

MYTH AND HOMOSEXUALITY IN JEANETTE WINTERSON'S *ORANGES ARE NOT THE ONLY FRUIT*

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Abstract

The term '*Lesbian feminism*' is a cultural movement which was most influential in 1980's era. Though it was a part of the concept '*Feminism*', the effect of it was something unique in North American and Western Europe society. It was emerged due to the result of the dissatisfaction with '*second wave feminism*'. It advocated that lesbianism is the only form of emancipated sexuality since it excludes men and rejects patriarchy. Many of the thinkers and activists like Rita Mae Brown, Mary Daly, Barbara Smith fought for the lesbian movement. Many of the writers also contributed in it with their contribution of works. Jeanette Winterson, a lesbian herself, also tried to advocate the lesbian movement through her literature.

The present research paper is an attempt to study Myth and Homosexuality as the important theme or aspects in the novel *Oranges Are Not the only Fruit*, an artistic work of Jeanette Winterson.

Jeanette Winterson is an award-winning English writer. She had served the English literature with her many of the famous works but her very first work '*Oranges Are Not the only Fruit*' stands remarkable in this list. She was born in Manchester but was an adopted child of Constance and John William Winterson in 1960. She was influenced by Elim Pentecostal Church. Since her childhood, she began writing sermons at age six and believed herself a child of God. But as a dark part of her life, by the age of 16, she identified herself as a lesbian and left home. In 2015, she married psychotherapist Susie Obruch.

'*Oranges Are Not the only Fruit*' is the first work, a novel, by Jeanette Winterson. It was published in 1985. It was later adapted into British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) television drama that evoked a havoc in English society. The novel is a story of coming-of-age story of a lesbian girl named Jeanette. She grows up in an English Pentecostal community. The novel handles various major themes but use of Myths and focus on Homosexuality bring it into a special queue of study. The novel discusses themes like transition from youth to adulthood, homosexuality complex family relationship and religion.

The novel is rightly considered as a semi-autobiographical novel that is based on Jeanette Winterson's life in Accrington, Lancashire. Protagonist of the novel bears the author's first name

but John Mullan, a specialist in 18th century literature argued that it is neither an autobiography nor a memoir, but an '*Artist's novel*'.

Jeanette, the protagonist of the novel, retells the story of her life. The story begins with the childhood when she was just seven years old and was living in England with her adoptive parents. Jeanette's mother is a fundamentalist Christian woman. She adopted Jeanette because she wanted to train her adopted daughter to be a servant of God and serve Him forever. Her mother is controlling and often appears to be hypocritical in a novel. She tries to present herself to be very religious but often acts in uncharitable ways. Jeanette's father doesn't have much value in her family or rather than he is ignored and remains absent. Jeanette's mother educated her to read the Bible. She had a special intention behind adopting Jeanette. Jeanette's mother wished to acquire a child in a sexless manner so she adopted Jeanette and wished to train to serve God. From the childhood Jeanette is influenced by her mother's thought that Jeanette is a special child where she stands unique and will become a missionary to the world, an ideal example. As Jeanette's mother is controlling, Jeanette doesn't know anyone except the church members until at the age of seven. Unfortunately Jeanette lost her hearing at the very age of her childhood. Jeanette spends her more time with a church member Elsie who teaches her poetry.

At school also Jeanette experiences different scenario. She is an outcaste as she has evangelical beliefs. The teachers often neglect her essays dealing with missionary work. But that attitude of teachers forces Jeanette to stop writing or making projects on biblical themes.

Readers find the transition period and changes in Jeanette's thinking with the teaching of her congregation. She is not agreed upon the sermon about the nature of perfection. She also starts thinking about romance. Eventually she becomes friend with Melanie, a compelling girl working at a fish stall. They start having a love affair but the pastor at church confronts them about their fallen state. Melanie repents on her deeds on the other hand Jeanette argues and flees. Then she takes refuge at Miss Jewsbury's house. Miss Jewsbury is herself a lesbian. Jeanette finds her home suitable and sleeps together. There is a change of her living. Jeanette starts preaching her own sermons and teaches Sunday school but soon she begins a new affair with a recent convert, Katy. The church then decides that Jeanette has been given too much responsibility so that she now almost thinks that she is a man. They insist that she give up teaching and preaching. Instead, Jeanette quits the church. Jeanette's mother forces her to leave their home since her evilness will bring illness to them all. With no home, friends, or money, Jeanette takes up various jobs. She works in a funeral parlor, as an ice cream truck driver, and eventually at a mental hospital. On occasion, she runs into her mother or members of her congregation who treat Jeanette coldly and say she is possessed by demons. Eventually she moves to the city. After an unspecified time, Jeanette does return home one winter to see her mother. Her mother still faithfully believes, but her Society for the Lost has been shaken by corruption. Jeanette's mother neglects her and does not discuss Jeanette's lifestyle with her, but her behavior indicates that she has softened in her beliefs. Jeanette's mother still listens to the missionary reports on the radio system with her usual fervor.

Myths in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*

The use of Myths in the present novel presents the Mythic journey thematically. Jeanette's birth and adoption are described with images from the story of Christ. From her childhood, Jeanette has a different thought of her birth and life. She thinks that she will emerge as a Christlike figure that will help and assist to save the world but the journey from childhood to youth reflects her quest to find her self. She is destined for a mission. Her homosexual desires contradict herself.

The writer makes the use of the standard techniques from a mythic story for protagonist's adventure throughout the novel. She is placed at the central of the novel and her lesbianism is also presented through the Mythic journey. At the end of the novel it is shown clearly besides her lesbian quality, her quest towards a mission of serving God is not changed.

Homosexuality in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*

Homosexuality or lesbianism, the theme of the novel, attracts the reader. The novel pictures the transition. From her childhood, Jeanette is an outcast and neglected child in school as she had a strong belief in God and her essays were nothing but the projects on biblical themes. She strongly advocates the homosexuality in a novel. Her mother herself is an example in front of her to present her views against patriarchal society. Her mother adopted Jeanette in a sexless manner. She had a different view and intention behind adopting Jeanette. Jeanette who believes in God and serves Him maintains the lesbian relationship. Melanie is Jeanette's first love. Jeanette meets Melanie at a fish stand. Melanie is a compelling girl who works at a fish stall. Melanie is sweet and docile. Her simplicity attracts Jeanette. Melanie is not too smart so she once tells Jeanette that she got her name because her head resembled a melon. Melanie is presented in opposite to Jeanette's character. Jeanette is a strong character but Melanie represents weak soul who refuses to follow her true love, desires unlike Jeanette. Melanie's docility leads her to marry and have children. Jeanette frequently visits Melanie's house for Bible study. As the two spend more time together, they start having a love affair. The feeling of homosexuality arises in the mind of Jeanette's mind and is attracted towards Melanie.

Miss Jewsbury is another character in the novel who advocates lesbianism. She is a member of Jeanette's church who plays the oboe, a musical instrument. Miss Jewsbury represents the closeted lesbian. Jeanette finds Miss Jewsbury's home safe and sleeps with her that reflects the homosexuality and latent sexual desire in Miss Jewsbury.

Jeanette has her second long term lover namely Katy. Katy is something confident but unashamed. She also represents homosexuality in the novel. Her sexual invitation to Jeanette builds a new confidence about same sex relations in Jeanette. Katy has helped to impart gradually Jeanette with confidence in her self and homosexuality.

In addition to this Ida is also the character who represents lesbian feminism. Ida owns the paper shop. She is truly lesbian. She is present on the day that Jeanette meets Melanie. As the novel strongly presents lesbian movement the male characters like Pastor Spratt, Pierre, Pastor Finch and Jeanette's father are intentionally ignored and less focused in the novel.

The novel '*Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*' is rightly considered as a milestone in lesbian literature which is nothing but has semi-autobiographical sketches of Jeanette Winterson's life.

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