitudes and roles ascribed to an individual’s gender has resulted in an endless quarrel and in multiple discriminations throughout time against those who did not meet the standards.

From the time our birth takes place, we are ordinarily categorised as “male” or “female”; this clearly biological assumption, however, may be challenged or disrupted in many occasions as we grow old when ‘gender identity’ and ‘gender roles’ come to play their crucial part.

Gender is a notion born as a mainly linguistic output, symbolologically- and culturally-laden, a semiotic construct, it is “a set of cultural practices and representations associated to biological sex” (García Landa 1996: 14) or “the cultural meaning attached to sexual identity” (McConnell-Ginet 1980: 16 & Stoller 1968: 9). In light of the complexity of the issue, José Ángel García Landa (1996), for example, thinks that gender might be experienced and analysed at several levels of specificity,

⁵ The notion of ‘sex’ is very much in keeping with the notions of gender and identity, but unlike the other two, ‘sex’ or ‘biological sex’ in García Landa’s terms (1996: 14-15) consists of a set of anatomical characteristics, but in no way is it a simple phenomenon. Among a set of sexual variables he points out, we find ‘official sex’, defined as an official description of biological sex, “male” or “female”.

from which we could separate three aspects of gender: gender identity (which will be commented on in this section), gender roles and gender style.

Gender identity, then, alludes to the identity an individual or subject develops throughout life, which “coincides with the official designations of sex” (1996: 14). In other words, a male subject usually tends to behave as and considers himself a man, whilst a female subject usually tends to behave as and considers herself a woman. These assumptions are conceived from our very childhood, something that might last for ever. But, as García Landa observes (16), “although a woman will not suddenly decide ‘I am a man’, the meaning of ‘I am a man/I am a woman’ will change, develop and become specified all through the individual’s life: gender identity is constructed on the basis of gender roles, not just biological sex”. Interpreting García Landa’s arguments, gender is far more than our biological sex, it is the output of a set of cultural values we take in, it is actually the result of our behaviour, attitude and performance in life.

An endless quarrel opens up in the domain of sexuality and identity, which often and fiercely challenges the following statement: gender roles must conform to the official sex. This diehard premise has increasingly weakened throughout History, although, suprisingly nowadays, everyone is expected to act in accordance with their gender identity, thus conforming to social criteria. Gender roles, in view of García Landa’s theory, are communicated mimetically and “are always central to a culture’s interests [...] that each culture will have a variety of means to express the way men and women are expected to behave” (16). This is, then, brought to literature and to the different arts through the representation of stereotypes. In literature, for instance, gender roles are in continuous change since they are regarded as something that is not rigid and, as a consequence, is “subject to revision” (16).

On the other hand, the individual’s identity, regardless of whether it is a man or woman, is also and quite often constructed upon our sexuality (heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, etc). It is certain that sexuality should not be mistaken for gender, although sexuality is unavoidably and undoubtedly built upon the notion of gender and is defined as the feelings and attractions you feel towards the other or same sex. So gender, sexuality and identity are terms mistakenly interchangeable yet intrinsic in our culture and in our lives. A subject’s identity can be categorised by its gender and sexuality, its gender being defined in relation to its real sex and its sexuality to its erotic feelings and attractions.

In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), Judith Butler, on the contrary, problematises the notions of gender and identity much more thoroughly by exploring and contrasting different feminist theorists' viewpoints.

Gender becomes a controversial notion as some feminists consider it as the cultural interpretation of sex, while others see it as a cultural construct. That is why Butler (1990: 7) wonders where that mechanism of construction comes from, whether it is something that might be constructed differently throughout times, how and where gender takes place, etc. In the case of Simone de Beauvoir, as Butler tries to explain, she firmly believes that gender is variable, evinced in her famous assertion "one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one" in *The Second Sex*. For Beauvoir, gender is not fixed, but rather it is something determined by culture and its laws; for her, 'the body' becomes something unstable and contingent, "there is nothing that guarantees that the 'one' who becomes a woman is necessarily female. If 'the body' is a situation, there is no recourse to a body that has not always already been interpreted by cultural meanings" (Butler 1990: 8). Beauvoir's contention "on the meaning of *construction* appears to founder on the conventional philosophical polarity between free will and determinism" (8; italics in the original). Other feminist theorists, however, claim that

gender is 'a relation', indeed, a set of relations, and not an individual attribute. Others, following Beauvoir, would argue that only the feminine gender is marked, that the universal person and the masculine gender are conflated, thereby defining women in terms of their sex and extolling men as the bearers of a body-transcendent universal personhood. (9)

In an attempt to complicate and fuel the debate over gender a bit further, Butler also accounts for Luce Irigaray's theory, which basically exposes the fact that women "constitute a paradox, if not a contradiction, within the discourse of identity itself" (9). Since we live in a mainly male-dominated world in which language is also under control of men "phallogocentric language" (9), women come to constitute "the *unrepresentable*" (9; italics in the original), a gendered subject which cannot be thought of, that lacks sense and representation, since the female sex itself constitutes "the unconstrainable and undesignable" (9). The sex of women, in the light of this theory, becomes multiple, not just one as in the case of Beauvoir's line for whom "women are designated as the Other" (9).

In short, Butler makes us become aware that these two above positions with respect to 'gender' and 'the feminine' are far from being close: on the one hand, Beauvoir upholds the theory that the female subject can only be coherent through her otherness (the masculine); on the other, Irigaray differs from the latter's opinion and claims that "both the subject and the Other are masculine mainstays of a closed phallogocentric signifying economy that achieves its totalizing goal through the exclusion of the feminine altogether" (9).

But what about the notion of "identity"? Identity is a thoroughly complex term and I would dare to claim that even more than "gender" itself. Identity is a human construct that encompasses and works within a great deal of fields, among them, the philosophical and sociological discourses. The first one assumes that "a subject" (its identity), in whatever context it might be in, is defined through its capacity for language, its awareness and moral deliberation. Sociological discourses have claimed that a "person/individual" takes in various roles through which they gain social recognition, meaning and visibility. Butler (1990: 16) contends that the question about "personal identity," within that philosophical discussion, focuses largely on the issue of what intrinsic feature of a subject establishes the continuity or self-identity of the person through time. She does uphold that the notions of "gender" and "gendered subjects" come into play by mostly governing the idea of "culturally intelligible personal identities". Being 'identity' a rather broad term, it cannot be conceived, understood or made 'intelligible', if it is not through 'becoming gendered'. Butler expands on this issue, she explains that the "coherence" and "continuity" of a subject/individual/person

are not logical or analytic features of personhood, but rather, socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility. Inasmuch as "identity" is assured through the stabilizing concepts of sex, gender and sexuality, the very notion of "the person" is called into question by the cultural emergence of those "incoherent" or "discontinuous" gendered beings who appear to be persons but who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined. (1990: 17)

Coherent identities, as Foucault also explains in Butler's *Gender Trouble*, are just made intelligible through "the matrix of coherent gender norms" (17), that

'heterosexualization', for example, becomes a product of binary and asymmetrical oppositions between "the masculine" and "the feminine" (presumably coherent gender norms). Personal identity, then, is theorized as being only rational through the fact of being 'gendered', this being simultaneously governed by the cultural laws imposed by society itself. Likewise, the conception of a "compulsory heterosexuality" (18) entails what 'gender identity' is expected to fulfil in a given social context, thus everything boiling down to the same matter that García Landa comes to terms with in his above mentioned article: gender, identity, even sex(uality) recur as a significant indissolubility by working hand in hand.

In my analysis of "the construction of the (homo)sexual identity" in Winterson's first novel, all of these previous theoretical assumptions and discussions come into play. As we shall see in the subsequent sections, the construction of the character-identity in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* is seen as a "demonic deviation" from the rules and social norms constituted by, in this case, a conservative and fundamentalist religious community of which Jeanette is a part. Theoretically speaking, we shall see that 'identity' and 'gender' diverge from that 'matrix of coherent gender norms and of that compulsory heterosexuality' to which a given subject must conform in order to gain a 'proper' social recognition and acceptance. For Winterson, we will see, fiction works as her "battle field", since it is

the site to interrogate, trouble, subvert, and tamper with gender, identity, and sexuality [three important constituents in her work]; her fiction is a serious invitation to readers to imagine the emancipation of "normal" and "natural" from the exclusive and totalizing domain of patriarchal and heterosexual authority. (Doan 1994: 154)

It is my contention that, through *Oranges*, Jeneatte Winterson rises up against these previously fixed and rigid considerations on sexuality, gender and identity roles that are established by recalcitrant societies (mostly patriarchal and zealously religious ones). She convincingly and adamantly explains:

I think that sexuality, or the versions of sexuality that we are served up from the earliest moments are prescriptive and in many ways debilitating. People don't get a chance to find out about themselves. They are told who they are, that they fit in to certain patterns. How many people can honestly say that they have made their own

choices, their own decisions? But that's largely because of the picture book world that we're offered, the story that we are told about ourselves, rather than being encouraged to tell our own stories. (Winterson in Asensio Aróstegui 1996: 270-271)

3. TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE INTERTEXTUALITY: THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE (HOMO)SEXUAL IDENTITY IN JEANETTE WINTERSON'S *ORANGES ARE NOT THE ONLY FRUIT*

3.1 INTRODUCTION: A POSTMODERN *BILDUNGSROMAN* ?

Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit was written in 1985 by the British writer Jeanette Winterson. This is the coming-out and coming-of-age⁶ story of an adopted girl, Jeanette, brought up at the core of a fundamentalist Pentecostal Evangelical household in a northern working-class industrial town of Lancashire. Jeanette's mother wishes her adopted daughter to become a missionary and to spread God's Word, although she is unaware that Jeanette is not willing to reject her hidden, yet emerging (homo)sexual orientation in order to do so. Throughout the novel, Jeanette bravely struggles to defend her own sexuality and personal happiness, with the aim of finding a place within such a restraining community, despite the fact that she puts her relationship with her mother in jeopardy.

As I pointed out in the introduction to this essay, *Oranges* became troublesome⁷ already at its release on account of some coincidences found between Winterson's personal life and her fictional *alter ego*: both seem to share names, sexual orientations and personal experiences. These conclusions created a buzz among her readership and her dubious response "Not at all and yes of course" (Winterson 2001: xiv) to the question "Is *Oranges* an autobiographical novel?" (xiv), appearing in the introduction to the first Vintage edition published by Pandora Press (1995), did not suffocate the increasing yet mere curiosity.

Winterson seemed to reject applying the tag of 'autobiography' to her novel *Oranges* since 'autobiography' has traditionally been associated with men and, in general, with the patriarchal system. She comes to question and to subtly subvert this aspect through *Oranges* in an attempt to reassert herself as a woman and a lesbian.

Traditional studies of fictional autobiography have

⁶ A 'coming-of-age' story is a genre which focuses on both the psychological and physical growth of the main character, from childhood to adulthood. The problematisation of *Oranges* as a coming-of-age novel is crucial to understand its nature.

⁷ Troublesome in the sense that the novel led to a great number of rumours about Winterson's private life.

naturalized the self-representation of (mainly) white, presumably heterosexual, elite men [...] participating in the cultural production of a politics of identity, a politics that maintains identity hierarchies through its reproduction of class, sexuality, race, and gender as terms of “difference” in a social field of power. (Gilmore 1994: 5)

The autobiographical fictional novel, sometimes also called *Bildungsroman*⁸, has traditionally been attached to the male discourse, the patriarchal system and the dominant power fields; not surprisingly, the represented subject, criticized so much by Postmodernism as I have argued in previous sections of this essay, is ‘unified, fixed and centered’, exposed to no deferral. Postmodernism, then, has challenged these classic autobiographical roots and, together with feminist critiques and revisions, the representation of the ‘subject’ has become a matter dependant on its historicism, gender, class and, above all, linguistic potential.

In Hutcheon’s terms (2002: 36), “the sense of the coherent, continuous, autonomous, and free subject is, as Foucault too suggested in *The Order of Things*, a historically conditioned and historically determined construct, with its analogue in the representation of the individual in fiction”. Winterson, then, comes to terms with these assumptions and, by means of *Oranges*, she disrupts and dismantles the traditional basis of the *Bildungsroman*. Winterson’s ‘coming-of-age’ novel, therefore, increasingly takes shape as a postmodern autobiographical fictional novel. Then, her fictional *alter ego*, Jeanette, behaves as a postmodern subject or construct

in process, never as fixed and never as autonomous, outside history. It is always a gendered subjectivity, rooted also in class, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. And it is usually textual self-reflexivity that paradoxically calls these wordly particularities to our attention by foregrounding the doxa, the unacknowledged politics, behind the dominant representations of the self. (Hutcheon 2002: 37)

⁸ *Bildungsroman* is a German term coined by the philologist Karl Morgenstern in 1819 and also refers to the novel of education, formation or ‘coming-of-age’. But, as Laura Bollinger deftly observes,

complex *bildungsromans* such as Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, generally posit physical and/or emotional separation from home and family as a necessary step in the process of maturation. For conventional stories of male development (the paradigmatic *Bildungsroman* as established by Goethe), such models play out the dynamics of the oedipal phase; the male infant recognizes physiological differences between himself and a female primary caregiver and learns to define his gender and identity in terms of that opposition. (1994: 363)

That is why the *Bildungsroman* is conventionally associated with the male discourse and male process of maturation, as totally opposed to Jeanette’s female/lesbian one in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*.

On the basis of Hutcheon's theory, Jeanette, therefore, conforms to all these features in accordance with her function within the novel: she is a gendered subject (a woman, not the traditional male character), homosexual (hetero-centrism is excluded) belonging to a working-class family and presented 'in the process of constructing her own identity' through narrative techniques as intertextuality, discourse and under numerous 'disguises'. Besides, and in order to be more subversive, Winterson disrupts another traditional feature of fictional autobiography: narrative linearity⁹.

Winterson's creativity in writing *Oranges* was not acknowledged at the time the novel was published, everyone was convinced of its autobiographical nature and that she attempted to make public her private life under a fictional character, but Winterson never had in mind to do so; she explains her feelings about this in an article by Justine Picardie (1992):

I didn't realise that if you invented yourself, everybody would think that the book was autobiographical. But now I'm thinking of telling everybody that I was brought up by two accountants in Weybridge [...] I was inventing myself when I wrote *Oranges* [sic]. I was remaking myself. It was a conscious act, a creative act. (44)

This statement makes Winterson reassert herself as a postmodernist writer as she states that she "was remaking herself"; it did not have to do with making anything public, it had to do with creativity and self-conscious artistic performances. The act of "re-inventing oneself" in fiction is very much in keeping with the postmodern aim of appropriation, re-definition and re-contextualization.

⁹ Since 'narrative linearity' has more to do with the aesthetic side of the novel than with its politics, I will not come into analysing it, in spite of its being another disrupting technique used by Winterson in order to distance her novel from traditional modes of autobiography.

3.2 *THE BIBLE, JANE EYRE AND THE STORY OF THE GRAIL AS MAJOR INTERTEXTS*

3.2.1 *THE BIBLICAL FRAME: GENDERING THE HOLY DISCOURSE*

Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit is a novel born from the juxtaposition of several intertexts, specifically from three texts which have transcended the History of Mankind. One of these is the best-known and most read worldwide, regardless of religions and nationalities: *The Holy Bible*. Jeanette Winterson can be said to have been brought up by the hand of *The Bible*, especially the Old Testament. Her thorough knowledge of it is evinced when one reads this novel.

Oranges was written within a period of upheaval in the twentieth century, more concretely in the mid-eighties when, in England in this case, Thatcherite conservatism had reached its apotheosis and the socio-cultural context demanded a high-cultural ‘art’ which by no means intermingled with political or sexual issues. It was then that *Oranges* showed up in the literary scene as a socio-cultural subtext, more specifically as a lesbian one, which gained social acclaim among a clearly ‘homosexual’ spectrum. *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* is, then, a promising product opposing a wide political class which denied the possibility of freedom of speech. It was also in the decade of the 80’s that fundamentalist religions (above all the Muslim one) started a series of discriminatory attacks against the act of free speech (which enables you to express your own opinions) and against homosexuality (clearly emerging at that time), thus leading to extremist measures such as the *fatwā* (death penalty) issued by the leader of the Iranian Revolution, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, against Salman Rushdie, the famous Indo-British writer, owing to the publication of his fourth novel *The Satanic Verses* in 1988, which was accused of blasphemy and of mocking the Muslim faith.

Winterson’s reaction to all these threatening occurrences and policies led her to write an apparently *naïve* and *touching* novel, *Oranges*, although, in truth, it was indignantly- and ironically-laden and through which her career and commitment to both fighting social injustices and supporting freedom of expression had just commenced.

On account of the distressing socio-political panorama briefly described in the above paragraph, Winterson, not suprisingly, reacted against the intolerance and pressure religions, above all, exerted on their parishioners. But there is something that

specially vexes Jeanette Winterson about religion that led her to ironically utilise *The Bible* as the frame of her work: its restraining and discriminatory doctrine. As I pointed out in section 2.2. on “Gender and Identity”, Winterson finds fiction a space in which real feelings can come to light, language can be used playfully and where you can detach yourself from norms and rules governed by a clear patriarchal and heterosexual matrix. Religion, indeed, might be said to be another frame/space under which a huge amount of people live since they share values and views on life and human existence.

As I indicated above, Winterson’s thorough knowledge of *The Bible*, especially of the “Old Testament”, leads us to think that her beliefs are rooted in a strong religious upbringing. Religion, then, has been a space in which Winterson was zealously taught during her childhood, although, clear as it might seem, her experience with it did not come to a successful end.

The relationship between Winterson, religion and her mother¹⁰ stirs up a controversial output by which she mainly denounces the way her own (sexual) freedom could not develop properly on account of a clearly imposing and limiting religious community. Her decision of picking up *The Bible* as a “subtext” subtly hints at a strong subversive political intention over her material and towards a specific spectrum of society: the alienated ones for reasons of class, sexuality and gender. In this section, I shall account for the reason why this “*Biblical* framework” is so important, partly due to the socio-political and religious panorama depicted above.

Religion and women have often had a paradoxical relationship: the fact that the human race has posited, from its very first steps, “man” as the example of perfection *par excellence* is not something by chance but closely associated with our religious background and the values it stresses and upholds. I especially remark upon those religions of Semitic roots, but I must also agree with the French linguist Yaguello when he observes,

Par ailleurs, que l’idéologie judéo-gréco-romano-islamo-chrétienne, orientée vers le Dieu-père, soit paternaliste et sexiste, et que cela se manifeste dans la langue, c’est un fait qui n’est plus à démontrer. (in Olivares Rivera 1996: 89)¹¹

¹⁰ In *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* as well as in Jeanette Winterson’s private life, the figure of the mother becomes a rather negative symbol. For Winterson, the “maternal” is closely related to “home” and “spirituality”, concepts which, through time, have been considered to be attributed to women and their tasks in life (masculine bonds on women) and from which Winterson herself wants to detach.

¹¹ “Moreover, the fact that Judeo-Greek-Islam-Christian ideology, oriented towards God the Father, is paternalistic and sexist, which is manifested in language, needs no demonstration” (1996: 89)

Religion often and self-consciously manifests a condition of self-betrayal as many of its preachers, followers and parishioners are by no means ashamed of their anti-feminist stance and assert that “the female” constitutes the inferior half of the human race. This is not only seen through religion itself but is also observed in language and its classification or hierarchical organization of knowledge and lexicon.

Winterson, however, is a woman who convincingly rejects religion in its paternalistic view, as it not only pervades the religious scope but also the everyday situation, thus discriminating against certain patterns which, obviously, women are not supposed to fulfil. In *Oranges*, her fictional heroine Jeanette is a *naïve* girl whose early convictions stem from a severe and upright morality instilled by her mother, whose understanding is overtly based on a binary asymmetrical system/organization of the world characterised by a homophobic, patriarchal and intolerant attitude which, not surprisingly, fits in the archetype of an evangelical Christian dogmatic:

She had never heard of mixed feelings. There were friends and there were enemies:
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 Brontë¹², Slug pellets. (Winterson 2001: 3)

The paradox is set in the book from the very beginning: mother-daughter ties will establish a symbol, hence and not by chance, Winterson’s project shall be differentiated from those canonical and conventional *Bildungsromans*. *The Bible*, here, constitutes a “umbilical cord” from which, in a near future, Jeanette will not be able to separate or get fully rid of.

The story of Jeanette, as it has been already acknowledged, disrupts any kind of traditional pattern of conventionality starting, for instance, with the very first lines of the novel: “Like most people I lived for a long time with my mother and father. My father liked to watch the wrestling, my mother liked to wrestle; it didn’t matter what. She was in the white corner and that was that” (3). Despite the fact that Jeanette’s relationship with her mother did not come out well, Jeanette’s stress, from the earliest

¹² One of the most outstanding intertexts to highlight in this analysis is *Jane Eyre* written by Charlotte Brontë. Jeanette’s mother is recurrently reading this novel in an attempt to educate her daughter the way she wants to; a manipulative reading of *Jane Eyre* is made by Jeanette’s mother who, later on, is given away by her unsustainable lie, thus Jeanette finds out her mother’s target.

moments of the novel, on the maternal figure instead of the paternal one¹³ is very telling since, in this case, for example, she remarks that the act of “wrestling” is going to be performed by the mother and not the father when *wrestling* is usually bound to men more than to women.

But let us center on the mother-daughter bonding and the religious issues. As I pointed out above, *The Bible* has not been chosen by chance, as Winterson overtly posits her novel as a re-working of it by naming the chapter headings of her work in the same way as the first eight Books of the Old Testament: “Genesis”, “Exodus”, “Leviticus”, “Numbers”, “Deuteronomy (the last Book of Law)”, “Joshua”, “Judges” and “Ruth”. Here comes the most disrupting and destabilising device utilised by the author when Jeanette’s process of construction/maturation mirrors that of the Israelites’ journey in their attempt to leave Egypt and thus getting to the Promised Land by the hand of Moses. Speaking in general terms, this arrangement of chapters confronts what for Jeanette constitutes her major problems: her hard process of maturation (being accepted by society and her mother on account of her sexual orientation) and her connection/relationship with her mother in itself.

By interspersing the most important text ever written in Western civilization with her own fictional character’s experience, it gives evidence of to what extent can Winterson be both postmodern and subversive since, on the one hand, she knows how to blur fact and fiction, history and storytelling¹⁴ and, on the other, her subversive politics by which she dares to situate her fictional character at the same level as any of

¹³ Jeanette’s father’s abstraction/uselessness throughout the novel posits and evinces the fact that the “male figure” remains totally excluded from Winterson’s material. It is actually Jeanette’s mother who adopts the masculine role throughout the novel, thus stressing the author’s subversive aim at a feminist viewpoint on both household and religious issues. This novel’s beginning with the ‘neglect of the male figure’ and the ‘strengthening of the female one’ hints at a subtle subversion of gender roles which, although, apparently, does not seem to have anything to do with religion, it actually does.

Carmen Olivares Rivera reminds us of a classical and well-known testimony of a common attitude towards the idea of the position of women, as stated by St.Paul in Eph. 5.22-24: “Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands” (1996: 89).

Jeanette’s mother is not subject to her husband, here; indeed, it is rather the other way round. In spite of its shortcomings, Winterson has made of the maternal figure a strong character whose obsession with taming all that surrounds her in her own way undermines her counterpart; thus the figure of the husband, not the wife, becomes “the Other” in Beauvoir’s terminology.

¹⁴ One of the most postmodern distinctive features of Winterson is her attempt at misleading the readership by blurring the limits between fact and fiction, history and storytelling. In *Oranges*, as we shall see in the subsequent section, Jeanette’s story line splices with fantastic stories, fairy tales, Arthurian legends etc.; often, Jeanette adopts an earnest tone, easily confused as narrating History, yet also a tone of storyteller (rather comic): “A long time ago, when the kingdom was divided into separate compartments like a pressure cooker [...] In those days magic was very important” (2001: 137) “Once upon a time, in the forest, lived a woman who was so beautiful..” (58-59)

the male figures in the Old Testament¹⁵. Even though we should not forget that *The Bible* is not just one of the most important documents in the world, we should also remember that it has also formed part of Winterson's private life from her early years. This will help readers to understand and become aware of the position of the author (a woman and a lesbian) with respect to the one of the Holy document, which is actually the model of a different kind of tradition (male and heterosexual)¹⁶.

Winterson's postmodern parody when comparing her heroine Jeanette, a lesbian working-class girl, with any of the male figures from the Holy Discourse posits what I mentioned in the theoretical section about Linda Hutcheon's observation in this sense:

postmodern parody [no longer strictly a comic genre] enables parodists to repeat material we define as (capital L) Literature with ironic difference in order both to explore and to confront their position within the tradition – a possibility particularly valuable for members of oppressed or marginalized social groups (Hutcheon 1988: 129)

Jeanette, then, identifies herself as a member of this oppressed and marginalized group, since she is actually “cast away” and neglected by her own family on account of her homosexuality.

As it has been appreciated hitherto, the mother-daughter bonding becomes central in Jeanette's story of maturation and construction of her own self, especially and as a starting point, because of the fact that from an early stage of her life, Jeanette recounts her story by both establishing a parallelism between herself and the Holy Text and by taking into account her origins within a family in which the maternal figure embodies (then subverting) the male or paternal one. My contention is that Winterson's utilisation of the story of the Hebrew population together with her prioritisation of the family home based on the mother-daughter relationship would result in a revision/re-

¹⁵ Quite recurrently Jeanette compares herself with outstanding male figures from *The Bible*, namely Joshua, Daniel or even Jesus himself, thus embedding and re-creating herself within a mainly patriarchal tradition with the aim of re-defining and undermining distinctive values such as heterosexuality and male-worship.

¹⁶ The Old Testament is universally and largely known as a masculine-biased text, especially when its “Head” is normally thought of as being male. What I am referring to complies with what Olivares Rivera also argues: “The God of Old Testament is quite obviously visualized as male, and the whole Bible is permeated by strong anti-feminist attitudes, which may in part be responsible for the Freudian notions of women as a penis-envious, castrated and incomplete human being” (1996: 90).

definition of the history of Western civilization as mainly patriarchal and heterosexual, which strictly condemns and denies other types of familial cohabitation.

But indeed, the hardest part of all this is that Jeanette is not wholly successful in achieving full detachment from those conventional clichés on sexuality and different familial modes of cohabitation, since her mother rejects either keeping her close or supporting her daughter when she finds out her true sexual orientation.

Jeanette's story commences, then, within this paradoxical situation: in the first chapter of the novel, "Genesis", for instance, we get to know about Jeanette's origins when she becomes aware of her adoption. This does not comply with the original Book of Genesis in which we get knowledge about stories such as the Creation and Fall, the tower of Babel, the Noah story, the calling of Abraham, the sacrifice of Isaac etc, everything closely connected with the story of the Israelites in their point of departure to the Promised Land. In *Oranges* this is rather altered since Jeanette's story relates more to the story of the New Testament about the origins of Jesus; she was expected from a virginal birth (that of her mother, who wishes to conceive a baby without having sexual relations and to give the baby to the Lord, thus devoting it to Him). Jeanette is adopted by this fundamentalist evangelical Christian woman; this fact dismantles and deconstructs the original birth of Jesus and, what's more, the origins of the Holy Discourse when Winterson gets rid of the predominant male figures such as Joseph who, in Jeanette's story, mirrors her passive father, and Jeanette herself who would replace the "Head" figure Jesus whose arrival on Earth was aimed at his preaching his Father's Word. As it is observed, Winterson retrieves women's ostracized power and reinstates it from the very beginning. As a consequence, Jeanette and her mother become the mightiest characters in the story.

Henceforth, Jeanette's story "walks" by her mother's hand until her decisive moment of departure to the "outside" world. In the second chapter, "Exodus", we are told about Jeanette's mother's reluctance and denial of her daughter's education outside (outdoors) Christian conventions: "The Devil's in the world, but not in this house" (22). Jeanette leaves home in order to attend classes at school, which is considered "a Breeding Ground" (17) by her mother. This chapter is much more faithful to the original Book of the Old Testament since we witness Jeanette's departure, as it occurs with the Hebrew population guided by Moses to the Promised Land. In my view, Winterson's heroine's departure constitutes a starting point in considering herself and her sexuality

as something ordinary and not “full of sin” (10). There are a few situations in which Winterson subtly implies her character’s seed of sentiments towards life, for instance:

Since I was born I had assumed that the world ran on very simple lines [alluding to her mother’s doctrine based on an asymmetrical and patriarchal conception of life] like a larger version of our church. Now I was finding that even the church was sometimes confused [...] the problem there and then was what was going to happen with me. (27)

This confusion she is referring to might be depicted as an extremely thin line between her own (sexual) freedom and her eternal and (the limiting conditions it implies) devotion to the Lord. At the beginning, she continuously thinks about her fate, since a specific type of understanding of the world has been imposed on her and, for the time being, there is nothing that can be done in that respect: “there is nothing for me to do but contemplate my fate and lie still” (27).

The subsequent chapters, “Leviticus” and “Numbers”, as Bollinger points out, “play off the position of their Biblical source texts as constituting “The Law”, and Winterson uses them to explore Jeanette’s domination by her mother and the church, including Jeanette’s initiation into her mother’s brand of evangelizing” (1994: 366), resulting in a moral clash between Jeanette’s mother’s strong convictions towards those whom she regards as “enemies” (Heathens, fornicators, non-holy people) and Jeanette’s increasing (homo)sexual self-awareness¹⁷, by her rejecting the possibility of marrying a man and considering “heterosexuality” a horrid condition: ““Why are so many men really beasts?, she laughed. ‘You’re too young for that’ [...] ‘There’s time enough you get a boy’. I don’t think I want one”” (71-72).

Then comes the chapter entitled “Deuteronomy: the last Book of Law”, which provides a digressive reflection upon history and storytelling as such: on the one hand, the status of history lies in its condition of being factual, objective and realistic, although Winterson questions the way in which history reports past occurrences. History is actually a set of organised multiplicity of events but, simultaneously, it is “a string full of knots” (91), which may also be understandable for us; but, sometimes, this

¹⁷ In this chapter “Numbers”, Jeanette is increasingly defining her (homo)sexuality when she falls in love with Melanie, another member of her Christian community, and starts to wonder why this type of love is called “unnatural passions”:

We read the Bible as usual, and then told each other how glad we were that the Lord had brought us together [...] there was something crawling in my belly [...] my mother seemed relieved that I was seeing less of Graham, and for a while made no mention of the amount of time I spent with Melanie [...] ‘Do you think this is Unnatural Passion?’ I asked her once. (86)

organisation of information leads to the omission of certain events such as the example Winterson gives in the book about Pol Pot, economy and imperialism to which she refers as “history as a means for denying the past” (92). This reflective chapter resembles the original Book of Deuteronomy in its non-narrative nature as it only provides “the Law” for human beings. Winterson again shows her postmodern and subversive politics by intending to make her readership become aware that the traditional interpretation of *The Bible* as a “historical document” must be questioned and revised; indeed, what Winterson is recurrently doing in *Oranges* is questioning and reworking the Holy account in order to defend her own sexuality in contrast to a society imbued with conventionalisms and biases, thus favouring both the traditional, conservative narratives and the patriarchal power structures.

In “Joshua”, the following chapter, Jeanette identifies herself with Joshua, who was an outstanding male figure in *The Bible*. Jeanette makes important references to this Book when she mentions, for instance, the function of walls that remind us of the battle of Jericho led by Joshua himself: “Walls protect and walls limit. It is in the nature of walls that they should fall. That walls should fall is the consequence of blowing your own trumpet [...] at one time or another there will be a choice: you or the wall” (110). Jeanette’s inner philosophical debate over the limiting power of walls alludes directly to her position within the family as not being accepted by her mother who prevents her from her quest for a lesbian romance. But it is in fact in this chapter when Jeanette realizes that she cannot keep on stooping to everything her mother commands, things have changed and roles (mother-daughter) are being reversed:

In the past these remarks would have meant nothing to me, now I wasn’t so easy. I had often thought of questioning her, trying to make her tell me how she saw the world. I used to imagine we saw things just the same, but all the time we were on different planets. (112)

“Judges” manifests itself as the chapter in which Jeanette feels at a loss, since no-one in her Christian community is able to understand her position. The paradox comes again when Jeanette is fully aware that some of her sisters¹⁸ (of her community) also

¹⁸ When reading *Oranges*, we notice the absence of male characters, except Jeanette’s father (although his appearance in the novel is almost non-existent) and Pastor Finch; this is another subversive and “feminist” position that Winterson adopts towards a male-dominated and biased world, that of the Christian religion and Church, since Winterson’s community is mainly led by women, strong women:

committed the sin euphemistically referred to as “unnatural passions”, despite the fact that they adamantly denied it. As Asensio Aróstegui deftly observes, “Jess¹⁹ fights for the liberation of those who like herself «fall in love with the wrong people»” (2001: 75). One of the clearest examples in the book is Miss Jewsbury whose “unnatural feelings” are tittle-tattled by everyone in Jeanette’s Christian community: “I met Miss Jewsbury [...] she was very clever. ‘But she’s not holy.’ Mrs White once said” (25) and thus foreseeable and corroborated later on:

Miss Jeswbury came in. ‘Feeling better?’ ‘Not much,’ I sighed. ‘Perhaps this will help.’ And she began to stroke my head and shoulders. I turned over so that she could reach my back. Her hand crept lower and lower. She bent over me; I could feel her breath on my neck. Quite suddenly I turned and kissed her. We made love and I hated it and hated it, but would not stop. (104)

To the astonishment of the readership, this occurs all of a sudden. Miss Jewsbury is another banned woman in the Christian community but there is a significant difference between Jeanette and Miss Jewsbury, they epitomise “two opposed representations of lesbian sexuality: Miss Jewsbury, the deviant lesbian, who posits herself as a victim of her lesbian condition and strives for normalcy; and Jeanette, the postmodern lesbian, who is proud of her sexual position and defies patriarchal conventions” (Asensio Aróstegui 2001: 75). Jeanette’s bravery, illustrated by her struggle against these oppressive conventions and her attempt to develop a proper lesbian romance with Katy²⁰, must be praised.

“The women in our church were strong and organized. If you want to talk in terms of power I had enough to keep Mussolini happy” (121). The question of “empowered women” (the fact of being “strong” hints at lesbian features in the novel) is just constructed within Winterson’s fictional world. Nevertheless, Jeanette’s mother’s stance is still biased and rigid regarding spreading/transmitting the Lord’s Word: “that women had specific circumstances for their ministry, that the Sunday School was one of them, the Sisterhood, another, but the message belonged [strictly] to the men” (131).

¹⁹ *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* was adapted by Winterson for a television series in 1990 (BBC); here the protagonist is called Jess instead of Jeanette.

²⁰ After her treacherous relationship with Melanie, Katy becomes Jeanette’s second love affair, with whom she eventually breaks through familial barriers and flees from home. Jeanette thought that the problem was in Melanie and that Katy would heal familial rifts, but she soon discovers that “it all seemed to hinge around the fact that I loved the wrong sort of people” (125), women. Jeanette’s mother attributes her daughter’s homosexuality to the typically masculine role (preacher) given to her within the community: “the real problem, it seemed, was going against the teachings of St. Paul, and allowing women power in the church. Our branch of the church had never thought about it, we’d always had strong women, and the women organized everything” (131).

“Ruth”²¹ is the eighth Book of the Old Testament and, in *Oranges*, it is the last and most important chapter regarding the analysis of *The Bible* as the primary structure of Winterson’s first novel. This chapter becomes paradigmatic since it is the one that best represents the analogy between Jeanette’s subversive mood and attitude towards her fundamentalist Christian community, and especially to her mother whose patriarchal expectations she “increasingly undermines,” and the Biblical Ruth who, by being a woman, becomes transcendent in the biblical Book. As Tess Cosslett observes: “here, Winterson’s reference to Ruth could indicate a liberation from patriarchal structures as Jeanette finally takes charge of her own woman-centred story” (1998: 17). This chapter attempts to show Jeanette’s “final step” in her construction of a lesbian identity. Its importance lies in the fact that Jeanette goes into exile on account of her familial disrespect to her sexual orientation (which is considered an abomination). In *The Bible*, Ruth, in the same way as Jeanette, objects to obeying her mother at her command of returning

to their mothers to seek husbands among their own people. Orpah, although unwilling, obeys her mother-in-law, but Ruth refuses, uttering the justly famous lines, “Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me” -Ruth 1:16-17. (Bollinger 1994: 368)

As happens to Jeanette, who is willing to break through familial, maternal and home barriers and flee with her female partner, Ruth refuses to return home and goes with Naomi, her mother-in-law, to Bethlehem. Even though Jeanette’s situation is not Ruth’s counterpart, there is a detail that strengthens the “Ruth” chapter as the most significant of Jeanette’s process of maturation with which she herself especially feels identified; Phyllis Tribble points it out, and I personally agree with her contention: “not only has Ruth broken with family, country, and faith, but she has also reversed sexual allegiance [...] one female has chosen another female in a world where life depends upon men. There is no more radical decision in all the memories of Israel” (1989: 173). These features, shared by both Jeanette and Ruth, of leaving their home, breaking through

²¹ “Ruth” tells the story of a Moabite woman, Ruth, who is devoted to her mother-in-law, Naomi; after the death of her husband, Ruth remarries and has a son, whom Naomi treats as her own.

frontiers and being loyal to their principles establish the balance between them and their respective (hi)stories²². The “Ruth” chapter might be considered the “summary” of Jeanette’s tormentous process of lesbian maturation and, simultaneously, Winterson’s success in literary experimentation, non linearity and narrative circularity, as Cosslett deftly observes: “Winterson’s story instead circles round themes of exile and return, female bonding, mother/daughter relations, loss and loneliness, female autonomy, in a non-linear order, to produce an ambiguous, open ending” (1998: 17).

Although this chapter somehow relates Jeanette’s reason for departure to the Biblical Ruth’s account for self-liberation, there are also other references in the novel to *The Bible*, which correspond to other Books, but whose significance is very much in keeping with Jeanette’s quest at that particular moment: for example, I specially point out one which has to do with the fact of not returning once you have left home and confronting your fate (what actually happens to Jeanette once she leaves home; she must be brave and leave behind her past that made her so unhappy). It refers directly to the story of Lot’s wife²³ in the Book of Genesis:

‘Don’t you ever think of going back?’ Silly question. There are threads that help you find your way back, and there are threads that intend to bring you back. Mind turns to the pull, it’s hard to pull away. I’m always thinking of going back. When Lot’s wife looked over her shoulder, she turned into a pillar of salt. Pillars hold things up, and salt keeps things clean, it’s a poor exchange for losing your self. People do go back, but they don’t survive, because two realities are claiming them at the same time. (155-156)

As it has been observed, there are further references to Jeanette’s quest and departure from home apart from the strict links to the Biblical Ruth’s account, as we shall see in the next and last section.

²² I introduce a parenthetical word ‘(hi)story’ because, among many other things, Winterson’s attempt at refashioning and reworking her fictional character and her story is only made possible through being playful with language and subverting the notion of ‘high literature’ (grand narratives as *The Bible*). The difference between “history”, that of the Israelites’ quest for liberty, and Jeanette’s “story” of her quest for sexual identity is subverted just at the moment in which Winterson decides to establish a link between Jeanette’s fictional story with the Hebrew population’s history. This juxtaposition of two “different standards” of literature ideally defines Winterson’s subversive literary politics and poetics.

²³ Lot and his wife were inhabitants of the iniquitous city of Sodom; they escaped its destruction by fire and brimstone, but Lot’s wife disobeyed God’s orders and looked back at the burning city; she was turned into a pillar of salt as a punishment.

To conclude, we have seen how Winterson has woven the story of her heroine by framing it with some Israelites' accounts of liberation to the Promised Land. Winterson has succeeded in disrupting and defying the apparent incongruity between the story of Jeanette's quest for sexual identity and many of the male figures' accounts (e.g.: Joshua, Moses, Jesus) in *The Bible* and their patriarchal monologic discourse.

3.2.2 'JANE EYRE', 'THE STORY OF THE GRAIL' AND OTHER FAIRY TALES: THE LESBIAN IN HER MULTIPLE 'PERSONAE'

As I stated at the very beginning of this essay, Jeanette Winterson not only utilises *The Bible* for accounting for the construction of her character-identity but she also intersperses some other outstanding stories from literary history and popular culture (fairy tales) to establish a more complex structure to her project and to evince Jeanette's difficulty in achieving and bringing to completion her quest for sexual liberation.

In an interview for *The English Review*, Winterson was quoted by Helen Barr as saying that when she was very young her family had only six books at home, one of them were *The Bible*, another was, surprisingly, Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* and the other was Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* "my mother's favourite non-Bible book, and she read it to me over and over again, when I was very small" (Barr 1991: 33). These stories and the repetition of 'over and over again,' as Cosslett points out, "emphasises that this is another story that 'embedded itself in my consciousness', as Malory did for the real Jeanette. Both texts [apart from *The Bible* itself] are also embedded in the novel *Oranges*" (1998: 15).

As happened with *The Bible*, Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is explicitly mentioned in *Oranges* and, again, comes to confront Jeanette and her mother ideologically. *Jane Eyre* is one of the most famous novels in British literary history and has also been revised and reworked by other twentieth-century feminist writers who sought to change perspectives about the story of Jane's fate, e.g.: Jean Rhys' postcolonial novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). Jeanette experiences something similar throughout her childhood to her adulthood to what Jane does in her novel since the latter also suffers from a difficult love situation in which she has to decide whether to conform to her Christian duty or to act on her passion. Winterson's paradoxical and parodic utilisation of *Jane Eyre* manifests itself when we get to know about Jeanette's mother's attempt at misleading her daughter along the story by maliciously omitting and rewriting²⁴ the love ending between Jane and Mr Rochester. In *Oranges*, Winterson accounts for Jeanette's realisation of her mother's intention:

²⁴ Jeanette's mother paradoxically did the same as Winterson has done with *Oranges*: rewriting its plot in order to make her daughter become aware of the prioritisation of Christian values and duties to any other feeling, even more if it has to do with love.

‘Remember Jane Eyre and St John Rivers.’ A faraway look came into her eye. I did remember, but what my mother didn’t know was that I now knew she had rewritten the ending. *Jane Eyre* was her favourite non-Bible book, and she read it to me over and over again, when I was very small. I couldn’t read it, but I knew where the pages turned. Later, literate and curious, I had decided to read it for myself [...] I found out that Jane doesn’t marry St John at all, that she goes back to Rochester. It was like the day I discovered my adoption papers while searching for a pack of playing cards. I have never since played cards, and I have never since read *Jane Eyre*. (73; italics in the original)

The same as the fictional character Jeanette did, Winterson does in writing *Oranges*; she has discovered that a great deal of details recounted by her mother from when she was small were biased, reworked and intentionally omitted in order to bring up “a proper missionary”. As happens to Jeanette in deciding whether to stoop to social conventions and her mother’s “attitude to sex, fundamentalism and proposed destiny for her as a missionary” (Cosslett 1998: 24) or to go on and let herself be guided by her true sexual orientation (thus being happy in life), Jane must choose between a fake marriage (imposed by Christian and social conventions) with St-John Rivers who is willing to take her to India, so that they can become missionaries, or marrying Mr Rochester for love (thus being happy).

So Winterson feels identified with Jane Eyre who is posited as another female victim of the patriarchal, rigid and fundamentalist Christian system which, in one way or another, has traditionally confronted women’s will and decisions on their own fate.

Another important intertext worth analysing is *Perceval & The Story of the Grail*. The fictitious story of the Grail is rooted in French medieval times and was originally written by the French poet Chrétien de Troyes, yet it remained unfinished (1135-1190). Perceval formed part of the Arthurian Court, a knight who was raised apart from civilization in the forests of Wales. The myth of Perceval and the Holy Grail might only seem an adventure of an outstanding Arthurian knight, but the story of a quest lurks beneath an apparent storyline which often displays fightings between knights and the search of *l’amour courtois* or courtly love. Again, Jeanette decides to posit herself as the mirror of an outstanding male figure of literature, Perceval, whose story is also similar to a *Bildungsroman* and, as Jeanette, finds hurdles along his way in the search for an identity, chivalric identity.

The Story of the Grail and the Christian tradition share many points, although it was indeed the Christian tradition which intended to appropriate some of those aspects. In the Arthurian legend, there are many concerning traditional views of men and their relationship with women, loyalty to the king and relationships among knights.

The fact that Winterson knows how to mislead her readership from the storyline is an aspect that I highlighted in the previous section. We have to remember the experimental and embedded nature of *Oranges* with its capacity for blurring notions of fiction/fact, history/storytelling; the story of Sir Perceval is recounted by our homodiegetic female narrator Jeanette since, many times, she feels powerless to convey her own sentiments and how she exactly feels as she is neglected and obliged to go into exile from her community and family on account of her decision of not abandoning her lesbian life with Katy. This is, then, the moment in which Sir Perceval's story commences: "Sir. Perceval, the youngest of Arthur's knights, at last set forth from Camelot. The king had begged him not to go; he knew this was no ordinary quest. Since the visit of the Holy Grail one feast day, the mood had changed" (127). In juxtaposing Jeanette's personal account with Sir Perceval's myth, Winterson provides us with the clue for interpreting this playfully and postmodern pastiche: just when Jeanette is "expelled" from her family and community, the story of Perceval contributes to counteracting Jeanette's incomprehension and exile-suffering for her mother and the community's part. The issue of exile and return are especially relevant in the closing chapters of the novel, Jeanette first feels obliged to abandon her household owing to her mother's betrayal and discontent with her, but then, she cannot fully detach herself from those maternal and religious bondings, something that makes her return home at Christmas and to endure her family's contempt. Sir Perceval endures a similar situation of exile, solitude and despair when he has to leave the Arthurian court and her mother in order to get the Holy Grail²⁵; both Jeanette and Perceval are forced to leap out their respective shelters (family and kingdom) so as to seek "perfection" or, rather, that "essence or trait" which would endow them with personal fulfillment: Perceval, an honourable heroism and Jeanette, a true romance with Katy, the girl she really loves.

In the novel, the narrator expresses Perceval's, like Jeanette's, emotional emptiness, on account of having left her mother and being away from his king,

²⁵ The Holy Grail is a symbol and a relevant theme of Arthurian legend, it usually stands for perfect heroism.

Sir Perceval stayed on his narrow chair long after his host had left for sleep. Under the burning torch he puzzled over his hands. One hand was curious, sure and firm. His gentle, thoughtful hand. The hand for feeding a dog or strangling a demon. The other hand looked underfed. A stark, questioning, blank, uncomfortable hand. A scared hand but the hand for balancing. Perceval had been angry that night. His journey seemed fruitless, and himself misguided. His host had asked him why he had left, not really wanting to hear, presuming reasons of his own, that the king was mad, or the Round Table ruined [...] he had gone for his own sake, nothing more. He had thought that day of returning. He felt himself being pulled like a bobbin of cotton, so that he was dizzy and wanted to give in to the pull and wake up round familiar things. (168)

Just like Perceval, Jeanette does long to return home but her mother's betrayal and contempt put her off and fuel reluctance on her; a great mixture of feelings overwhelm and befuddle her:

Going back after a long time will make you mad, because the people you left behind do not like to think of you changed, will treat you as they always did, accuse you of being indifferent, when you are only different. 'When did you last see your mother?'²⁶ I don't know how to answer. I know what I think, but words in the head are like voices under water. They are distorted [...] 'What would have happened if you had stayed?'. I could have been a priest instead of a prophet. The priest has a book with the words set out [...] The prophet is a voice that cries in the wilderness. (156)

Sir Perceval and Jeanette share very similar situations of despair, exile and even regret; both of them, as it is observed, depart from home in search of "a life of truthful stories", earning a living on their own and gaining full bliss which is impossible to achieve if they remain at home. Nevertheless, there is a special nuance which makes both stories, that of Jeanette and that of Perceval, rather different in terms of manners: Jeanette is mercilessly expelled from home by her mother: "My mother wanted me to move out [...] there was no escaping this time. I was in trouble [...] romantic love for another woman was a sin" (125), the one who cannot conceive being loyal to the Lord at the same time as to her "deviant" sexuality; for Jeanette, one thing is perfectly compatible

²⁶ This question was posed by Sir Perceval's aunt to Percerval himself: 'Whan herde you tydynges if youre modir?' and she tells him about her sorrow for his mother's death; Sir Perceval leaves, then, together with his companions (knights) in search of a new life, new horizons.

with the other: “I love you as much as I love the Lord [to Melanie]” (102) and “I loved God and I loved the church, but I began to see that as more and more complicated. It didn’t help that I had no intention of becoming a missionary” (126).

This last quote relates directly to the difference between “being a priest and being a prophet”. Jeanette has clearly become a prophet who, after her experience, longs to cry to the world that she can love a woman and believe in God; two ideas not so much widespread and shared by zealous Christians such as Jeanette’s mother whose knowledge is ascribed to the paternalistic, homophobic and binary/asymmetrical system of the branch of her Christian religious community.

Finally, and apart from analysing the importance of Jane Eyre and Sir Perceval as *alter egos* of Jeanette, I find it necessary and of utmost interest to address to the question of Winterson’s utilisation of fairy tales (popular culture) in *Oranges*; I shall especially and respectively refer to the fairy tale of “the prince who sought perfection” and “the story of Winnet Stonejar”.

Winterson establishes a critical dialogue with two fairy tales: the first one, “the prince”, is tackled from a feminist and revisionist way; the other, Winnet Stonejar, is actually an experimental story created specially by Winterson herself in order to fit it in Jeanette’s story.

As every intertext in *Oranges*, Winterson makes use of these short stories in order to express her discomfort, disagreement and distress towards her church and her mother’s philosophy. The fairy tale of “the prince who sought perfection”, which is to be found in the chapter “Leviticus”, deals, as Jeanette’s story, with a quest for personal fulfillment. Winterson critically puts forth this story from a rather feminist view since like most fairy tales it consists of a prince’s obsession with marrying a beautiful woman. Traditional fairy tales are recurrently concerned with this topic, the stereotype of perfection of women for men to be chosen, thus women become the “passive/fragile” object who are beheld and are markedly dependant-beings on men; accordingly, men the “active” subject, the ones who behold. In this story, Winterson aims at reversing/subverting gender roles, as usually her politics does, consequently managing to free the beautiful princess from her traditional fate of compulsorily marriage to the prince. She is endowed with independence, beauty and power to deconstruct the conventions and the protocol of a traditional love story: “ ‘I’m not getting married’ she said [...] it’s not something I’m very interested in” (61). In this way, Winterson also seeks to dismantle conventionalisms attributed to women in real life, as it is to happen

to her fictional character Jeanette, who is expected to marry a man due to the very fact that she is woman since, following Judith Butler's line on her theory of gender and identity, 'gender identity' is expected to fulfil a "compulsory heterosexuality" in a given social context.

The metaphorical and experimental story created by Winterson herself about Winnet Stonejar²⁷ and the sorcerer is utilised again by Jeanette in order to express what she cannot in real life on account of her confines. Similarly, the story of Winnet is concerned, as the story of Perceval, with the feeling of alienation, distress, refusal and exile, thus mirroring all along Jeanette's events in real life but in a fantastic and magical way. Winnet is "adopted" by a sorcerer who is to teach and endow her with magical powers but, later, he sees that Winnet does not conform to his expectations as apprentice. As a consequence, Winnet is expelled and condemned to wander in the forest.

This recurrent convergence of similar elements shared by Jeanette, Winnet, Perceval and the characters of the fairy tales intermingled by Winterson in *Oranges* results in a wide range of perspectives of Jeanette's account for her self-liberation and exile from home in order to achieve happiness. In doing so, and as we approach the outcome of the book, we are able to witness Winterson's mastery in blurring the limits between fact (the real story of Jeanette) and fiction/fantasy (the story of the characters of the intertexts: Jane Eyre, Perceval, Winnet, the princess, etc...), thus relating all of them and bringing about a circular, or rather, spiral narrative structure. By alternating and embedding each mythic story (Perceval, Winnet, etc...) in the central and real story of her fictional character Jeanette, Winterson is utilising a narrative technique called "mise-en-abyme"²⁸.

This literary technique, in Asensio Aróstegui's terms, works "to describe and represent the Protean condition of 'women' as a way to determine the extent of their

²⁷ Winnet Stonejar is a play on words or an anagram from which we can spot, if we respell the words, the name of the flesh-and-blood author Jeanette Winterson. This evinces her ability in being playful with language in order to disguise herself and her "fictional self, blurring again the limits of history/storytelling, fact/fiction.

²⁸ "The *mise en abyme* thus opens a spiral of infinite regression in representation. Representation can never come to an end, since greater accuracy and detail only allows us to see even more Quaker Oats boxes. This is rather odd, since we are accustomed to think of accuracy and detail as helping us to grasp an image fully, rather than forcing us to recognize the impossibility of grasping it. To think of feminism in these terms would be to suggest that each new attempt to determine women does not put an end to feminist questioning but only makes us more aware of the infinite possibilities of women. That is to say, women may be represented, but the attempt to represent them exhaustively only makes us more aware of the failure of such attempts. Hence the infinite regression that I specifically call the "*ms. en abyme*" (Elam 1994: 27-28; italics in the original).

political actions” (2008: 11). Jeanette’s attempt at accounting for her own story does not seem sufficient, she needs to embed herself and to fill up “[her] image with more and more definitions and representations of itself” (2008: 11). The accounts of Sir Perceval, Winnet Stonejar, Jane Eyre and every story whose protagonist is intended to mirror Jeanette herself attempt to provide us with different perspectives, angles and representations of Jeanette and her story; this complies with prior definitions of Hutcheon’s theory on the postmodern subject “always in process, never as fixed and never as autonomous, a gendered subjectivity” (2002: 37), since “the postmodern condition denies the existence of either epistemological or ontological certainties which would settle the foundations for knowing what women are and what they can do” (Asensio Aróstegui 2008: 11).

This is Winterson’s most powerful tool when writing, her concern with “disguising” herself and her fictional characters in order to create “a spiral of infinite regression” (Elam 1994: 27-28) by which she achieves endless definitions, representations and meanings of these “postmodern” characters, always in process of self-construction and never as fixed outputs.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This section is intended to carry out a proper summary and gathering of those ideas and results that have emerged after this analysis of the subversive politics of intertextuality as a means to construct the character's sexual identity in Winterson's first novel *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*.

Firstly, I found it necessary to include a theoretical overview of the main concepts which are dealt with in the analysis of *Oranges*: on the one hand, a brief description of the notion of intertextuality, its nature and then its controversial politics within the scope of postmodernist and poststructuralist movements are required for a proper understanding of its function within Winterson's novel. Likewise, the incorporation of theories on identity and gender by the scholars Jose Ángel García Landa (University of Zaragoza) and the American philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler were found of great importance. Furthermore, Judith Butler's contribution goes by the hand of other outstanding feminist theorists such as Simone de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray, whose theories on gender and identity differ but complement each other and have helped me to provide a proper explanation of Winterson's target when interrogating and subverting gender and identity notions.

The third part is fully dedicated to the analysis of the function of intertextuality in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* and everything it implies: the first part, that I named "Introduction: A Postmodern *Bildungsroman*", is found of utmost importance since the critique and a wide readership problematise to what extent *Oranges* is autobiographical and has to do with Winterson's personal life. The result is that she rejects applying the tag of "autobiography" to her novel since autobiography has traditionally been related to a mainly male discourse. Winterson has revised and re-defined the notion of autobiography, like some of her contemporaries, and has claimed that she self-consciously aimed at reventing herself, thus denouncing the widespread conception of relating men to autobiography and self-exploration and women to their relegated, submissive and passive role of housewife.

The second point (3.2.1) and third point (3.2.2) of this part come to analyse the importance of the three outstanding intertexts utilised by Winterson in her novel: section 3.2.1 is obviously wholly devoted to the analysis of *The Bible* as it is regarded as the most relevant text in Western civilization. We have learned that a thorough

knowledge of *The Bible* enables Winterson to utilise it subversively. In doing so, she all along conflates the story of her fictional character Jeanette with the story of the Hebrew population in their path to the Promised Land in an apparent linear narrative structure. Winterson's challenging and deconstructing target dares to make her heroine Jeanette identify with outstanding male figures of *The Bible* such as David, Joshua and the Messiah himself. This intertextual parody attempts at a clear sexual politics by which Winterson has achieved to reverse gender roles (father-son to mother-daughter) and make homosexuality be considered another and valid way of sexuality, not just heterosexuality. The parodic utilisation of *The Bible* has helped Winterson to deconstruct the paternalistic, homophobic and patriarchal tradition that this text has constructed throughout time, then, through fiction, Winterson provides alternative spaces for those marginalised people (as Jeanette, neglected by her family for her sexual orientation) for reasons of gender and sexuality, consequently, gaining social recognition.

The last point (3.2.2) analyses the other important intertexts Winterson intersperses with the storyline of her fictional character Jeanette: Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Chrétien de Troye's *The Story of the Grail* whose main characters mirror Jeanette's story and her striking happenings of refusal, neglect and exile from home in search of personal fulfillment. Apart from this, and in order to complicate the narrative structure, Winterson critically establishes dialogues with traditional fairy-tales, taken from popular culture, whose characters, again, endure and share similar experiences as those of Jeanette. In juxtaposing and embedding all these intertexts/fairy-tales in the contemporary story of our heroine Jeanette, Winterson achieves a circular, non-linear and experimental narrative by which our protagonist adopts multiple perspectives, definitions and meanings, all the time in process of becoming and, thus, constructing her own (sexual) identity.

To finish off, Winterson's parodic intertextuality together with her continuous overlapping of narrative voices result in a clear politics which aims at both demonstrating the way a given subject is constantly changing, that it cannot be seen from a fixed perspective and denouncing the still discriminatory attacks against women and homosexuality, thus opening up spaces for everyone regardless of their sexuality, class and gender.

5. EPILOGUE: *FRUTA PROHIBIDA* AND FURTHER RESEARCH.

Owing to the confines of this essay, I could not permit myself developing what constitutes, in my humble opinion, one of the key issues in the novel: its title which, in Spanish, is translated into *Fruta Prohibida*, a thing that is very telling at the end of the day. Although the title in English is not translated into Spanish in the same way, the sense is quite similar; both posit the “orange” as an “unwelcome” symbol since it represents, as the novel evinces, heterosexuality itself. By delving into the significance of the title, we get to know that this novel is primarily a voice that cries in the wilderness for aid, a female voice which seeks social reinstatement, for she has been ostracized on account of her lesbian orientation. From the very beginning, Jeanette’s mother always offers her daughter an orange when she is distressed; this fact is later encoded as a symbol of her mother’s expectations towards her daughter regarding a “compulsory heterosexuality”. An orange, as I could have observed, is a fruit whose skin is stubborn and, consequently, is hard to peel; heterosexuality, as we have seen throughout this essay, is regarded as a ‘fixed condition’ imposed to everyone, regardless of their sex, from our childhood. Jeanette’s mother subtly hints at this imposition by the offering of the orange. There is a passage in the novel in which Jeanette debates about this fact: “ ‘Here you are’, said my mother, giving me a sharp dig in the side. ‘Some fruit’ [...] it was a bowl of oranges. I took out the largest and tried to peel it. The skin hung stubborn, and soon I lay panting, angry and defeated. What about grapes and bananas?” (111). What about my sexual orientation? Is it not as equally valid as heterosexuality? Eating grapes and bananas symbolise other fruit alternatives and, at the same time, other sexual orientations which is why *oranges are not the only fruit*.

In the light of the great number of gossipings about the certainty of *Oranges* as a mirror of Winterson’s personal life, three years ago, in 2011, Winterson published a memoir titled *Why Be Happy When You Could be Normal* in which, without recreating fantastic and fictional scenarios, she recounts the true story that conceals her first novel about herself and the different confrontations with her mother due to the fact that she was a lesbian. I think that this novel or any other literary work which tackles or deals with these themes deserve analysis, which is, if possible, my aim in a forthcoming future.

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