



## **Women Writers: Voices in Transition**

*Jeanette Winterson*

### **Fiona Doloughan, Lecturer in English:**

“I think for me the magic of Winterson’s work derives from the fact that she mixes intellect and passion. I remember when I first came to her works – I began with “Oranges are Not the Only Fruit”, and zipped through most of what she had written. It became a kind of passion, and a kind of obsession. She introduced me to heroines that I could identify with, and who defied convention. Her re-invention of the classics was provocative. It was experimental.

She began life as an outsider in many different ways, growing up in a working class Northern town in an environment where her parents were particularly religious and she discovered early on that her passions were unconventional or non-conformist. And by that I don’t just mean her passion for other women, but her passion for literature.

The passage I’m going to read comes from “Oranges are Not the Only Fruit”. The young Jeanette is returning from Oxford to see her mother. There is a kind of internal dialogue going on.

“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, but 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. Such things are too much. You can salt your heart, or kill your heart, or you can choose between the two realities. There is much pain here.”

I think this passage brings out the Winterson who continues to be interested in the possibilities of language, taking what might be considered clichés and doing something more interesting with them.

Like the modernists, Winterson is not interested in rehearsing old stories in tired ways but finding fresh ways to create new stories for new times.

In just five words – “gender-bending”, “genre-defying”, “passionate”, “provocative” and “poetic”.