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Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit



Synopsis

Winner of the Whitbread Prize for best first fiction, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* is a coming-out novel from Winterson, the acclaimed author of *The Passion and Sexing the Cherry*. The narrator, Jeanette, cuts her teeth on the knowledge that she is one of God's elect, but as this budding evangelical comes of age, and comes to terms with her preference for her own sex, the peculiar balance of her God-fearing household crumbles.

Book Information

Paperback: 176 pages

Publisher: Grove Press (August 20, 1997)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0802135161

ISBN-13: 978-0802135162

Product Dimensions: 0.5 x 6 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

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Best Sellers Rank: #11,451 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #53 in Books > Gay & Lesbian > Literature & Fiction > Fiction > Lesbian #386 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Coming of Age #1524 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Literary

Customer Reviews

Jeanette Winterson's semi-autobiographical novel is one of the most beautifully written story of a middle-class girl struggling to come to terms with her own sexuality, creativity, passion vs. her family/society's inflexible "formed opinions". The story of the persecution of a girl because of her sexual preference (in this case, lesbianism) is not new. It's how Ms. Winterson presents her story. Fresh. Alive. Witty. Funny. Heartbreaking at times. Imaginative. Almost like you were holding a piece of someone's soul in your hands rather than merely a book. I noticed that one reviewer mentioned that the book's sexual nature is vulgar. I do not find this so. Even if it is, so what? Life is vulgar. Only those fond of sweeping the dirt under the carpet so that it stays out of sight (or those who drive lesbian girls from their house/church and pretend they don't exist) will disagree with the innate vulgarity of all life. This book is the antidote for that kind of sanitized thinking. This book exposes that sanitized Christian middle-class thinking is weird, almost alien when observed sanely by a third party standing on the outside. This book celebrates life. Read it.

Published in England in 1985, this first novel (autobiography?) is a story of a girl adopted as a baby into an evangelical Christian family in the Midlands, and raised with good humor and matter-of-fact, everyday, unquestioned love ("I cannot recall a time when I did not know that I was special"), strict religious teachings, a lot of structure, strong opinions coming from all corners. As a child, she's proud of her eccentric, high-achieving mom; she's her best student, too. The household and small community is a bubbling stew of English coziness, friends and neighbors, superstition, religious fervor and misinformation, vulgarity, harsh pronouncements and oddly good-natured fanatical beliefs. The girl soaks it up -- to a point. Things begin to come apart, inevitably, and later still, as a teen, there's the narrator's growing knowledge that she is passionately, yearningly, and quite happily in love with a girl her age named Katy -- and no amount of exorcism will change that. The affair proceeds. Winterson is smart enough to put it all together with grace and humor. Her bright and resourceful protagonist travels a great and difficult path, avoiding all the predictable plot formulas. No whining or self-pity, either. There is incisive wit, a smart and brave presentation of the (sometimes appalling) facts; very good use of myth, history and politics, fairy tales, Bible and church miscellany; amazing observation. This is a detailed and often funny picture of a truly strange household, a great girl, and there's a lot of love -- in this wonderful novel.

This novel has often been criticised as Winterson's best now that she has gone on to write several powerfully experimental novels. This is implying that she should have remained in these more familiar regions of experience or stuck to a slightly more conventional mode of narrative. What's tremendous about this novel is the way it works as a perfect springboard for the kind of fiction that is being so negatively criticised for its inventiveness. This is a story about a girl who is struggling with the conventions of a restrictive Pentecostal community in a small spot of England, but it is also about the interplay between reality and fiction in people's lives. Jeanette's fables are established to be as valid as the complex religious practices of her family. The characters of the novel constantly differ to a fictional artifice to hold together the reality they cannot understand. Tension builds when the fictional worlds that people struggle to hold into place contradicts other people's realities. This novel is a tribute to the fight for independence and survival. She powerfully asserts that there is a necessary space for these fictional parts of people's realities despite the conflict it will inevitably create. She suggests that the reality built in fiction is also the truth of our own fictions accepted as reality. The interplay of these two creates a living reality.

Winterson's first novel is a compelling story that presages her talent for finding themes that aren't

last year's, or even today's, but cut the edge of tomorrow. No less importantly, it's the first look at a word smith of the finest calibre. Every word has import and can build, nuance by nuance, into breathtaking metaphors that only emerge after you've finished the book and find yourself thinking about it. I like to read Winterson out loud, because hearing words and reading them are two different experiences. This book is a must read because the true high art of lesbian-themed writing is found here.

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