

# THAT AWFUL OCCASION

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The connection  
between adoption and  
authorship in the life  
writing of Jeanette  
Winterson

## Samenvatting met trefwoorden

### **Samenvatting**

Deze Engelstalige masterscriptie is gebaseerd op de vakgebieden *life writing*, algemene literatuurtheorie en traumatheorie. Het onderwerp is de wisselwerking tussen een gevoel van roeping of aanleg (auteurschap) enerzijds en een groot verlangen om aan een benauwende omgeving of een pijnlijk verleden te ontsnappen (adoptie in het bijzonder) anderzijds. Hoe draagt de representatie van adoptie als trauma in Jeanette Wintersons semi-autobiografische roman *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985) en in haar memoir *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* (2011) bij aan de voorstelling van haar auteurschap? Winterson kan of wil haar adoptietrauma niet verwerken in *Oranges*, terwijl ze in *Why Be Happy* narratieve technieken lijkt te gebruiken om het actief te verwerken. Een gedetailleerde lezing toont aan dat trauma aan de basis van een identiteit kan liggen. Dit betekent dat herstel verstrekkende gevolgen heeft voor het zelf van een individu en het auteurschap en auteurspostuur van een auteur.

### **Trefwoorden**

adoptie, trauma, auteurschap, auteurspostuur, identiteit, het zelf, Jeanette Winterson, *life writing*, autobiografie, memoir, verwerking, herstel

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## Introduction

“There are markings here, raised like welts. Read them. Read the hurt. Rewrite them. Rewrite the hurt.” (Winterson 2012, 5)

### “It’s why I am a writer”: life (and) writing

This quotation from Jeanette Winterson captures the essence of this thesis, a project in which wounds and (re)writing are central. The quotation is from her recent memoir and postulates that reading and writing literature have the power to make pain comprehensible and therefore bearable. The hurt in her life figures prominently in her writing. Winterson is not simply a successful or acclaimed novelist; she is a *celebrity novelist*. James F. English and John Frow describe celebrity novelists as “novelists whose public personae, whose ‘personalities’, whose ‘real-life’ stories have become objects of special fascination and intense scrutiny, effectively dominating the reception of their work” (39). The mass fascination with the “real” within contemporary culture means that many readers want to feel the personal presence of their favourite authors, for example at book festivals or bookshop readings, but also in autobiographies or memoirs. Literary authors respond to this human desire for authenticity in their own ways. Reina van der Wiel observes that “[i]t is impossible to know, perhaps even for Jeanette Winterson, whether the publication of her recent memoir, *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* (2011), signifies a capitulation to, or a more positive embracing of, the public’s fascination with her personal life”. Besides, she aptly remarks that the public’s enchantment is “a fascination that she has arguably almost as much encouraged as contested throughout her writing career” (2014, 176). Winterson plays along, toying with the desires and expectations of readers, and exploring the fine line between fact and fiction in gender-bending and genre-defying ways.

Born in Manchester in 1959, Winterson was adopted and brought up in Accrington, Lancashire, in the north of England. Her strict Pentecostal Evangelist upbringing features largely in her first novel, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, published in 1985. Somewhere between autobiography and novel, this story is still the best known of Winterson’s works. In *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?*, a memoir published in 2011 and labelled the “silent twin” of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (Winterson 2012, 8), she revisits the subject of her adoptive mother and goes on a search for her birth mother. The first ten chapters, before the

“Intermission”, constitute a memoir about her childhood in Accrington. This is part one, as it were, of the adoption story: the part which her first novel had turned into a fantastic tale shaped by and framed within the religious discourse which its protagonist renounces. Especially after the “Intermission”, which constitutes an enormous narrative leap (from 1982 to 2007), the book proceeds as an “adoption-as-trauma” memoir (Van der Wiel 2014, 177). *Oranges* and *Why Be Happy* are characterised by a sense of vocation (authorship) as well as a desire to escape from an oppressive environment or painful past (adoption, in particular). The quotation above encapsulates the connection which is central here: her adoption and adoptive mother on the one hand and her storytelling skills and self-invention on the other hand define Winterson and each element is essential to the equation.

The main research question is: how does the representation of adoption as trauma in Jeanette Winterson’s semi-autobiographical novel *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985) and in her memoir *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* (2011) contribute to the construction of her authorship? Two sub-questions follow from this. With regard to the author’s construction of authorship, in what way and to what effect for Jeanette and Winterson do these works read life and writing as fact and fiction? In what way and to what effect for the adoptee do these works represent the traumatic experience of the adoption? The main research question meaningfully connects adoption and authorship through life writing, bringing the analysis round to trauma and its form and function for Winterson. A concise definition of a particular aspect of literary authorship first has to be given before the relevant theory will be specified, a hypothesis advanced, and a reproducible methodology developed: the concept of authorial posture, which is inextricably bound up with life writing, though infrequently discussed in relation to it.

### **The concept of authorial posture**

Authorial posture analysis is an instrument which has been developed over the last few years by Swiss sociologist Jérôme Meizoz, notably in his essay “Modern Posterities of Posture: Jean-Jacques Rousseau” (2010). By “posture” he understands the representations of the self which authors employ to take up a position in the literary field (auto-representation) as well as the representations of authors which are established by critics, essayists, academics, and other actors (hetero-representation). Posture is the product of a complete oeuvre, so of all texts, interviews, behaviour of authors, photographs, and appearances on television, the radio, and at book

festivals, and of all sources of hetero-representation, including the paratexts of their books. Winterson is also a regular contributor of reviews and articles to many newspapers and journals, and also has a regular column published in *The Guardian*, so these are additional channels through which she gives form to her identity as author.

The concept is made up of five elements of definition. Firstly, “[a]n author’s posture marks out his position in the literary field in a singular way”, thus enabling the identification of the author in the literary field: Winterson is expected to “do Winterson” while at the same time a new book must be neither very different from nor very similar to older books (Meizoz 84). Thus, Winterson is known for, among other things, the formal indeterminacy of her works. Through recurrence, this quality has become a signature of Winterson’s writing. Secondly, “[p]osture is not uniquely an author’s own construction, but an interactive process” involving various mediators serving the reading public (84). Thirdly, posture involves both non-discursive elements and discursive elements. The former means “the author’s public presentation of self”; the latter means “the textual self-image offered by the enunciator” (85). Fourthly, “the concept of posture allows to describe the connections between behaviour and textual effects in the literary field” (85). Finally, memory plays an important part in the literary field with regard to posture. What Meizoz means when he writes that “particular variations in a position will become equally fixed in the available repertory of literary practice” (85) is that there is a limited number of distinctive possibilities for embodying “an author function” and “an authorial figure” which can be appropriated, altered, and actualised (81). Thus, Winterson encourages comparisons with modernists Gertrude Stein, Virginia Woolf, and Katherine Mansfield in her memoir and collection of essays *Art Objects*, published in 1995.

Laurens Ham describes a conceptual model for posture analysis in *Door Prometheus geboeid* (2015). He emphasises the distinction and reciprocity between auto-representation and hetero-representation. Within the domain of auto-representation, he distinguishes four representation levels, intra- as well as extra-textual: the level of the biographical person, author (intra- and extra-textual), narrator (intra-textual), and character (intra-textual). Within the domain of hetero-representation, he distinguishes two elements of representation: contemporary and later reception and creative hetero-representation in the form of a so-called opponent. An opponent is a contemporary or later author who can be associated with the posture of the author under discussion because he copies, alters, or questions elements of his posture (35). The domain of

auto-representation definitely invites comparison with the autobiographical “I”s of an autobiographical act as these were identified by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (2010). These “I”s will not be enlarged on here, but in section 1.1, where they are utilised in relation to self-invention. The four representation levels distinguished by Ham and the four “I”s developed by Smith and Watson refer to literary texts: both models could be applied in an analysis of *Oranges* as well as in an analysis of *Why Be Happy*. The biographical person resembles the “real” or historical “I”, the narrator resembles the narrating “I”, and the character resembles the narrated “I”, but Ham’s author and Smith and Watson’s ideological “I” have no equivalent terms. Ham does not explain how his conceptual model can be applied in practice, but some terms may be referred to henceforth since authorship is represented, perhaps more than anywhere else, in literary authors’ life writing.

### **Authorship representations in autobiographical works**

In *The Novel After Theory* (2012), Judith Ryan examines the phenomenon of fiction which raises questions about the nature of authorship and the practice of writing. She discusses Roland Barthes’s essay “The Death of the Author” in the first chapter, an essay in which Barthes argues that texts are constituted not by their authors but by their readers: the “death of the author” gives rise to the “birth of the reader”. If, however, a text is nothing more than a web of language and an author is not a point of origin for it, it follows that autobiography is equally well an intertextual verbal construct. Peter Barry sums up some other theoretical ideas in *Beginning Theory* (2009), ideas in the humanities which are less controversial. In *The Author* (2005), Andrew Bennett examines the debates surrounding literary authorship, including the idea of the death of the author and the genre of autobiography. As an introductory guide, it will be complemented by sources with slightly less breadth and more depth, but it is a proper starting point. The interrelationship of life writing and literary theory will be developed in section 1 of Chapter 1: Jeanette Winterson, the self, and writing the self.

What does life writing “do” for writers and for readers, or what is its appeal? In *Autobiography* (2001), an introductory guide to autobiography, Linda Anderson discusses developments in autobiographical criticism, women’s life writing and related theoretical issues and concepts, and the popularity of literary memoirs. Like Bennet’s work, Anderson’s work is

chiefly useful for its interpretation of key concepts of its particular field of study. In *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention* (1985), Paul John Eakin argues that the self at the centre of all autobiography is necessarily fictive and that, as a consequence, the autobiographical act is a mode of self-invention. Much profundity can be found in Micaela Maftai's *The Fiction of Autobiography: Reading and Writing Identity* (2013) and Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (2010). The first chapter of the former, "Truth and Trust", examines truth and truthfulness, authenticity, and the fine line between autobiography and fiction which Winterson navigates in her semi-autobiographical novel *Oranges*. The third chapter of the latter, "Autobiographical Acts", treats the components of autobiographical acts and offers useful typology and terminology which can be applied in an analysis of the two autobiographical acts which Winterson performs, as it were. The basic idea of life writing as a mode of self-invention will be developed in section 2 of Chapter 1.

What role can trauma play in life writing and vice versa? In *Literary Aesthetics of Trauma: Virginia Woolf and Jeanette Winterson* (2014), Reina van der Wiel investigates a fundamental shift, from the 1920s to the present day, in the way that trauma is aesthetically expressed, treating *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* as a contemporary trauma memoir. This is one of the few works of criticism on Winterson's 2011 memoir. Van der Wiel demonstrates how Winterson ultimately gains control over the traumatic event that her adoption has been instead of being controlled by it. She argues that Winterson's adoption can be read as her founding trauma, a concept which Dominick LaCapra develops in *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2014). Van der Wiel derives much of the theory she uses from *The Trauma Question* (2008), in which Roger Luckhurst demonstrates how ideas of trauma have become a major element in contemporary Western conceptions of the self. Van der Wiel does the same by means of a case study in "Trauma as Site of Identity: The Case of Jeanette Winterson and Frida Kahlo" (2009). The interrelationship of life writing and trauma theory will be developed in section 3 of Chapter 1.

Some works may be cited throughout Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. Sonya Andermahr's *Jeanette Winterson: A Contemporary Critical Guide* (2007) and Merja Makinen's *The Novels of Jeanette Winterson* (2005) are more general works which include discussions of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. The former is a comprehensive collection of scholarly articles and the latter traces



the early review reception of Winterson's individual works, considering it alongside the larger critical debates which have subsequently evolved. Andermahr's book contains Michelle Denby's essay "Religion and Spirituality" (2007). Denby argues that *Oranges* presents an acute critique of evangelicalism by targeting the fundamentalist discourses which limit subjectivity and imagination. Lauren Rusk's *The Life Writing of Otherness: Woolf, Baldwin, Kingston, and Winterson* (2002) contains a chapter, tellingly called "The Refusal of Otherness", in which Rusk explains how Jeanette in *Oranges* refuses to be "othered" by her family and the Church. In "Adoption Narratives, Trauma, and Origins" (2006), Margaret Homans discusses the work of some popular adoption writers and problematises some of their assumptions about adoption and the connection with trauma. A highly relevant essay, finally, Margot Gayle Backus's "'I Am Your Mother; She Was A Carrying Case': Adoption, Class, and Sexual Orientation in Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*" in *Imagining Adoption: Essays on Literature and Culture* (2001, edited by Marianne Novy) investigates the adoption motif in *Oranges*.

### **Hypothesis and methodology**

As already briefly mentioned above, *Oranges* and *Why Be Happy* are characterised by a sense of vocation (authorship) as well as a desire to escape from an oppressive environment or painful past (adoption, in particular). The hypothesis broadly distinguishes between the novel and the memoir. The general expectation is that in *Oranges*, Winterson is unable or unwilling to work through the trauma of adoption, whereas she employs narrative techniques to actively work it through in *Why Be Happy*: the work of art functions as a container for her, ultimately enabling her to achieve psychological distance. A container converts overwhelming anxieties into bearable, memorable, thinkable emotions. Among other things, it remains to be examined how Winterson gives the active working through or not actually working through form and what this means for her posture, the author's employed representation of the self. This will be tested by means of a thematic approach.

First, passages about adoption, trauma, authorship, and identity generally will be marked and distinguished in *Oranges* and *Why Be Happy*. (Occasionally, quotations from *Art Objects* may be used by way of illustration, so that particular enunciations may be better contextualised.) These passages will be read in the light of the theory on posture, life writing, literary theory, and trauma theory. This will involve detailed reading, which is an interpretative activity. This method

is nevertheless reproducible, because the first step of finding the relevant passages and the second step of interpreting them by means of the theory expounded in the thesis are combined almost completely watertight. The relevant theory will be complemented by general works which directly engage with Winterson's writing, in order to embed the thesis in the field which these works together make up. The structure of the thesis ensures that the research question is answered step by step.

Chapter 1 is the theoretical chapter forming the link between the Introduction which precedes it and the other chapters. It is about life writing in relation to literary theory, life writing as a mode of self-invention, and life writing in relation to trauma theory. Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 are both case studies of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* and *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?*. Chapter 2 deals with fact, fiction, and the autobiographical pact, so the workings and effects of the autobiographical character of *Oranges* and *Why Be Happy*. Chapter 3 deals with the relation between narrativising and actively working through (or not actually working through) the adoption in *Oranges* and *Why Be Happy*. In this thesis, "Jeanette" refers to the protagonist of *Oranges* and "Winterson" refers to the narrating "I", narrated "I", and ideological "I" of *Why Be Happy* (since the book is indisputably marketed as a literary memoir) as well as to the "real" or historical "I", the author of the works. (The "I"s will be explained hereafter.)

This Master's degree thesis will contribute to the study of Winterson's work as well as advance research in the academic field of life writing. Literary critics have mainly utilised three theoretical approaches in their engagements with Winterson's oeuvre: deriving from feminism and lesbian feminism, from postmodernism and poststructuralism, and from queer theories (Andermahr 4). The paradigms of trauma theory and life writing have largely been neglected. Current theory in the areas of the British novel, authorship, and autobiography will be evaluated, and its applicability will be tested in a detailed case study on Winterson's life writing. The memoir has of yet not received much attention from literary journalism and academic study, so it is also the object of this thesis to fill part of this void. Since orphans and adoptees are recurrent figures in Winterson's oeuvre, it would perhaps be better to consider all her works for a more complete understanding of her life writing through implicit and explicit intertextuality, but this is beyond the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, the discussion of the unique relationship between *Oranges* and *Why Be Happy* in relation to adoption and authorship aims to be a valuable contribution and an invitation for further research.

## Chapter 1: Jeanette Winterson, the self, and writing the self

“We all know that Art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realize truth, at least the truth that is given us to understand. The artist must know the manner whereby to convince others of the truthfulness of his lies.” (Pablo Picasso qtd. in Honour and Fleming 785)

As a link between the introduction and the actual analyses, this chapter aims to discuss or theorise life writing in relation to literary theory (section 1.1), life writing as a mode of self-invention (section 1.2), and life writing in relation to trauma theory (section 1.3). The quoted statement by Picasso – which tells us that neither identity nor art constitute Truth, but that the truthfulness which is at the basis of these so-called lies matters greatly – encapsulates much of what follows. The first section outlines the emergence of postmodern novels which engage with French poststructuralist theory, some ideas which have come to prevail after theory, and how life writing resists theory. In addition, it focuses on the desire for authenticity and personal presence which readers seem to have and which the literary market seems to exploit. The second section takes the challenge to the theoretical death of the author even further by contending that life writing is an assertion of agency and authority over a life, in the sense that an intricate balancing act of combining truth and invention is performed in order to gain self-knowledge. The third section, finally, lays the foundations for considering trauma as a site of identity by briefly describing what trauma is, how it may take shape in life and writing, and how writing can effectively act as container for writers and renew their capacity to mentalise and relinquish traumatic experiences.

### 1.1 Life writing and literary theory

In her comprehensive introduction to *The Novel After Theory*, Judith Ryan writes that a new strain emerged in postmodern fiction in the late-twentieth century: numerous novels appeared which “know about” literary and cultural theory (1). They do not simply incorporate, accept, or resist French theory, they reflect on it and on its persistence beyond the period of its greatest popularity, so that they raise questions about the nature of authorship and the practice of writing. Contrary to what is said in Thomas Doherty’s *After Theory* (1990), Valentine Cunningham’s *Reading After Theory* (2001), and Terry Eagleton’s *After Theory* (2003), the writer of the novel after theory is not always critical of literary theory in its entirety: a balancing act is performed.

Ryan argues that the novelistic reworking of poststructuralist theory can make theory easier to understand by losing its technical terminology, that it allows readers to move easily between binary and non-binary thought, points out weaknesses and blind spots in theory (17), makes theory more relatable, and probes the moral implications of subscribing to theory (20).

Life after theory – that is, the period when the “preaching” phase of theory, which roughly took up the 1970s and 1980s (Barry 32), is over – takes for granted some ideas which were fiercely resisted in the so-called theory wars which broke out some decades ago. Firstly, Peter Barry explains, many people feel that identity is as much a shifting as a fixed thing, or in other words: “our notion of ‘being’, after theory, is that it always has significant elements of ‘becoming’ in it” (288). Secondly, the notion which many people have of the literary text is likewise unstable (288). Thirdly, many people are aware of the instabilities of language itself (288). Finally, there is a sense of the pervasiveness of theory itself, or the realisation that “it isn’t possible to opt out of the business of position-taking, because every stance is a viewpoint, so that *all* our assertions are improvisatory, contingent, and provisional” (289). This set of ideas has largely come to constitute contemporary thinking in research in the humanities all over the world.

Ryan demonstrates for some novels how they engage with theory, but she overlooks life writing, which also engages with theory. It is especially Roland Barthes’s provocative concept of “the death of the author”, first developed in his essay of the same title (1967), which life writing by literary authors incorporates, for example by offering resistance to it. “Life writing, in particular,” Lauren Rusk aptly remarks, “resists theory that claims to do away with the authorial presence, since the work itself is a declaration of the subject’s shared identity with the author” (9). Paul John Eakin observes from another angle that “[t]he impulse to take the fiction of the [authorial] self and its acts as fact persists, a more than willing suspension of disbelief in which the behavior of writer and reader refuses to coincide with theory” (26). Finally, Barthes affirms that life writing disputes “the death of the author”, who “still reigns ... in the very consciousness of men of letters anxious to unite their person and their work through diaries and memoires” (Barthes 1322).

Kate Douglas notes the significance of book publication and book marketing to discussions of authorship:

At a time when two, or perhaps even three generations of literary theorists have primarily been raised on the notion that the biography of the author is almost irrelevant to the text,

in the contemporary world of book publication and marketing, the author has if anything become even more crucial to a book's success. (806)

It is generally known that there are such disparities between commercial and academic literary reception – the distinction between “success” and “degree specific consecration” or literary prestige (Bourdieu 38) is established – but autobiography as a literary form finds itself more and more to be the talking point within both non-academic critiques and theoretical discussions of literature.

“For many people,” Micaela Maftai asserts, “one of the main allures of reading memoir and autobiography is the proximity they allow themselves to feel to the writer” (49). This is so, Jill Ker Conway argues, because we cannot escape from our bodies and therefore develop the desire to behold the world with someone else's eyes: our identities “crave the confirmation of like experience, or the enlargement or transformation which can come from viewing a similar experience from a different perspective” (qtd. in Maftai 49). Winterson states in her introduction to *Oranges* that “[t]he trick [of writing an autobiography] is to turn your own life into something that has meaning for people whose experience is nothing like your own” (xi). Thus, it is not only writing an autobiography, but also reading an autobiography which involves a “project” of self-inquiry or self-knowing. Readers seem to want to understand themselves through the subject of an autobiographical act, as if an autobiography provides them with a tool box with which they can decipher the code that is the sum of their own life experiences. Douglas argues that publishers respond to this desire by attempting to shape readers' answers to the following question: “What do you, as the reader, want the author to be?” (815). The book jacket is a fine example of this hetero-representation: this is where the (celebrity) author, his or her text, criticism, and commerce come together. How dead is the author of *Oranges* and *Why Be Happy* on the jacket blurbs?

The following brief interlude will attempt to answer this question in order to demonstrate how malleable a thing posture is in the hands of publishers. It appears that review blurbs alternately represent an autobiographer as an observant recorder (fact) and as a creative genius (fiction). The following short judgements are quoted from the covers of *Oranges* and *Why Be Happy*, being the editions from 2014 and 2012, respectively. With regard to *Oranges*, the reviewer from *Vanity Fair* describes Winterson as “a master of her material, a writer in whom great talent abides”. Especially the first phrase suggests that she is an artist in control of her work.

John Bayley describes her novels as “performances of real originality”, which signifies agency and singularity. The reviewer from *Evening Standard* declares that “[i]n her hands, words are fluid, radiant, humming”. The word “hands” connotes skilful control. *Why Be Happy* is described as “honest” by the reviewer from *The Times*, and the reviewer from *Spectator* regards it as proof of “intelligence, heart and imagination”: fact as well as fiction.

In the examples given above, the author rather than the book is subject to evaluation. It seems that readers do require an extra-textual, embodied subject. This cannot be read as an indication of the resistance of non-academic literary reception to poststructuralist theories of the death of the author. It does, however, provide food for researchers active in the humanities and concerned with questions of authorship in contemporary literature: can Barthes’s still provocative concept of the death of the author be reconciled with the persistent popularity of life writing? According to Barthes, writing is “the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin”; it is “that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing” (Barthes 1322). A text is “a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash”, “a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture” (1324), invariably “made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation” (1325). The death of the author causes the birth of the reader: “the controlling, limiting subjectivity of the author” is replaced with “the controlling, limiting subjectivity of the reader” (Bennett 18). The nature of life writing, however, requires the resurrection of the author.

Barthes invalidates the notion of authorial originality by claiming that a text is nothing more than a web of language, that the author is not a point of origin for it, but an anonymous “scriptor” who is devoid of individuality and intention, and that meaning is constituted by the reader. The autobiographical pact evoked in much life writing, however, involves the textual and paratextual assertion that the author, narrator (though with a chosen voice), and protagonist of the work are the same. An author who creates a text and invests it with meaning is indispensable in this line of reasoning. According to Philippe Lejeune, the autobiographical text establishes a “pact” among narrator, reader, and publisher which “supposes that there is *identity of name* between the author (such as he figures, by his name, on the cover), the narrator of the story, and the character who is being talked about” (qtd. in Smith and Watson 207). In the paradigm of

poststructuralism, intertextuality is inherent in writing, whereas Winterson's life writing leads one to suspect that intertextuality is agency in life writing. Her semi-autobiographical act *Oranges* is a composite narrative with identity of name which brings together truth, invention, and allusions to other literary authors and works. This shows that Winterson *deploys* intertextuality to confront her traumatic experiences and construct her authorship.

A construct is exactly what authorship in life writing is. An autobiography by a literary author offers a representation of the self which the author employs to take up a position in the literary field. As demonstrated above, the literary author receives a great deal of attention on jacket blurbs. This form of representation takes a special form on the book jackets of autobiographies, where paradoxical evaluations of the autobiographer in question can be found. This is the place where the interplay between fact and fiction, or truth and invention, in life writing is both critically exposed and commercially exploited. More generally, this section has shown that life writing by and about literary authors challenges the death of the author. Life narratives, then, bridge the gap between "theoretical" and "un-theoretical" readers, because the former are drawn to these texts precisely because they problematise representation, and the latter get to read about the lives of authors. For the theoretically informed reader, life writing by and about literary authors is *the* type of writing which incorporates theoretical reflections on authorship and authority.

## 1.2 Life writing as a mode of self-invention

To what extent is the author, who was deprived of his or her authority by poststructuralist theory some decades ago, still an authority when it comes to the writing of his or her own life? As Paul John Eakin writes in *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention*, autobiographers are both artists and historians, "negotiating a narrative passage between the freedoms of imaginative creation on the one hand and the constraints of biographical facts on the other" (3). The keynote of his study is that "autobiographical truth is not a fixed but an evolving content in an intricate process of self-discovery and self-creation," and, flowing naturally from this line of argument, that "the self that is the centre of all autobiographical narrative is necessarily a fictive structure" (3). This dovetails with Winterson's view that adoptees and authors are self-invented, that she is her own experiment, and that life is part fact, part fiction.

The materials of her past are invariably shaped by memory and imagination to serve “the needs of present consciousness” (5).

Self-invention in this thesis refers not only to the creation of a self in autobiography, but also to the idea that the self or selves which the autobiographer seeks to reconstruct in art are, to use Eakin’s words, “made in the course of human development” rather than “given” (8), so that self-invention is practised first in living before it can be formalised in writing (9). *Oranges* and *Why Be Happy* clearly incorporate theoretical reflections on authorship such as this one. Autobiographical acts therefore are essentially “investigations into and processes of self-knowing” (Smith and Watson 90), so reading *Oranges* and *Why Be Happy* requires attention for both the modes of inquiry encoded in the autobiographical narratives through generic conventions and the self-knowledge which is actually gained or produced in the works. Smith and Watson take for granted that the latter aspect is really knowable for the writer and the reader alike.

With regard to the question of authorial authority mentioned above, Barthes would refuse the very possibility of self-knowing, and Eakin prudently leaves the question unanswered. The former believed that autobiography, like fiction, is an intertextual verbal construct which can as a text not refer to anything outside of the text. The latter believes that it is unknowable whether (a part of) the self is made visible in autobiography or whether it is a product of the recognisable norms of life narration (language), for “knowledge of the self is inseparable from the practice of language” (278). For him, the question is: “How can we know the dancer from the dance?” (278). Language, then, is all that the reader of autobiographical life narratives has to go by. By now it is clear that the self-knowledge which is gained or produced cannot be discovered by reading an autobiography, and that the observations made in the following chapters are – obvious as it may sound – based on linguistic evidence only: writing and reading identity in autobiography only happen within language.

Who is this autobiographical “I”? Smith and Watson make a distinction between four “I”s: the “real” or historical “I”, the narrating “I”, the narrated “I”, and the ideological “I” (72). The first one is the flesh-and-blood author who is unknown by and unknowable for the reader, and whose life is much more complicated than the story which is being told: the reader cannot get access to this “I” in an autobiographical narrative of it (72). The second one is the “I” who relates the autobiographical narrative and is available to the reader for this reason. Smith and Watson



appropriately emphasise that this “I” is a persona of the historical person who wants to tell a story about the self (72). The third one is the “I” who is evoked. As Françoise Lionnet suggests, the narrated “I” is “the subject of history” whereas the narrating “I” is “the agent of discourse” (qtd. in Smith and Watson 73). In other words, the narrated “I” is “an objectified and remembered ‘I’” whereas the narrating “I” is “the remembering agent” (Smith and Watson 73). The fourth and final one has to do with the fact that the “I” is steeped in ideology, in the institutional discourses through which people come to understand themselves in ways that seem normal (76). Paul Smith explains that it is “the concept of personhood culturally available to the narrator” (qtd. in Smith and Watson). The ideological “I” is only apparently stable, so a position may be called into question.

The autobiographical “I” should be elaborated to make it workable in the detailed analysis of the life writing of Winterson. Another relevant concept is “relationality”, which in autobiographical acts implies that self-inquiry and self-knowing are “routed through others” and that consequently the boundaries of an “I” are often “shifting and permeable” (Smith and Watson 86). Smith and Watson make a distinction between five textual others: the historical, contingent, significant, idealised absent, and subject other (86-88). The significant other is the most relevant relational other here, and significant others are “those whose stories are deeply implicated in the narrator’s and through whom the narrator understands her or his own self-formation” (86). Winterson’s adoptive mother is a significant other (her birth mother is present through her absence, becoming significant later). The idea that “no ‘I’ speaks except as and through its others” (88) suggests that the subject of autobiography is not autonomous. As mentioned above, the narrating “I” is really a persona. The creation of the persona is a process during which Winterson establishes who exactly she is in her autobiographical narratives. Maftei evokes the image of a particular self being constructed from parts of the other selves of the author (44). The process involves selecting a voice and refusing other selves access to the autobiographical narrative, so the persona is simultaneously the author and not the author of the work (45). Winterson captures this idea in her introduction to *Oranges*, where she writes: “I am I and I am Not-I” (xiv).

The creation of the persona, then, is a form of self-invention, in the sense that it concerns a crafted and fashioned narratorial voice which is self as well as not-self, but paradoxically it is also that which elicits trust from the reader, trust that the author evokes a believable story world

and that he or she gratifies the wish of the reader for truth and truthfulness. This is where a pact comes about in autobiographical writing: the autobiographical pact mentioned earlier. Eakin explains that intention becomes the decisive consideration in a discussion of writing and reading autobiographical narratives, and that the autobiographical pact between author and reader expresses this (20). For Philippe Lejeune, “identity between the *author*, the *narrator*, and the *protagonist*” (qtd. in Anderson 2) makes a narrative autobiographical, but Linda Anderson points out that involving authorial intention is highly problematic: “the difficulty is how to apply this condition since the ‘identity’ Lejeune speaks of can never really be established except as a matter of *intention* on the part of the author” (Anderson 2).

The explicit or implicit pact determines the manner of reading a narrative, sometimes turning a desire into an expectation, and can therefore create a vulnerable relationship between author and reader. A logical line of argument could look like this: *Oranges* is a semi-autobiographical novel, and as such it does not arouse the expectation that it will fulfil the pact; *Why Be Happy* is labelled non-fiction in its own paratexts, so the reader assumes that this narrative will not violate the pact, as it were. Sissela Bok, however, points out that personal narratives may actually result in an inverse reader response to that of self-declared fictional texts, which means that:

the more autobiographers insist on their veracity, the more readers look for discrepancies between the written life and what they know of the author’s life; whereas when confronted with autobiographical fiction, the effort of readers is, rather, to try to discern similarities between the author and the central character in the novel. (qtd. in Maftai 54)

Though inevitable in personal narratives, self-invention seems to be deemed out of place by readers. Likewise, it seems to be something which has to be seen through in autobiographical fiction, as if some readers think: “I’m up to your tricks”. How this works in practice is hard to find out and in addition beyond the scope of this thesis anyway, but it suggests that truth and truthfulness are indispensable concepts. This section will therefore be concluded by a reflection on their meanings as employed henceforth.

The word “truth” is associated with the quality of being unstable and not universally acknowledged. This is because most events and interactions involve multiple truths, but naturally also because the dependability of memory is questionable. The word “truthfulness” will be understood to mean a disposition to tell the truth and abstain from pretence or counterfeit. As

Maftai lucidly argues, truthfulness is “an action or kind of behaviour”, whereas truth is “a state of affairs” (22). In other words, truth is a thing to be represented, and truthfulness means having the intention of respecting *a* truth – not *the* truth, because there is no such thing as a single, whole, representable truth. As the creation of a persona involves a degree of “shaping, pruning, selecting and therefore altering the material of one’s identity” (55), a process which may be seen as essential to engrossing autobiographical writing, working with “the truth” involves “excavation, discovery, decision, interpretation, revelation” (19). In conclusion, invention and truth are not black-and-white: they are inextricably bound up with each other and with life writing.

### 1.3 Life writing and trauma theory

Some critics argue that adoption life stories constitute a distinct and coherent genre of life writing “because personal identity is mediated by a primary rupture, [namely] separation from the biological family” (Smith and Watson 255). A special issue of *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* (18.2) on adoption narratives and *Imagining Adoption: Essays on Literature and Culture* (edited by Marianne Novy) confirm this. The scope of adoption narratives spans all members of the triad: birth parent(s), adoptive parent(s), and of course adoptee (255). *Why Be Happy*, for example, is, like many contemporary adoption narratives, narrated as what Jill Deans calls a quest that tries to “restore the lost origins of the adoptee” and “forge meaningful connections despite the indeterminacy of one’s identity” (qtd. in Smith and Watson 255). The first ten chapters constitute the part of the adoption story on which *Oranges* is based, and the chapters after “Intermission” form an adoption-as-trauma memoir. Up to a certain point, both works can be considered trauma narratives, with Winterson’s adoption being her trauma, but how exactly do trauma narratives work?

The word “trauma” is derived from the Greek word for “wound” and denotes a psychic injury caused by emotional shock, the memory of which is repressed and not easily healed. A traumatic experience cannot be incorporated unproblematically within memory, so it shows resistance to representation and literally becomes unspeakable (283). Psychoanalytical theorists of trauma argue that speaking the unspeakable (an attempt at articulation) involves “the narrator in a struggle with memory and its belatedness” (283). Leigh Gilmore points out the central antinomy of trauma narratives: “Although trauma must be spoken in order to heal the survivor and the community, language is inadequate to do this” (qtd. in Smith and Watson 283). The

trauma came about in an event in the past, but it is re-experienced or re-enacted in the narrative present. This is a result of the act of trying to remember, which may expose rather than heal the wound.

Trauma appears not only to have become a very popular topic within the humanities, but also “a highly controversial and debated concept” there and elsewhere (Van der Wiel 2014, 1).

Roger Luckhurst writes that:

[r]ival theories proliferate ... because it is one of these ‘tangled objects’ whose enigmatic causation and strange effects that bridge the mental and the physical, the individual and collective, and use in many diverse disciplinary languages consequently provoke perplexed, contentious debate. (15)

Literary applications for trauma have been explored since the early 1990s, when academic trauma theory gradually came into existence. It is the self-appointed task of trauma theorists to engage with “the paradox of the incommensurability and impossibility of language and representation in relation to trauma, on the one hand, and the desperate need for a means of expression, on the other” (Van der Wiel 2014, 2). If an autobiographical act involves a project of self-inquiry or self-knowing, then it can be said that “an adoption-as-trauma narrative”, as a combination of two genres of life writing, may involve a project of self-healing.

Early trauma theory employed psychoanalysis. In “Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through” (1914), Freud introduced the idea of the compulsion to repeat, whereby the PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) patient does not remember but instead acts out “repressed feelings, impulses, impressions, situations, connections and, especially, very early childhood experiences” (Van der Wiel 2014, 7). For this reason, the aim of psychoanalysis used to be “to fill in gaps in memory” or “to overcome resistances due to repression” (Freud 148). Traumatic experiences cannot essentially be relegated to the past, so traumatic memories become detached: they are banished from consciousness, but they cannot be not buried (Van der Wiel 2014, 7). Because the traumatic experience cannot be given a place in the past, and it haunts the individual with images, sensations, and impulses in the present, the future cannot be faced and thought about or imagined. Cathy Caruth recapitulates briefly how trauma manifests itself: “Trauma can be experienced in at least two ways: as a memory that one cannot integrate in one’s own experience, and as a catastrophic knowledge that one cannot communicate to others” (qtd. in Van der Wiel 2014, 7). Caroline Garland explains that, paradoxically, patients may

unconsciously believe that the safest way of dealing with trauma is “clinging on to it through *being* it, rather than being at a mental distance from it” (qtd. in Van der Wiel 2014, 9). How can literature accommodate a working-through of a traumatic loss without the author continuing to be compulsively, narcissistically identified with a lost object of love?

Kleinian psychoanalysis, named after its exponent Melanie Klein, involves the displacement of anxiety onto external objects, which results in mental distance (Van der Wiel 2014, 9-10). Theories of alpha-function, maternal container, and thinking, developed by psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion, can illustrate this and make it applicable to literary fiction and life writing. “Alpha-function is an abstractive function of the mind,” Van der Wiel explains, “which transforms raw, concretely felt sense-impressions (‘beta-elements’) into sense-impressions which are stored as memories and thus available for thought (‘alpha-elements’)” (10). Before the infant has alpha-function, it is the mother who has to act as alpha-function, thus functioning as a container for the overwhelming anxieties by converting them into bearable emotions and returning them to the infant (10). Van der Wiel argues that a traumatic experience upsets alpha-function, and that a psychoanalyst can assume the role of maternal container in a clinical setting; she argues that artistic form can similarly function as container: a work of art can offer a means to “control and gain [psychological] distance from its emotionally overwhelming content” and transform it into thought (10). In imitation of Van der Wiel, this thesis will consider substitution or transformation of the traumatic past into a set of symbols to be of crucial importance in the working-through of the traumatic experience (11). The life writing of Winterson is not literature with trauma as its subject, but literature in which the reconstruction or recuperation of the traumatic experience is to a greater or lesser degree a functional concern.

With regard to the relation between life writing and trauma theory, Gilmore observes that “[t]he age of memoir and the age of trauma may have coincided” (qtd. in Luckhurst 117). The experiential seemed to have required the traumatic rather than the everyday to be interesting. “Paradoxically,” Luckhurst writes, “experience beyond the range of the normal became the new norm” (117). He presumes that the appeal of the memoir is chiefly located in its ability to outstrip “the narrative conventionality of fiction” in responding to “the pressure of the real” (118). According to Luckhurst, literature with a traumatic experience as its subject is often associated with a specific conventionalised trauma aesthetic, with easily identifiable narrative devices, such as narrative rupture (89). Memoir approximates the traumatic real. *Why Be Happy* can be

considered to be a result of what Lynne Segal calls the “turn to autobiographical narration” (qtd. in Van der Wiel 2014, 21) and the concomitant “traumatic turn” (qtd. in Luckhurst 121), which are part of a broader shift in British and American cultural production and reception.

Some critics speak of “traumaculture”, which denotes “a cultural sphere in which identity formation is based on traumatic experience” (Van der Wiel 2014, 21). This idea underlies this thesis, in the sense that the representation of adoption as trauma is read as an element of the construction of authorship. Traumaculture, however, makes for the sacralisation and sublimation of trauma and encourages compulsive repetition, whereas here the emphasis is on reflecting on trauma and working it through. “In working through,” Dominick LaCapra writes, “the person tries to gain critical distance on a problem and to distinguish between past, present, and future” (143). In other words: regaining a sense of detachment means being able to tell yourself: “Yes, that happened to me. It was distressing, overwhelming, perhaps I can’t entirely disengage myself from it, but I’m existing here and now, and this is different from back then” (144). Working through means reclaiming agency.

In order for an active working-through to take place, a narrative form which mimics traumatic memory is not effective. The psychoanalytic concept of symbolisation, whereby “an unconscious idea is expressed in the form of a different idea, object, image, or concept” (Colman), for example through modernist aesthetics, can represent a transformational process of working-through of trauma through form and style. Symbolic expression allows a text to act as transformational object or container for the author. Van der Wiel argues that Winterson’s traumatic adoption story is more “authentic” in *Why Be Happy* than in *Oranges* (2014, 22), meaning that experimental literary form is abandoned in favour of a more unmediated representation of traumatic realism in her memoir. Winterson’s later literary aesthetics of trauma are therefore not based on symbolisation, for example through impersonality and abstraction, but on the traumatic real and on the end of the narrative suppression of her birth mother. Thus, the “end of repression” is simultaneously the “beginning of recovery” (Van der Wiel 2014, 211), which entails the capacity to get on with it (rather than to get over it).

This chapter in three parts has done the groundwork for analyses which aim to demonstrate how the depiction of adoption as founding trauma or as primal wound in the life writing of Winterson contributes to the construction of her authorship: the combination of trauma and self runs as a

connecting thread through her life writing. *Oranges*, with its humorous and fanciful tone, is characterised by a certain distance on Winterson's part from the personal and traumatic material of her childhood. *Why Be Happy*, in contrast, signifies a turn to the traumatic real and as such signals the necessity of a drastic modification to her identity. It is the repressed knowledge yet unremembered experience of being adopted which constitutes Winterson's founding trauma, and this traumatic event is not or cannot be confronted in *Oranges* but can and is confronted many years later in *Why Be Happy*. Now the key question is: how can her past be worked through if her trauma has become such an integral part of her identity and if the recurrent self-narration only cultivates this very specific identity of Winterson as an author? It seems that the answer can be found in both altered literary aesthetics and identity.

## Chapter 2: Fact, fiction, and the autobiographical pact

“I prefer myself as a character in my own fiction.”

(Winterson 1996, 53)

This second chapter discusses fact, fiction, and the autobiographical pact in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (section 2.1) and *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* (section 2.2). The chapter called “Deuteronomy: The last book of the law” in the semi-autobiographical novel *Oranges*, which mirrors its biblical counterpart in being a non-narrative chapter devoted to setting down rules or recommendations for human behaviour, epitomises much of what follows. The narrator here reflects on the true nature of reality, of storytelling, and of history, making the distinction between story – supposedly “subjective” and “chaos” – and history – “objective” and “order” – undone. “If you want to keep your own teeth,” Winterson advises her reading public, “make your own sandwiches” (Winterson 2014, 122): she pleads for intellectual integrity. The dietary law of less “refined food” and more “roughage” aims at preventing intellectual “constipation”. She suspects that “if you tell people that what they are reading is ‘real’, they will believe you, even when they are being trailed in the wake of a highly experimental odyssey” (Winterson 1996, 53). In other words, it is neither possible nor desirable to distinguish between fact and fiction in both life and writing – let alone in life writing.

With regard to the author’s construction of authorship, in what way and to what effect for Jeanette and Winterson do these works read life and writing as fact and fiction? This chapter examines how *Oranges* can be read as life writing (2.1.1), how it incorporates the Bible (2.1.2), and how it incorporates fantasy elements (2.1.3). Though they may at first sight seem diverse in character, these topics are united by the idea that the act of storytelling is a technique for establishing an identity. The chapter investigates how *Why Be Happy* is positioned vis-à-vis *Oranges* (2.2.1) and demonstrates how reading and writing – the power of the word – liberate Winterson (2.2.2). These topics elaborate on and make more explicit what emerges from the analyses of *Oranges*.



## 2.1 *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*

### 2.1.1 Reading *Oranges* as life writing

As semi-autobiographical fiction, *Oranges* falls under life writing; Winterson hardly absents herself from the text. In the paratexts, the biographical blurb clearly matches the broad outlines of the life of the protagonist of the novel. It says that *Oranges* is based on her own upbringing, but uses a fictional character. As regards the autobiographical pact, the author gives the narrator and protagonist of the novel her own first name as well as a surname which comes “at the end of the alphabet” (Winterson 2014, 49). Moreover, as Rusk points out, the name of the alter ego of Jeanette *Winnet Stonejar* is anagrammatically related to *Jeanette Winterson*, lacking only a couple of *es* and a *t* (109), so that the correspondence is “slant, not straight” (109).

The form dovetails with the content, because both the protagonist and the narrative defy categorisation: as Rusk argues, the hybrid form of the narrative enacts the transgressive experience of the young protagonist (110). This approach seems to be based on the idea that the imagination can reveal truth, and it seems to signal an interest in how life and art are interrelated rather than in generic categories (110). Winterson admires how Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando* (1928) and Gertrude Stein’s *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933) “identified and exploited the weak-mindedness of labels” (Winterson 1996, 50) and posed “an immediate challenge to conventional genre-boxing” while simultaneously extending to readers “an invitation to believe” (71). Just like these two works, *Oranges* is an experimental “fiction masquerading as a memoir” (53).

*Oranges* encompasses a wide range of genres which in the light of life writing can be regarded as modes of self-inquiry. Smith and Watson explain that “[s]ome well-known patterns for presenting processes of self-knowing are linked to other genres of literature, such as the novel, and provide templates for autobiographical storytelling” (91). This reasoning shows that indeed it is a fine line which separates fiction from non-fiction. Rusk argues that *Oranges* springs from the *Bildungsroman*, the *Künstlerroman*, and the coming out story (108), though she does not present these genres as schemes of self-investigation for the author. She does argue that *Oranges* is a didactic narrative (109), which ties up with the nature of the *Bildungsroman*: it educates the reader by portraying the education of the protagonist. As the previous chapter explained, it seems that readers want to understand themselves through the subject of an autobiographical act. Thus, the example of the *Bildungsroman* holds both when *Oranges* is considered fiction and non-

fiction. As a *Künstlerroman*, *Oranges* portrays the self-creation of the subject through the artistic creation of the same subject, which may be Jeanette or Winterson or someone in between, depending on the chosen way of reading. All in all, the book is rooted in the tradition of developmental fiction, which commonly incorporates allegorical elements (Rusk 109), and in experimental life writing.

The author herself also has something to say about the nature and function of the book in the introduction to the edition published in 2014. “*Oranges* is autobiographical,” she elusively declares there, “in so much as I used my own life as the base for a story” (Winterson 2014, xi). She believes that the lesson you learn from literature is that that you should “[r]ead yourself as a fiction as well as a fact” (xii). This remark does not refer to performing an autobiographical act; it seems to imply that identity is as much a shifting as a fixed thing. For Winterson herself, *Oranges* is about self-invention, about “writing [herself] the world [she] wanted to find” because she was born without prospects, and about using herself as a fictional character or “an expanded ‘I’” (xiii). These remarks do have bearing on the creation of a particular persona in autobiographical writing; this is for herself as much as for her readership. Thus she interrelates life and writing while downplaying the characterisation of *Oranges* as autobiographical writing. In Winterson’s case, the experiential is extraordinary rather than ordinary. She finds a connection between the private and professional, while foregrounding the inevitability of fictionalisation:

Adopted children are self-invented because we have to be; we arrive with the first pages of our story torn out. Writers are self-inventors too – we have to be – so in my case a capacity or a cast of character, (yes, that becomes a cast of characters – the multiple self of the writer) is strongly in the ascendant. Given what I am, I don’t see what else I could be, but a fictioneer. (xiv)

There is a missing part, so the adoptee sets about filling the blank paper with believable or comforting words, like a writer might do. Though she uses her own name in *Oranges*, Winterson proclaims that she never wanted a literal reading of it and pronounces it a novel (xiv). Indeed, “[p]art fact part fiction is what life is” (xiv). In other words, self-invention is first and foremost practised in life, not only in autobiographical writing.

The final section of the introduction is about “Memory versus Invention” (xv), a subject which corresponds to how memory and imagination in autobiography shape the materials of the past to serve the present psychological needs of the narrating “I”, so again Winterson’s words

approximate to life writing terms. She considers memory a “re-creation”, because the past does not hold one stable and representable truth, and believes that “we can change the story because we are the story” (xv). Thus, the storytelling is a process of self-discovery and self-creation. “Sometimes,” she aptly remarks, “what we remember is a cover-story for what we will not allow ourselves to remember” (xvi). This refers to the repressed knowledge yet unremembered experience of being adopted: *Oranges* may be a cover-story.

Memory and imagination emerge through intertextuality and allusion in *Oranges*. As both an author and a reader, Winterson employs the narrative interweaving to establish a relation between her text and a cultural or literary tradition as well as to “make sense of being human” (xvi). Reading and writing facilitate self-inquiry. The spiritual and the fanciful, the religious and the secular, are combined in this respect. The novel is divided into chapters named after the first eight books of the Bible, and it alludes to some of their events and themes. Interleaved with the main narrative, the story of Jeanette’s girlhood, are rewritten episodes from Arthurian legend, new fairy tales, other allegorical passages, and metanarrative comment. Literature and her own imagination help Jeanette and Winterson cope.

### **2.1.2 The novel and the Bible**

The narrative is shaped by and framed within the religious discourse which its protagonist renounces. When it alludes to aspects of the books of the Bible, this happens “at times with structural significance, at others with glancing wit” (Rusk 106). The renunciation of evangelicalism is presented as an opposition between organised religion and spiritual experience. The novel rewrites, often parodically, aspects of the Bible in ways which emphasise the production of dogmatic narratives by evangelicalism. It problematises the values and challenges the authority of the ideology in question in a de-naturalising way, by putting together the Bible and fiction. Art can, perhaps like religion, expose people to other dimensions of spiritual experience, “provide a guiding vision,” and elevate people above the mundane (Denby 101). In *Art Objects*, Winterson considers art “visionary” rather than “documentary”, and she believes that “its true effort is to open us to dimensions of the spirit and of the self that normally lie smothered under the weight of living” (136-137). A true artist is like a prophet, endowed with “prescience” and “an immanence that allows him or her to recognise and make articulate the emotional complexities of his age” (39-40). The fanciful sections embody Jeanette’s endeavour to “shape

imaginatively her emotional and spiritual dilemmas” and mark her alignment with Winterson’s ideas about art (Denby 102), which is an example of auto-representation. The numerous intertexts allow Jeanette to “explore creatively a world apart from biblical doctrine” (102), so her social development and her artistic growth are juxtaposed.

“Genesis” parodically equates God’s creation story with Jeanette’s adoption story. The narrator writes about her mother: “She was very bitter about the Virgin Mary getting there first” (Winterson 2014, 6). In her “non-procreative production” of Jeanette, Mrs Winterson did something similar to what the Virgin Mary had done (Denby 102). Jeanette herself is the product of a visionary project to “get a child, train it, build it, dedicate it to the Lord” (Winterson 2014, 13):

a missionary child,  
a servant of God,  
a blessing (14)

Mrs Winterson thus pigeon-holes the newly born before she has lain eyes on it. Her visit to the orphanage is compared with God’s completion of the universe within seven days:

And so it was that on a particular day, sometime later, she followed a star until it came to settle above an orphanage, and in that place was a crib, and in that crib, a child. A child with too much hair.

She said, ‘This child is mine from the Lord’.

She took the child away and for seven days and seven nights the child cried out, for fear and not knowing. The mother sang to the child, and stabbed the demons. She understood how jealous the Spirit is of flesh. (14)

On the one hand, the narrative voice is airily farcical, and this parodic attitude undercuts the authority of the evangelicalism which Mrs Winterson vehemently propagates; on the other hand, its poetic and slightly rhetorical tone, which draws on the literary style of “Genesis” (Denby 102), makes this a formative scene. The protagonist is seriously distressed, and the narrator makes clear that she is from that moment on at the mercy of a religious fanatic who prepares her for the messianic role of preacher and missionary, but the narrator simultaneously distances herself from the gravity of the situation through her voice. Jeanette becomes Mrs Winterson’s “way out ... for years and years to come” (Winterson 2014, 14), diverting and assisting, “brought in to join her in a tag match against the Rest of the World” (4).

It is in “Exodus” that Jeanette starts school and the eccentric Elsie Norris is introduced. Jeanette is scorned by her teachers and peers, and her creative projects are never recognised because of their religious themes. A tough lesson which she learns from her school days is that not all people around her ponder “whether something has an absolute as well as a relative value” (58-59). Elsie, “who liked the prophets” (51), eases Jeanette’s suffering by initiating her in the world of the mystic poets and emphasising “the central role of ‘creative imagination’ in the production of external reality” (Denby 102). Mrs Winterson is suspicious of Elsie and her ideas about the origin of true spirituality. Not only Elsie, but also Winterson values art with such religious fervour: “Art is my rod and staff, my resting place and shield, and not mine only, for art” – in contrast to the exclusionist religion which determined her youth – “leaves nobody out” (Winterson 1996, 20). Elsie is presented as Jeanette’s “emotional, spiritual, and artistic mentor” (Rusk 125). Unlike her coreligionists, she believes that “God’s in everything” (Winterson 2014, 41), and even more unlike them, she not only accepts but appreciates “those who follow their passions rather than conform” (Rusk 125), especially if they are artists. As Rusk argues, her imagination underlies both her empathy, being “the antithesis of othering”, and her aesthetic delight (125). The child views herself as a radical artist, “misunderstood by the academy but sustained by a visionary audience of one” (126).

Mrs Virtue’s rejection of Jeanette’s artwork is paralleled by the Church’s condemnation of Jeanette’s love: in each case, Rusk observes, the institutional view is “myopic, lacking in humane vision” (127). The following three books of the Bible, “Leviticus”, “Numbers”, and “Deuteronomy”, focus on the compilation of Christian laws (Denby 103). In the corresponding chapters, Jeanette increasingly questions the singular authority of the set of rules which the Church lays down. The Church’s doctrine of “perfection”, a notion which it equates with “flawlessness”, generates Jeanette’s “first theological disagreement” (Winterson 2014, 78). This difference of opinion is explored in the following fable about the prince who seeks a “perfect” wife, a woman “without blemish inside or out, flawless in every respect” (79). This symbolisation on the part of Jeanette contributes to her social development, or sense of self, and her artistic growth. “Joshua” contains “That Awful Occasion,” or Jeanette’s discovery of her adoption, and the exposure of her lesbianism. After her biological mother had come to claim her back, Jeanette goes outside in panic. “It was Easter,” the narrator says, “and the cross on the hill loomed big and black. ‘Why didn’t you tell me,’ I screamed at the painted wood, and I beat the wood with my

hands until my hands dropped away by themselves” (130). She casts herself and her adoptive mother as Christ and God, respectively, and the anecdote anticipates her suffering on account of her rejection by both her family and the Church, social institutions which “other” her (they place her outside and in opposition to what is considered to be the norm).

With regard to the Church’s condemnation of Jeanette’s lesbian love, Jeanette artfully rewrites the narrative which is used against her. When a pastor who follows St Paul’s teachings on impurity pronounces Jeanette and Melanie beset by “unnatural passions,” Jeanette exclaims: ““To the pure all things are pure ... It’s you not us”” (134), thus reversing the ideal of physical purity and declaring that the only perversion is the pastor’s inability to understand the genuine spirituality and sanctity of their love. In other words, lesbianism is not the problem, but the attitudes which people take up towards it can definitely be. According to the pastor, Jeanette is possessed by an evil spirit, but the following exorcism results in a friendship between the girl and the demon. The creature is recast as a symbol of liberty and individuality, as “a Blakean manifestation of ‘Poetic Genius’” (Denby 103), which helps Jeanette accommodate the creativity and lesbianism which the Church interdicts but are vital. The creature enables the integration of consciousness and unconsciousness, with the latter attempting to by-pass the self-imposed limitations of the former to unite the suppressed but significant aspects of self. Thus, recasts as products of her imaginative resources make life bearable and worthwhile for Jeanette. Rusk argues that she is “defeated though not transformed” (107). The assumption behind Rusk’s choice of words seems to be that a true transformation involves an absolute conversion to heterosexuality, but the modification to Jeanette’s identity is really in the personal assimilation of her homosexuality.

In “Judges”, Mrs Winterson, the pastor, and the religious council judge Jeanette to have unlawfully assumed male power in the Church: she “had flouted God’s law and tried to do it sexually” (Winterson 2014, 171). When Jeanette refuses to repent and relinquish her orange demon, she leaves the Church and is mercilessly expelled from home. Mrs Winterson betrays Jeanette, herself, and her coreligionists by supporting the pastor’s distorted fundamentalist reading. “If there’s such a thing as spiritual adultery,” Jeanette thinks, “my mother was a whore” (172). Jeanette’s refusal to repent is a recast as well, because she reverses what D. M. Gunn has called “the cyclical pattern of sin, oppression, repentance, and salvation” (qtd. in Denby 104) which is established in “Judges” in the Bible. In “Ruth”, Jeanette returns to visit Mrs Winterson,

mirroring the themes of family and ties between women which are explored in “Ruth” in the Bible. Before the meeting takes place, Jeanette reflects on the opposition between organised religion and spiritual experience, priests and prophets, their narrative and her counter narrative:

The priest has a book with the words set out. Old words, known words, words of power. Words that are always on the surface. Words for every occasion. The words work. They do what they’re supposed to do; comfort and discipline. The prophet has no book. The prophet is a voice that cries in the wilderness, full of sounds that do not always set into meaning. The prophets cry out because they are troubled by demons. (Winterson 2014, 205)

The visit to Mrs Winterson heralds in Jeanette’s completed maturation and “accession to the status of Blakean prophet” (Denby 104): the priest subjects people whereas the prophet understands the imagination or art to be able to generate a spiritual sensation. The framework of understanding the world which the Church employs cannot be internalised by Jeanette, so she selects some elements and alters others in order to shape the material of her social and artistic identity.

### **2.1.3 The novel and fantasy elements**

Jeanette seems to attain her sense of self through telling herself different stories which attempt to create a coherent identity. The act of storytelling in which she engages enables her to acknowledge trouble and trauma and control them through symbolisation. Jeanette mirrors what Winterson does with *Oranges* in its entirety. In one of her essays, Winterson writes that during “the difficult years of an evangelical childhood,” she “used books,” in particular, “as Bram Stoker’s *Van Helsing* uses holy wafers, to mark out a charmed place and to save my soul ... from ordinariness, from habit, from prejudice, from fear, from the constraints of a life not chosen by me but strapped onto my back” (Winterson 1996, 122). Art is essential to Jeanette, as suggested by Arthurian revisions and a diversity of allusions to literary history and fairy tales. These instances of intertextuality additionally develop the postmodern thesis that no text is completely original and that all texts develop out of existing and culturally known narratives: *Oranges* engages with issues of literary originality and generic boundaries. Judging from Winterson’s belief that fiction can often convey more emotional truth than fact, she would agree that the fantasy elements add another, “truer” dimension to the main, semi-autobiographical narrative.

Fiction can help people comprehend the world in all its complexity and reject totalising grand narratives and short-sighted absolutist categories: “the limitless world of the imagination ... made it possible for me [Winterson] to scale the sheer face of other people’s assumptions” (Winterson 1996, 157).

Rusk points out that the fantasy elements simply interrupt the main narrative, meaning that there is no transition to indicate who is thinking them up: the narrator or protagonist (107). To be more accurate and use relevant life writing terms: the narrating “I” might actually produce a narrated “I” which then becomes her agent of narration (Smith and Watson 75). The older narrator with “greater knowledge, narrative experience, and linguistic competence” has the choice to have “recourse to simplistic vocabulary, to truncated phrases, to sensory description”, all distinctive narrative characteristics associated by the reader with the younger narrating “I” (75). This strategy constitutes an effort to capture or imagine the meaning of the child’s experience. Rusk continues her broad outline of the nature of the various fantasy elements as follows:

Since their many intertextual references keep pace with the protagonist’s reading level, the fantasies seem *like* stories she might tell herself, polished up by the narrator, who interpolates them without comment. These allegorical sections correspond to adjacent events in the narrative, figuratively expanding on the psychological implications of those happenings. (107)

Most early chapters include one fairy tale, but the fantasies increase after Jeanette is outed, which suggests that she must resort to her imagination to deal with “the social repercussions of her private life” (107). It is in the last two chapters (“Judges” and “Ruth”), when Jeanette leaves the Church, breaks with her family, and goes out on her own, that the allegorical interludes feature alter egos of considerable complexity. The figures emerge at a time when Jeanette feels most lonely and can and should take charge of her self-construction. The alter egos are personae: one of them is Sir Perceval, from Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur*; the other one is Winnet Stonejar, from the tale of “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice”.

Sir Perceval goes on a quest for the Holy Grail after the fellowship of the Round Table has been disbanded. Instead of eulogising the heroic chivalry of the Knights of the Round Table, however, the interludes focus on what Paulina Palmer describes as “the disintegration of the company of the Round Table and the feelings of disillusion in which it results” (qtd. in Makinen



31). The Perceval intertexts broach the subjects of loneliness and exile. The evangelical Church is symbolised in the Round Table, King Arthur predominantly represents Mrs Winterson, and the Holy Grail is a successful loving lesbian relationship. Perceval remembers the past warmth and companionship of Arthur's court. The story stresses Perceval's loneliness, but also Arthur's sense of loss at the knight's going. Thus it also gives an alternative version of events: it suggests or hopes that there is a deep emotional bond between Jeanette and Mrs Winterson. The first piece of the saga is from Arthur's instead of Perceval's point of view, and ends with him thinking: "But oh, Sir Perceval, come and turn cartwheels again" (Winterson 2014, 166). "As a parental figure," Rusk observes, "Arthur reflects the desolation that Jeanette's mother doesn't voice but must feel as she pushes her daughter away" (121). Much later, the story reads: "On his last night at Camelot, he found Arthur walking in the garden, and Arthur had cried like a child, and said there was nothing" (Winterson 2014, 211). The promise of the community has failed for both Jeanette and Mrs Winterson (Rusk 121).

Winnet Stonejar, alternatively, is a resourceful young woman who is captured by a sorcerer whose power and capriciousness make him look suspiciously like Mrs Winterson. Her narratives revolve around a power struggle and the painful shift in which it culminates. The bond between mother and daughter is represented in terms of the attachment between a sorcerer and his apprentice, a representation which consciously "emphasizes its irrational aspect," Palmer remarks, "acknowledging the 'magical' power which it wields" (qtd. in Makinen 31). Winnet achieves mastery of magic after having become the sorcerer's adopted daughter. Jeanette is likewise trained by an adoptive parent. Her mother has taught her to use her religious knowledge as a preacher and missionary, but Jeanette has also learnt the powers of language and storytelling. In other words, perhaps Mrs Winterson has paradoxically fostered imagination and autonomy in Jeanette. Thus, the magic powers which the sorcerer teaches his apprentice will help her to create the chalk circle to surround herself with, a willed self-protection. Like Jeanette, Winnet falls in love with the "wrong" person, causing Susana Onega's words "the wizard's apocalyptic rage and her expulsion from the paradisaal *hortus conclusus* [enclosed garden] where they lived" (qtd. in Makinen 39). The motif of the thread around the button signifies an enduring bond between them. "One thing is certain," it is said about Winnet, "she can't go back" (Winterson 2014, 204). Jeanette's thread nevertheless keeps her attached to her mother, because Mrs Winterson is an integral part of her identity, whichever way one looks at it.

## 2.2 *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?*

### 2.2.1 *Why Be Happy vis-à-vis Oranges*

As regards the public's fascination with Winterson's private life, the author has expressed a threefold complaint in several reviews of other female artists and writers. Reina van der Wiel explains that the charge holds that:

a) within our patriarchal society, women are habitually seen to record *experience*, whereas men make *art*; b) even though art *transforms* personal experience, it often gets misconstrued as autobiography because of a mass fascination with the 'real' within contemporary culture; and c) women suffer more than men do from the cult of celebrity generated by the mass media, which commonly leads to a shift in attention from the work to the person. (2014, 176)

Actively resisting this unmistakable complaint, Winterson has always attempted to combine fact and fiction, "experience *and* experiment," "the observed and the imagined" (Winterson 2012, 3). *Why Be Happy*, however, constitutes an exception. Being a memoir, it contains a self which is inevitably a fictive structure, but the work hardly shows signs of her earlier apprehensions: it focuses almost exclusively on her life as an adoptee. The story divided in two parts is demarcated by two mothers: "the domineering Mrs Winterson and the mysterious, long-absent birth mother" (Van der Wiel 2014, 176). When Winterson and Mrs Winterson are on the phone conversing about the recent publication of *Oranges*, Mrs Winterson confronts Winterson with the fact that she has used her own name in the novel, asking her "if it is a story, why is the main character called Jeanette?" (Winterson 2012, 5). She notes the genre – a novel – as well as an autobiographical pact – because she sees an identity of name between her daughter / the author, the narrator, and the protagonist – and looks upon these aspects as being mutually exclusive, which makes her view both novel and author with suspicion.

Thereupon Winterson poignantly writes: "I can't remember a time when I wasn't setting my story against hers. It was my survival from the very beginning" (5). Narration, then, is a means of survival for the author. In the same vein, Maftei observes that "if we understand living as a process by which we create a narrative identity, then narration generally, and writing specifically, become bound up with notions of survival" (28). Writing can be "a response to trauma" and "a record of survival in the face of trauma" (28). Indeed, Winterson considers her work to have its origins in the double bind of being adopted and consequently of having two

mothers: “Adopted children are self-invented because we have to be; there is an absence, a void, a question mark at the very beginning of our lives. A crucial part of our story is gone, and violently, like a bomb in the womb” (Winterson 2012, 5). This passage is reused and rewritten in the introduction to the 2014 edition of *Oranges*, which strengthens the impression that the novel actually contains more fact than fiction than was suggested upon its first publication or, in other words, that it invites an autobiographical reading. She connects this involuntary self-invention to her authorship, contending that she needs her writing as a way out: “It’s why I am a writer – I don’t say ‘decided’ to be, or ‘became’. It was not an act of will or even a conscious choice” (5). Winterson’s extremely forceful adoptive mother is an exceptional case, of course: “To avoid the narrow mesh of Mrs Winterson’s story I had to be able to tell my own” (5).

What is significant in *Why Be Happy* is that the autobiographical pact is firmly established in this work while Winterson claims to be still “reading [her]self as a fiction [rather] than as a fact” (154). In its “public enactment of private experience” (Luckhurst 131), it divulges many very personal details. Winterson writes about relationship breakdown, madness, and attempted suicide, and she does not shun mentioning names of those around her, even when they are well-known. *Why Be Happy*, however, is clearly not “[t]he womb to tomb of an interesting life” (Winterson 2012, 154). Not only is it a memoir rather than an autobiography; it also has an unconventional episodic structure. Van der Wiel explains that “[a]fter recounting her disastrous visit home with Vicky for the Christmas holidays in 1982, ... Winterson informs the reader ... of the enormous narrative leap (to 2007) about to follow” (2014, 177). The first ten chapters constitute a memoir about her childhood in Accrington. They present “an incomplete and fragmentary slice of life, a hybrid of history and personal narrative, uncertainly locating experience between self and others” (Luckhurst 118). This is the part of the adoption story which her first novel had turned into a cover story. The eleventh chapter relates the last time she would ever see Mrs Winterson, mentioned above. Especially after the “Intermission”, which constitutes the enormous narrative leap of twenty-five years, the book proceeds as an “adoption-as-trauma” memoir (Van der Wiel 2014, 177). This uneven-paced structure reflects how identity is something which is “in the making” in life and life writing.

While the childhood of the precocious girl in the fantastic tale that is *Oranges* is traumatic enough, *Why Be Happy* goes to show that the black humour served to disguise and make bearable

the true awfulness of much that took place within the walls of the two-up two-down in Accrington:

I told my version – faithful and invented, accurate and misremembered, shuffled in time. I told myself as a hero, and me thrown on the coastline of humankind, and finding it not altogether human, and rarely kind.

And I suppose that the saddest thing for me, thinking about the cover version that is *Oranges*, is that I wrote a story that I could live with. The other one was too painful. I could not survive it. (Winterson 2012, 6)

This passage demonstrates how difficult it is to determine whether *Oranges*, as autobiographical fiction, was written, according to Winterson, with or without truthfulness in mind. The quality of being “invented” and the quality of being “misremembered” are inherent in life writing, which is the umbrella under which autobiographical fiction falls. Winterson, however, seems to have expanded these categories in order to be able to grasp the reality of being raised by such a grotesque mother. The result is one possible response to trauma, one which resists the pressure of the real by resorting to a more enduring than enduring narrative. She could not have “survived” writing a work like *Why Be Happy* in the 1980s, but it became her means of survival in the 2010s. Perhaps *Oranges* had to be written before *Why Be Happy* because it made her realise “truth” which could then be worked with and worked through. In terms of trauma theory, Winterson’s alpha-function was upset at the time of *Oranges* and her writing could not or not entirely recover it either, but *Why Be Happy* can function as container for Winterson because *Oranges* was a stepping stone and its subject matter had meanwhile gained undeniable urgency.

Without going into the adoption, which will be analysed in detail in the following chapter, this section will conclude with a brief reflection on “truth”. “I am often asked, in a tick-box kind of way,” Winterson writes, “what is ‘true’ and what is not ‘true’ in *Oranges*” (6). Her use of inverted commas shows an awareness of the slippery terrain on which any reference to truth is made. A series of questions which inquisitive readers might ask follows, as well as the assertion that those questions are unanswerable. She explains how elements with an ambiguous status may actually matter greatly:

I can say that there is a character in *Oranges* called Testifying Elsie who looks after the little Jeanette and acts as a soft wall against the hurt(ling) force of Mother.

I wrote her in because I couldn't bear to leave her out. I wrote her in because I really wished it had been that way. When you are a solitary child you find an imaginary friend.

There was no Elsie. There was no one like Elsie. Things were much lonelier than that. (6-7)

Elsie was invented in an effort to capture or imagine the meaning of Jeanette's experience. Winterson needed an imaginary friend – she may or may not have had one, but that is not the point here – and understandably grants her younger, fictionalised self the pleasure of knowing someone like Elsie Norris. Another passage merits particular notice:

Truth for anyone is a very complex thing. For a writer, what you leave out says as much as those things you include. What lies beyond the margin of the text? The photographer frames the shot; writers frame their world.

Mrs Winterson objected to what I had put in, but it seemed to me that what I had left out was the story's silent twin. There are so many things that we can't say, because they are too painful. We hope that the things we can say will soothe the rest, or appease it in some way. Stories are compensatory. The world is unfair, unjust, unknowable, out of control.

When we tell a story we exercise control, but in such a way as to leave a gap, an opening. It is a version, but never the final one. And perhaps we hope that the silences will be heard by someone else, and the story can continue, can be retold.

When we write we offer the silence as much as the story. Words are the part of silence that can be spoken. (8)

Beyond the margin of *Oranges*, which is a compensatory narrative, lies harsh reality for Winterson: too harsh to be articulated, let alone to be published. The inclusion of, say, Elsie speaks of a narrative exclusion which stands for a lack of consolation in Winterson's life. *Why Be Happy* thus also performs a function for *Oranges*: it shows the way to the margins, gaps, openings, silences, and passageways of the novel. It encourages not an autobiographical rereading, but an exercise of the imagination for reading literature.

Winterson asserts that her adoptive mother would really have preferred her to have been silent, and she meaningfully goes on to connect silence and trauma. The subject of trauma has so

far been dealt with in relation to writing, whereas Winterson discusses it in relation to reading, or others' writing.

I believe in fiction and the power of stories because that way we speak in tongues. We are not silenced. All of us, when in deep trauma, find we hesitate, we stammer; there are long pauses in our speech. The thing is stuck. We get our language back through the language of others. We can turn to the poem. We can open the book. Somebody has been there for us and deep-dived the words.

I needed words because unhappy families are conspiracies of silence. The one who breaks the silence is never forgiven. He or she has to learn to forgive him or herself. (9)

This passage shows that Winterson is aware of how a traumatic experience typically manifests itself: it cannot be incorporated unproblematically within memory, so it shows resistance to thought and articulation. The words spoken by others can offer a means to control and gain distance from the event experienced by yourself, so that a memory is recovered which is literally thinkable. Because the first paragraph unmistakably broaches the subject of trauma (for the first time in the work and in detail), the second paragraph will inevitably be read in the light of trauma by many readers, which makes it painfully personal. It is not entirely clear what exactly is unforgivable about breaking the silence, but perhaps the one who breaks the silence is blamed or punished by others for their sins: the others may feel that he or she has brought shame on all of them and should regret this deed. It is hardly surprising that Mrs Winterson should be upset, but her daughter took the first step in healing herself through the production of *Oranges; Why Be Happy* pardons Winterson and her mother. Literature was a tricky business in the Winterson family home, but it is also Winterson's way out.

### **2.2.2 Reading and writing as empowerment**

The author fashions herself as a reader in *Why Be Happy*, using the Bible, fairy tales, and other texts as means of self-discovery and self-creation. She not only does this, she also makes it explicit, so that it becomes a case of auto-representation, a carefully thought-out move in a game of constructing a distinct posture – something to bear in mind. Winterson had recourse to stories at an early age already. She was “very often full of rage and despair” and “always lonely”, because there were many fights, but she has also always been “in love with life” (Winterson 2012, 21). Hovering between hope and fear stimulated the young girl's imagination:

When I was locked outside, or the other favourite, locked in the coal-hole, I made up stories and forgot about the cold and the dark. I know these are ways of surviving, but maybe a refusal, any refusal, to be broken lets in enough light and air to keep believing in the world – the dream of escape. (21)

Winterson treats her punishments lightly, though each one must have left a painful, indelible memory. She had her imagination, however, and the resulting stories had a soothing effect on her. Together with the Bible, which taught her about God's love, the made-up stories weakened her fear and strengthened her hope.

The Wintersons owned six books. In *Why Be Happy*, Winterson mentions the Bible, two commentaries on the Bible, a nineteenth-century copy of *Morte d'Arthur* by Thomas Malory, and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. The list in the chapter "Art & Life" in *Art Objects* deviates slightly. Mrs Winterson was convinced – "knew" – that "sedition and controversy are fired by printed matter" (33). When she was asked by her daughter why they could not have normal, secular books, she answered: "The trouble with a book is that you never know what's in it until it's too late" (33). The young girl thereupon began to read books in secret. "[M]y mother didn't want books falling into my hands. It never occurred to her that I fell into the books – that I put myself inside them for safe keeping" (36). She turned to books for support while growing up. Fairy tales provided her with valuable clues about human nature. "Fairy tales warn us," Winterson writes, "that there is no such thing as standard size" (35). The Grail stories by Malory have inspired her throughout her personal life and professional life. The Perceval story has given her hope throughout her personal life, hope for "a second chance" (38). Likewise, the Lancelot story appealed to her imagination because it is all about "longing and unrequited love" (38). She finds that poetry is not a choice, but a chance: "A tough life needs a tough language – and that is what poetry is. That is what literature offers – a language powerful enough to say how it is" (40). In her way of thinking, it is not "a hiding place", but "a finding place" (40).

When her books were discovered and burned by Mrs Winterson, she began to memorise concise, personally significant versions of them: "I had lines in me – a string of guiding lights. I had language" (42). Thus, she got the thing of which Mrs Winterson had been in charge in the past. "Fiction and poetry," she writes, "are doses, medicines. What they heal is the rupture reality makes on the imagination" (42). The tangible books were gone, but the perforce distilled substance was safely stored inside herself. In other words, when she could no longer put herself

inside the books, she simply put the books inside herself. Moreover, she decided that she could write her own books and thus draw the chalk circle of *Oranges* around herself.

The burning of the books made her feel even less at home with her family. She believes that “[b]ooks don’t make a home – they are one” (61). With the tangible books, part of her sense of home was irreversibly destroyed and another sense of self had to be built inside. This process was shaken when the exorcism took place. “I would do whatever they wanted,” she says about Mrs Winterson and the elders, “but only on the outside. On the inside I would build another self – one that they couldn’t see. Just like after the burning of the books” (82). However many setbacks Winterson had, even when they involved books, literature was her salvation long before she became a published as well as celebrated writer.

The Bible has played an important part in Winterson’s social development and artistic growth. Though Winterson overtly renounces evangelicalism, the Bible is not a negligible factor in her life, because her early exposure to biblical language gave her a profound sense of “language as something holy” (Winterson 1996, 153). It is not only biblical form, but also biblical content which has rendered her life more meaningful, as well as the lives of those around her:

I saw a lot of working-class men and women – myself included – living a deeper, more thoughtful life than would have been possible without the Church. These were not educated people; Bible study worked their brains. They met after work in noisy discussion. The sense of belonging to something big, something important, lent unity and meaning. (Winterson 2012, 68)

She emphatically incorporates her class and creed in her posture. *Why Be Happy* is clearly more subtle in the way it approaches religion than *Oranges*, selecting those elements of organised religion which have shaped the author in a positive sense. The quotes from the Scriptures which she used to find in her hockey boots and the scrolls from the Promise Box which she would find by her plate at mealtimes – mostly frightening rather than comforting words – were without exception devoured: “cheery or depressing, it was all reading and reading was what I wanted to do. Fed words and shod with them, words became clues. Piece by piece I knew they would lead me somewhere else” (101). The road to somewhere else was paved with recitations. Reciting from the Bible or from literary works helped her fight off loneliness and fear, which explains her belief that art has a healing power.



When Mrs Winterson was confronted with Jeanette and Janey after she and her husband had returned from the annual holiday, during which the teenage girls had broken into the house, she said: “You’re no daughter of mine” (112), whereupon Winterson writes: “It hardly mattered. It was too late for lines like that now. I had a language of my own and it wasn’t hers” (112). Winterson’s linguistic talent was fostered by a close combination of her mother and the Bible, whereas she has at this point found a language, her language, or *the* language, which perhaps is what writing is. These separate languages may coexist, but it is implied that the speakers cannot truly communicate with each other any longer on account of insurmountable differences.

Winterson repeatedly swears by reading yourself as a fiction as well as (or: rather than) as a fact, which she regards as a fruitful and liberating way of conceiving yourself; reading literature reinforces this growth:

Reading things that are relevant to the facts of your life is of limited value. The facts are, after all, only the facts, and the yearning passionate part of you will not be met there. That is why reading ourselves as a fiction as well as fact is so liberating. The wider we read the freer we become. Emily Dickinson barely left her homestead in Amherst, Massachusetts, but when we read, ‘My life stood – a loaded gun’ we know we have met an imagination that will detonate life, not decorate it. (117)

For Winterson, who is “fascinated with identity and how you define yourself,” Woolf’s *Orlando* and Stein’s *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* were crucial, because “[r]eading yourself as a fiction as well as a fact is the only way to keep the narrative open – the only way to stop the story running away under its own momentum, often towards an ending no one wants” (119). This particular form of self-conception encompasses the idea that identity is something fluid and fragmented, just as “truth” is unstable and not universally acknowledged: unfixed. When Winterson was young, reading literature set her thinking about the purpose of art, the nature of truth, and identity. It was in desperation that she left home at sixteen, but there was still, as always, a spark of hope for her: “There is always a wild card. And what I had were books. What I had, most of all, was the language that books allowed. A way to talk about complexity. A way to ‘keep the heart awake to love and beauty’ (Coleridge)” (120). Literature gave her a language which enabled her to interpret herself and cope with life, but also burst with life. “Reading is where the wild things are” (144), but the same turned out to be true of writing for Winterson.

Winterson has a vehement desire to “detonate” life through writing, which entails a method which does justice to its elusiveness. The chapters after the “Intermission” focus considerably less on both reading and writing than the ones which come before it, but they do clearly connect these subjects to Winterson’s adoption:

Flash forward to 2007 and I have done nothing about finding my past. It isn’t ‘my past’, is it? I have written over it. I have recorded on top of it. I have repainted it. Life is layers, fluid, unfixed, fragments. I never could write a story with a beginning, a middle and an end in the usual way because it felt untrue to me. That is why I write as I do and how I write as I do. It isn’t a method; it’s me. (156)

This illustrates how the way you conceive yourself should be considered in relation to others: since history renders impossible an absolute sense of identity, Winterson’s past is not hers alone. Identity is enmeshed, just like no text is an island: “I tend to work obsessively with texts,” she remarks at one point, “and I embed them in my work” (160). She inserts various texts in the story of “her” past, which makes the subject matter even more rewritten and relational. The supposed untruthfulness of a story which is conventionally structured is located in the perceived incompleteness of or hiatus in her life as an adoptee, as Winterson explains in the first chapter of her memoir. Her truthfulness in turn emerges in the acknowledgement of non-linearity. This is not chaos, but order or clarity in its own way: “Creativity is on the side of health – it isn’t the thing that drives us mad,” she writes when she is at her most self-destructive, “it is the capacity in us that tries to save us from madness” (171). In the “Coda”, she asserts that narratives not only bring empowerment, but also require resignation: “I had to know the story of my beginnings but I have to accept that this is a version too. It is a true story but it is still a version” (229). As a reader of the story of her life, then, Winterson recognises the complexity of herself and adoption, accepting the antinomy regarding the weight attached to her beginnings.

Reading life and writing as fact and fiction is what matters for Jeanette and Winterson. Winterson prefers herself as a character in her own fiction, because it is a truthful way of gaining knowledge about truth, life (or particularly what it means to be human), and the purpose of art. Jeanette’s refusal of aspects of the Biblical tradition in *Oranges* is the young girl’s self-fashioning. The self becomes a constantly shifting entity, a product of language and narrative (also adapted from the Bible), and ultimately a story to be told. The discourses of fairy tale and fantasy in the novel

emphasise the role of storytelling in our arrangement of experience. The intertexts convey the understanding that experience cannot be explained by a single, overarching narrative. *Why Be Happy* develops this idea, and Winterson explains that and how *Oranges* was really an approach to loneliness, fear, and the silence of trauma. Reading and writing are shown to be inextricably bound up with each other and survival. In conclusion, the distinction between fact and fiction is self-delusion. History and story are like “knots” in a game of “cat’s cradle” (Winterson 2014, 119). Learning to take pleasure in the tangle leads to clarity.

## Chapter 3: Narrativising and working through the adoption

“‘I’m your mother,’ she said very quietly. ‘She was a carrying case.’”

(Winterson 2014, 129)

This third and final chapter discusses the presence and representation of Winterson’s adoption as well as any attempts undertaken by her at working it through in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (section 3.1) and *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* (section 3.2). In what way and to what effect for the adoptee do these works represent the traumatic experience of the adoption? This chapter examines how in *Oranges* the biological mother is narratively suppressed by both the adoptive mother and adoptee author, and what the causes and effects are of this (3.1.1). It also investigates how the novel portrays the domineering Mrs Winterson and what the most salient features, tensions, and developments in the relationship between her and her daughter are (3.1.2). The chapter continues with an analysis of how exactly *Why Be Happy* fills in what the novel left out, focusing again on the dominance of Mrs Winterson (3.2.1). In addition to this, it describes the fact that Winterson explains the behaviour of her younger self in the light of adoption. The chapter concludes with an analysis which reveals how Winterson can work through her past in spite of the fact that her trauma has become an integral part of her identity and her writing (3.2.2). Thus, the discussion of *Why Be Happy* first deals with the chapters before the “Intermission” and then with the chapters after the “Intermission” so as to naturally follow the representation of trauma and its influence on the construction of authorship.

### **3.1 *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit***

#### **3.1.1 Shutting out and filling in**

Winterson had told her own story in *Oranges*, making herself into a fiction with the assistance of various other stories. This can be read as “a successful attempt to liberate herself from the story or ‘scripture’ that Mrs Winterson and the Church had chosen for her – that of the heterosexual missionary – and of the consequences of her refusal of that role” (Van der Wiel 2014, 180). The reworking of their story and language into her own is what grants Jeanette and Winterson agency and authority. The revision functions as container rather than embellishment: it makes the “facts” tolerable and thinkable by converting overwhelming anxieties into bearable emotions for both

“I”s. Regarding trauma, the mixing of alternative stories with Jeanette’s coming-of-age narrative indicates “a level of detachment on the writer’s part from the personal material,” which implies “a degree of working-through of the raw experience” (182). The mingling suggests a mode of mentalisation for Jeanette on an intratextual level and for Winterson on a metatextual level. While *Oranges* is an adoption story as well as *the* book that is identified with Winterson (Winterson 2012, 181), it really only depicts the part of the story which Winterson refers to as “Winterson-world” (224). The narrator only fleetingly touches on Jeanette’s adoption halfway through.

These passages have a coincidental and ephemeral character. When Jeanette finds out how Mrs Winterson had rewritten the ending of *Jane Eyre*, she compares it with the day she discovered her adoption papers while searching for a pack of playing cards: “I have never since played cards, and I have never since read *Jane Eyre*” (Winterson 2014, 96). In a similarly coincidental way, falling in love with Melanie reminds Jeanette of the uncertainty she felt following what she calls “That Awful Occasion” (128). When Jeanette’s biological mother comes to claim her daughter back, Mrs Winterson resolutely sends the woman away without allowing a meeting. When Jeanette dares say, ““She’s my mother,”” Mrs Winterson hits her in the face; ““I am your mother,”” she insists, ““she was a carrying case”” (129). They never speak of the incident again, neither does *Oranges*.

Additionally, the adoption motif has only fairly recently been academically investigated, viz by Margot Gayle Backus in 2001. About “That Awful Occasion” she writes that “Jeanette’s birth mother is as suppressed as she could possibly be, appearing only indirectly and symptomatically even in the scene to which she is narratively central” (143). The scene “symbolically reaffirm[s]” “the bond between Jeanette and her adoptive mother ... as the sole arbiter of Jeanette’s identity” (143). Adoption, like class and sexuality, is identified in the novel as “a privileged site for the generation of ideological power” (135). As mentioned earlier, Jeanette describes her evangelical mother as having brought her in “to join her in a tag match against the Rest of the World” (Winterson 2014, 5). Adoption apparently has the power to generate ideological force enough to enable Mrs Winterson to take on “the Rest of the World”. It makes possible a radical renegotiation of the narrative that is her life. The beginning of the novel signals this. Jeanette recalls that her mother had “a mysterious attitude towards the begetting of children; it wasn’t that she couldn’t do it, more that she didn’t want to do it” (5-6). The adoption

of a foundling was a way to radically reconstitute her life story: she emulates the perpetual virginity of Mary, the most prominent figure of female power in Christianity.

Mrs Winterson's pitifully passive husband is in a comical way hardly present in the narrative, in the sense that Jeanette "thought he was nice, though he didn't say much" (48). The suppression of the girl's biological origin is much darker, though optimistic interpretations also exist and are almost equally valid. According to Backus, this suppression is a "fertile absence" (141), for Jeanette because she derives her gift of vision from it and for her mother because it empowers her in the sense that the process of rearing a child dedicated to a holy mission provides her with a way out. Adoption, next to marriage and religion, is used strategically by this middle-class woman to preserve her imperilled class position, though largely at her daughter's expense. Yet, while the suppression or absence may be so-called fertile in terms of vision or creativity, it is ultimately what Van der Wiel calls "a defensive response to trauma" (2014, 184). Jeanette senses this towards the end of *Oranges*: "the things I had buried where exhuming themselves; clammy fears and dangerous thoughts and the shadows I had put away for a more convenient time. I could not put them away forever, there is always a day of reckoning" (Winterson 2014, 219). *Why Be Happy* can in this respect be regarded as the result of a day of reckoning for Winterson.

Jeanette's adoptive mother has without a doubt a "superior discursive and definitional power" relative to Jeanette's biological mother (Backus 143), and social class and sexual norms certainly play an important part in this dishonest portrayal. Backus explains that "Jeanette's adoptive mother has symbolically, and, indeed, all but literally, maintained 'perfect' sexual continence, while Jeanette's birth mother has demonstrably violated bourgeois norms, mandating sexual continence for women prior to marriage" (143-144). The adoption of a girl on whom she could enforce strict moral and sexual norms – a clean slate – could restore the balance which her premarital sexual transgression had jeopardised (144). Backus illustrates the point of how Mrs Winterson puts herself up on a pedestal at the cost of the other mother: "Jeanette's adoption brings her adoptive mother into a productive symbolic opposition to her 'fallen' birth mother, against whom Jeanette's adoptive mother's own sexuality is symbolically reconstituted as unimpeachable" (144). Jeanette's adoptive mother reduces Jeanette's biological mother to an object for Jeanette: "a carrying case". The woman at the door is dehumanised by Mrs Winterson. Jeanette is pitilessly denied the forbidden narrative of its bearer. Adoption in this novel thus comes to represent the triumph of one narrative over another, but in an unrighteous way and with

the denigration and victimisation of biological mother and daughter, respectively, as a consequence. The betrayal means that Jeanette is once again deprived of her own right to self-definition, this time due to the different discourses of her two mothers which vie for power.

The interludes of the novel constitute Jeanette's subjective reaction to her mother's process of self-reinvention. These counternarratives represent a lack of and yearning for empowerment. Backus explains that "Jeanette's mother's imaginative self-revision, while it cruelly limits Jeanette's access to basic information concerning her own origins and identity, inadvertently provides Jeanette with both motivation and licence to herself imaginatively recreate" (138-9). The interludes make no mention of biological parents or origins. They obliquely express and simultaneously mask the experience of adoption. The interludes cause narrative rupture. They correspond to research showing that "adoptees frequently have recourse to fantasy as a means of making sense of their unspeakable and incomprehensible situation" (140). Jeanette's biological mother, as said, is conspicuous by her absence. The first interlude – which tells the story of "a brilliant and beautiful princess" (Winterson 2014, 13) who is extremely sensitive and takes over an old hunchback's position as caretaker of a small village – mythologises Jeanette's adoption as "an entry into an enchanted, matriarchal realm" (Backus 140) and imagines her life prior to adoption as "a site of discomfort, a place into which she was constitutionally unable to fit" (140). Backus compellingly develops the absence: "[t]he perfect (but not flawless) woman who tries to teach the idealistic prince the secret of perfect balance seems always to have inhabited her obscure corner of the kingdom" (141); in other words, the woman or Jeanette has no beginnings. Likewise, "Sir Perceval's earliest memories begin at King Arthur's court, and Winnet comes from nowhere" (141).

The first fantasy interlude romanticises Jeanette's adoptive mother to a certain extent (though of course the dying hunchback recruits a displaced princess with the indecent intention of letting herself off the hook), whereas she is reconceptualised in more complex ways in the other fantasy interludes, resulting in a new dimension. She takes the form of "a wounded prince who grows increasingly murderous as he continues to defend his deluded quest for a flawless bride" (141). She inspires pity and disgust, because she is blind to the impossibility and undesirability of the vision which she has and lets nothing and no one stand in her way. She also appears as King Arthur to Jeanette's Sir Perceval in a segment which shows her as an abandoned and disillusioned parent figure in distress. Finally, Mrs Winterson provides the model for "the sorcerer who

beguiles and tricks the young Winnet, first adopting her and teaching her his magic, then ultimately casting her out in punishment for her normal human desire for a mate” (141). She is imagined to have lost her sense of reality, though she has tied a thread around her daughter’s button, which is a sign of an enduring bond between them. Thus, the narrative is multi-layered, intricately composed of competing subjectivities – that is, as far as Jeanette’s adoptive mother is concerned. Her biological mother is eclipsed, which suggests that “[the] repressed knowledge yet unremembered experience of being given up for adoption” (Van der Wiel 2014, 185) underlies Jeanette’s traumatic adoption story.

### 3.1.2 The invisible thread between them

Being given up for adoption is something which protagonist and author are unable or unwilling to work through in *Oranges* (Van der Wiel 2014, 185). Artistic creation is an attempt at mastery of a distressing experience and can temporarily offer control where there is none. Van der Wiel quotes Winterson’s discussion of Mexican painter Frida Kahlo’s self-portraits as evidence. Winterson argues that people should regard the works of art as “retaliation” rather than as “compensation”:

Painting herself as obsessively as she did was a way of regaining control over a body that belonged to doctors. ... The elaborate dressing up, the stylized hair and face, the ritual of posing: are formalized ways of breaking free. She could never free herself from her corset or from her injuries, but she could free herself into her own image, and that is what she did. (186)

Freeing herself into her own image is exactly what Winterson had done herself in *Oranges*, in her case regarding her upbringing and coming out (186). What is done in reality cannot be undone in the work of art, but the loss or damage can be recast or rewritten to shift the focus. Jeanette’s biological mother is shut out or eradicated as narrative agent. The reader is never told what Jeanette hears from the other side of the wall on “That Awful Occasion”. The narrative suppression, however, is not indiscernible and the story subtly acknowledges the traumatic past, though recovery fails to occur. There is no painful yearning for the absent biological mother, because the humour, playfulness, and performativity of the experimental novel do not provide opportunities for traumatic realism to manifest itself. The fantasy interludes puncture the main narrative, but they do not do so in the form of eruptions of trauma. The grotesque Mrs Winterson



is another reason why the biological mother and the yearning for the biological mother are overshadowed: the invisible thread never snaps.

In the beginning of *Oranges*, Jeanette is unwilling to keep Mrs Winterson at a distance. Since she is a child, this is not surprising, but the way other people respond to her mother is telling. There is a lack of understanding between the female Wintersons and the predominantly female community. When Jeanette feels sad because she is scorned by teachers and peers, she tells her mother in a frenzy of nostalgia and despair what her life was like before school. She can make friends, but not keep them. Her mother replies: “We are called to be apart” (Winterson 2014, 56). The girl relates that her mother did not have many friends either: “People didn’t understand the way she thought; neither did I, but I loved her because she always knew exactly why things happened” (56). The incomprehension extends to the relationship between mother and daughter, but Mrs Winterson reassures Jeanette. Mrs Winterson offers Jeanette a framework of understanding the world, and her daughter at this point hangs on to it because she simply does not have the need to and means of making alterations to her mother’s frame of reference: mother and daughter are still in a dual team here. When Jeanette is handing out tracts in the market on a rainy Saturday, Mrs Arkwright keeps saying: “Tha mother’s mad, tha knows,” whereupon Jeanette thinks: “She might have been right, but there was nothing I could do about it” (78). The possibility of eccentricity is accepted, but not pondered on. In another passage, Miss Jewsbury, a closeted lesbian, comes out for Jeanette and simultaneously chides her for talking unguardedly to her mother about her feelings: “No one need ever have found out if you hadn’t tried to explain to that mother of yours” (135). Jeanette murmurs: “She’s all right” (135), to which Miss Jewsbury replies with conviction: “She’s mad” (135). Further on in this chapter, Jeanette experiences an even more rude awakening: “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” (145). The exposure of her lesbianism and the expulsion which follows open her eyes to reality.

What lies at the bottom of the declining relationship between mother and daughter is betrayal, an idea which Jeanette herself more than once expresses explicitly. After the people of the church had tried to “quarantine, starve, argue, and pray the lesbian out of her” (Rusk 111) and her mother had burned all writing, Jeanette draws the conclusion that “[t]here are different sorts of treachery, but betrayal is betrayal wherever you find it” (Winterson 2014, 143). This is when

her mother falls from her pedestal in Jeanette's eyes: "In her head she was still queen, but not my queen anymore, not the White Queen anymore" (142). Jeanette is not simply disappointed, but overwhelmed and disillusioned, because her trust is violated and proved to have been unfounded. When the teenager proves reprobate, Mrs Winterson betrays another part of the communal selfhood which Jeanette experiences among the women of the church and thought the two of them shared. It is the part of Jeanette's identity which Rusk calls "a conviction of women's spiritual autonomy in the church" (116). Mrs Winterson is so eager to disassociate herself from lesbianism that she supports the pastor's claim that "the message belonged to the men" (Winterson 2014, 171). Rusk aptly remarks that she is "willing to marginalize herself in order to cut off Jeanette yet more drastically" (116). Jeanette cannot make sense of her life anymore and her disillusionment turns into impotent anger: "I knew my mother hoped I would blame myself," she thinks to herself, "but I didn't. I knew now where the blame lay. If there's such a thing as spiritual adultery, my mother was a whore" (Winterson 2014, 172). The last chapter, called "Ruth" and concerned with the older Jeanette's visit to Mrs Winterson, reflects the themes of family and ties between women which are explored in "Ruth" in the Bible and relates them to betrayal in love affairs, at the same time echoing the first mention of betrayal:

One thing I am certain of, I do not want to be betrayed, but that's quite hard to say, casually, at the beginning of a relationship. It's not a word people use very often, which confuses me, because there are different kinds of infidelity, but betrayal is betrayal wherever you find it. By betrayal, I mean promising to be on your side, then being on somebody else's. (217)

Because of Mrs Winterson's disloyalty, Jeanette has developed fear of conjugal infidelity and trusting people. When people ask her whether she ever thinks of going back, she says to herself:

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. ... 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. (204-5)

Remembering and returning are inconvenient, but also inevitable: the thread around her button makes her go "across in time" (216).

The personal introduction to *Oranges* points out that Winterson has embraced the prevailing identity narrative which was engendered by traumaculture. As Van der Wiel explains in her essay “Trauma as Site of Identity” (2009), this involves “an identity rooted in a conception of trauma entailing an abortive process of working through and acting out, and fostered by recurrent self-narration” (137). The experience of being given up for adoption and the experience of being forced to leave Church and family must have given her the feeling of being marginal and disposable. Through writing *Oranges*, Winterson seems to have come some way in detaching herself from the experience she describes in it, in the sense of having consciously created a certain distance from the personal, traumatic material. At the end of *Oranges*, when Jeanette is about to meet her mother, who pretends that nothing has ever happened, Jeanette once more reflects on her repressed “clammy fears and dangerous thoughts” (Winterson 2014, 219). Psychological trauma, however, does not allow itself to be repressed like feelings do; it persistently re-emerges in a different guise. After the visit, Jeanette thinks in quiet, helpless resignation about her fate: “Families, real ones, are chairs and tables and the right number of cups, but I had no means of joining one, and no means of dismissing my own; she had tied a thread around my button, to tug when she pleased” (224). This also goes for Winterson, who compulsively repeats versions of her childhood in fictional works. That is, until *Why Be Happy*.

### **3.2 *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?***

#### **3.2.1 The chapters before the “Intermission”: Resuming the thread of *Oranges***

Whereas one of the foremost repercussions of experiencing a traumatic event is a crisis of subjectivity, trauma can paradoxically also become the basis of identity and offer the individual sublimity, hence the term “founding trauma”. Not only does psychological trauma become an articulation of subjectivity – the event offers the individual the grounds to firmly secure a specific account of selfhood – but it also becomes a test for the self and an entry into the extraordinary. As Van der Wiel explains in *Literary Aesthetics of Trauma*, what this means for the traumatic subject is ultimately that “the trauma has to be endlessly reiterated in order to sustain this specific identity” (193). Working through would mean disintegration of the newly found identity. Winterson is aware of this: “All my life I have worked from the wound. To heal it would mean an end to one identity – the defining identity” (Winterson 2012, 223). Her adoption trauma shaped her and she in turn gave form to her posture by means of the traumatic event located in her

childhood. Van der Wiel argues that Winterson's *The PowerBook* (2001), *Weight* (2006), and *The Stone Gods* (2007) are concerned with representations of origins and are characteristic for their compulsive retelling of the traumatic adoption story (194). It is in *Why Be Happy* that the wound appears full-scale and that an attempt is made to heal it, though "the healed wound is not the disappeared wound" and "[Winterson] will always be recognisable by [her] scar" (Winterson 2012, 223).

The founding trauma in *Oranges* and *Why Be Happy* resides in the imprint of loss – the loss of the birth mother and the loving childhood which she might have given. Whereas the semi-autobiographical novel sharply played with fact and fiction, the publication of a full-blown memoir seems to be the logical pinnacle of the increasing pressure of the traumatic real. As a trauma memoir, it encourages a "reading mode" of "complete identification, affective connection rather than aesthetic analysis" (Luckhurst 134). Indeed, the central tenor of the work is one of revealing and sharing of traumatic experience with the reading public. Of course, Winterson's adoption and difficult childhood were to a certain extent already publicly known, but the disclosure of a breakdown and suicide attempt must come as a shock for most people, just as the subsequent search for her biological mother must come as a surprise after the first chapters. In line with what was concluded with reference to *Oranges*, Winterson very directly states about her adoptive mother, who was no longer alive: "I know that she adopted me because she wanted a friend (she had none)... She hated being a nobody, and like all children, adopted or not, I have had to live out some of her un-lived life. We do that for our parents – we don't really have a choice" (Winterson 2012, 1). Winterson had come to the realisation "how small [her mother] was to herself. The baby nobody picked up. The uncarried child still inside her" (3).

The chapters before the "Intermission" are largely about oppressive "Winterson-world". The colourful descriptions of Mrs Winterson maintain her narrative dominance, and this hinders working through. Winterson begins as follows: "When my mother was angry with me, which was often, she said, 'The Devil led us to the wrong crib'" (1). She explains that there had been a little boy called Paul in the crib next to her in the orphanage, who was her "ghostly brother" because his "sainted self" or good behaviour was always invoked when she was naughty (10). Angelical Paul supposedly would never have made her "malicious" mistakes: "If they had taken Paul instead of me, it would have been different, better. I was supposed to be a pal ... like she had been to her mother" (11). This illustrates Winterson's conviction that children sense how their

parents are sad or sorry about things which happened or did not happen in the past and how children feel the burden of setting things right, like an emotional legacy. Adoption is a complicated case: “Adoption is outside. You act out what it feels like to be the one who doesn’t belong. And you act it out by trying to do to others what has been done to you. It is impossible to believe that anyone loves you for yourself” (7). In other words, the object of relinquishment feels inclined to be the subject of repulsion. Adoption becomes a primal wound and adoptees display a perpetual acting-out of their original abandonment.

Popular adoption writer Nancy Newton Verrier has developed a model of adoption as primal wound and assumes that adoptees suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (Van der Wiel 2014, 211). She encourages newly adoptive parents to interpret any “unexplained sadness or crying” as “expressions of the child’s loss of the biological mother” and to talk about it with the child, put it into words, in order to make the fact of the adoption thinkable (qtd. in Van der Wiel 2014, 212). Margaret Homans problematizes this as potentially “imposing a fiction on the child and obliging her to mourn a loss she does not feel” (Homans 8). Yet, Winterson gives the following account in *Why Be Happy* of her fits of screaming:

Until I was two years old, I screamed. This was evidence in plain sight that I was possessed by the Devil. Child psychology hadn’t reached Accrington, and in spite of important work by Winnicott, Bowlby and Balint on attachment, and the trauma of early separation from the love object that is the mother, a screaming baby wasn’t a broken-hearted baby – she was a Devil baby. (20)

There is a difference here:

While Homans’s is an important critical intervention into a seemingly blanket response to a real-life situation, Winterson’s retrospective translation of her prolonged screaming as a baby into an expression of mourning for her birth mother works precisely *against* a parentally imposed fiction – in this case, of religious fundamentalism. In rewriting Mrs Winterson’s story of the Devil baby, just as she had done with Jeanette in *Oranges*, she reclaims agency over her own childhood – even though this would have taken place too early for her to actually remember. (Van der Wiel 2014, 212)

Reclaiming agency over her life is what Winterson does in this memoir, and she juxtaposes her desire with Mrs Winterson’s:

We were matched in our lost and losing. I had lost the warm safe place, however chaotic, of the first person I loved. I had lost my name and my identity. Adopted children are dislodged. My mother felt that the whole of life was a grand dislodgement. We both wanted to go Home. (Winterson 2012, 23)

She reconstructs a memory of her abandonment and suggests the possibility of three successive identities: before the adoption and trauma, after the adoption and during the trauma, and after recovery. She also feels that she could actually have undone her adoptive mother's sense of dislodgement: "I was a miracle in that I could have taken her out of her life and into a life she would have liked a lot. It never happened, but that doesn't mean it wasn't there to happen" (31). This is what her mother believed too, but the difference is that Mrs Winterson expected it, as if it were her right.

When she talks about specific literature and its comforting characteristics, she writes that it makes bearable "another failed family – the first one was not my fault but all adopted children blame themselves. The second failure was definitely my fault" (39). It is unclear whether the last statement is uttered by the older narrating "I" or a younger narrated "I" produced by the other one and appointed her agent of narration: the ambiguity of the utterance makes it even more unpleasant. A distinctive feature of Wintersonian prose, however, is the power of its black humour to transform the most appalling experiences. Mrs Winterson's memorable warning that "[t]he trouble with a book is that you never know what's in it before it's too late" (33) is taken up and rewritten by her daughter to wittily explain the great differences between them, thus laughing away her uncertainty: "[t]he trouble with adoption is that you never know what you are going to get" (51). It is striking how often Winterson explains the behaviour of her younger self in the light of adoption. She refused to acknowledge the existence of a second grandmother, because "two mothers had meant the first one gone forever," so "[w]hy would two grandmothers not mean the same?" (52). She was seized by panic when she was taken to the hospital and settled in a high-sided bed on the children's ward: "Panic. I can feel it now. I must have thought she had taken me back to be adopted again" (53).

The loss of the birth mother encompasses another loss: the loss of the loving childhood which she might have given. Winterson writes that she never received unconditional love from her parents, which made her a "very nervous and watchful child" and "little thug" who could not relax at home (76). Mrs Winterson was heedless of or indifferent to the consequences of her

actions and the implication of this rash relationship was that love was unreliable and “dangerous” for Winterson for most of her life (77). “I began my small life ready to be given up,” she writes. This confirms her view that “[l]ove didn’t hold when I was born” (80). Mrs Winterson only exacerbated this. When, for example, Winterson’s keeping a diary was discovered, Mrs Winterson cruelly said: “I never had secrets from my mother ... but I am not your mother, am I?” (79). The loneliness ran very deep:

Were we endlessly ransacking the house, the two of us, looking for evidence of each other? I think we were – she, because I was fatally unknown to her, and she was afraid of me. Me, because I had no idea what was missing but felt the missing-ness of the missing.

We circled each other, wary, abandoned, full of longing. We came close but not close enough and then we pushed each other away forever. (103)

Mother and daughter thus shared a profound sense of expulsion and intensified this feeling in each other, which created an atmosphere of distrust and fear. “I was lonely,” Winterson frames it. “Mrs Winterson had succeeded there; her own loneliness, impossible to breach, had begun to wall us all in” (105). Love was “not an emotion,” but “the bomb site” between her and her mother (112), meaning that it was the source of all the trouble. Mrs Winterson needed her to keep herself from going under in a well of loneliness, but they were both deluged by their longing for security.

### **3.2.2 The chapters after the “Intermission”: The creation of something new**

The “Intermission” both “signifies the amnesia produced by repression of the traumatic adoption story” and “indicates that the intermediary years are – for a trauma memoir – irrelevant to the life story” (Van der Wiel 2014, 178). The chapter “The Night Sea Voyage” tells of the moment that Winterson, as a little girl, finds what she believes to be her birth certificate. The narrator briefly reflects on the significance of her discovery, noting that for a long time she did not have the desire to examine it:

I never wanted to find my birth parents – if one set of parents felt like a misfortune, two sets would be self-destructive. I had no understanding of family life. I had no idea that you could like your parents, or that they could love you enough to let you be yourself.

I was a loner. I was self-invented. I didn’t believe in biology or biography. I believed in myself. Parents? What for? Except to hurt you. (Winterson 2012, 155)

This passage captures the essence of the chapters before the “Intermission” which were just discussed, emphasising the voluntary and involuntary self-invention which mark Winterson’s posture. Mrs Winterson’s depression and dominance played a decisive role in Winterson’s youth and the first part of her memoir, but this chapter shifts the focus. It jumps forward to 2007, when Winterson actually discovers her formal adoption papers after the death of her father’s second wife, the kind-hearted Lillian. The “coincidence/synchronicity of finding those adoption papers and Deborah [Warner] leaving [her]” (169) blasts open the old wound, the “lost loss” of the birth mother (161). In the second part of her memoir, too, Winterson acknowledges the profound impact of her adoption on her literary authorship: “I have written love narratives and loss narratives – stories of longing and belonging. It all seems so obvious now – the Wintersonic obsession of love, loss and belonging. It is my mother. It is my mother. It is my mother” (160). She also recognises her trauma: “The threefold repetition of ‘It is my mother’ semantically reflects the fixation, the compulsive repetition [characteristic of trauma] exhibited by the narratives, and the triptych of ‘loss, love and belonging’” (Van der Wiel 2014, 208). She says “It *is* my mother”. The present tense urges the birth mother upon Winterson.

This is also the case in Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*, which is Winterson’s favourite Shakespeare play and declares that “that which is lost be not found” (qtd. in Winterson 2012, 161). “Read that line,” Winterson writes: Not ‘that which was lost’ or ‘has been lost’. Instead, ‘is lost’. The grammar shows us how serious is the loss. Something that happened a long time ago, yes – but not the past. This is the old present, the old loss still wounding each day. (Winterson 2014, 208). Her birth mother *is* the old loss, in the present tense, and Winterson is forced to suffer from incessant wounding: “My mother had to sever some part of herself to let me go. I have felt the wound ever since” (220). This raises the question of how much trauma is inevitable in adoptee experience and whether the loss of a birth mother always constitutes a primal wound which persists through adulthood. The idea of a primal wound is endorsed in the final chapter of *Why Be Happy* (Van der Wiel 2014, 209), though it is tempered by the assertion that “[t]he wound is symbolic and cannot even be reduced to any single interpretation” (Winterson 2012, 221). Winterson initially universalises the wound, relating it to what it means to be human (Van der Wiel 2014, 209), but this view changes when she highlights “the nearness of the wound to the gift” in stories: “the one who is wounded is marked out – literally and symbolically – by the wound. The wound is a sign of difference” (Winterson 2012, 221-2). Perceiving the wound as a



gift for the chosen few, Winterson distinguishes herself from others and accepts sublimity with open arms, which is a perfect example of auto-representation: her authorship stems from pain, was really inevitable, and is accordingly extraordinary.

Being given up for adoption does constitute a psychological injury, but whether this should always be called traumatic remains contested (Van der Wiel 2012, 210). Yet, “[e]ven without elevating adoption intrinsically to the realm of trauma, ... it is indisputable that the adoptee experience has been traumatic for Winterson” (210). After years of repression, an unfortunate combination of events triggers “the loss of everything through the fierce and unseen return of the lost loss” in her life (Winterson 2012, 169). “I began to go mad,” she puts it bluntly (161). She is confronted with “a walled-up opening” deeply buried inside her in which she finds her birth mother, “smothered in time like an anchorite” (161). This vision is the beginning of the end of repression. Winterson explains that the “lost loss” which is “experience[d] as physical” is “pre-language” (191) and characterised by its feelings of “helplessness, powerlessness and despair” (190). She realises that she cannot communicate the knowledge of her loss to others: “often I could not talk. Language left me. I was in the place before I had any language. The abandoned place” (163). The traumatic experience also haunts her with images, sensations, and impulses: “I started waking up at night and finding myself on all fours shouting ‘Mummy, Mummy’. I was wet with sweat” (162). Her trauma finally manifests itself with great intensity. It does so frighteningly unpredictably, making her feel like a “haunted house” with an “invisible thing” inside which affects her both physically and emotionally (165).

The “lost loss” ultimately leads to a failed suicide attempt. Though her mind may still have been trying to forget or repress, Winterson describes her state of confusion as follows:

The door into the dark room had swung open. ... The Bluebeard door with the bloodstained key.

The door had swung open. I had gone in. The room had no floor. I had fallen and fallen and fallen.

But I was alive.

And that night the cold stars made a constellation from the pieces of my broken mind. (169).

The lid has finally come off Pandora’s box and this development has nearly killed Winterson (Van der Wiel 2014, 211). The end of repression, however, doubles as the beginning of recovery.

A struggle starts with “the creature” inside, the “lost furious vicious child” (Winterson 2012, 171) which may be “split off and living malevolently at the bottom of the garden” but is “sharing your blood and eating your food” (172). The creature is the damaged part of Winterson and it is neither rational nor reasonable, but it does allow her to start writing again. She decides to “talk to this savage lunatic for an hour a day” (174) in order to “[contain] the oozing lunacy that had been everywhere” (175). The writing and talking which she had been busying herself with for about six months are gradually beginning to pay off: “the split part of herself starts to be reintegrated into the whole” and “the ‘broken mind’ is slowly being pieced together” (Van der Wiel 2014, 211). Change is coming.

The chapter “This Appointment Takes Place In The Past” takes Winterson back to the beginning. Strengthened by her new relationship with Susie Orbach, she has finally started the process of opening her closed adoption files. “The baby knows it has been abandoned,” Winterson writes, “I am sure of that” (180). It is therefore not only out of love that her partner accompanies her on her journey, but also to redress the loneliness of the abandonment. A statement about finding her adoption papers which Winterson made earlier in the memoir clarifies the title of the chapter: “Typewriters and yellow paper. So old. Those things look like a hundred years ago. I am a hundred years ago. Time is a gap” (159). The use of the present tense – “I *am* a hundred years ago” – creates the illusion that the past is retrievable, but it is not recoverable (Van der Wiel 2014, 212). Something else happens. Homans posits that “the reconstruction of traumatic origins can highlight the generative aspects of adoption narratives” (7):

Like (or as) trauma narratives, adoption narratives are often obsessively oriented towards an irretrievable past... Narratives of trauma and adoption ... are best understood not as about the unearthing of the veridical past, nor yet again about revealing the past to be what [J. Hillis] Miller calls the ‘absence at the origin,’ but about the creation of something new. (7)

The active creation of a new identity is what *Why Be Happy* can ultimately be seen to represent for Winterson (Van der Wiel 2014, 213). The past becomes the past.

Instead of reiterating the singular but definitional childhood event, Winterson uses the memoir to make an attempt at resolution through the search for the birth mother. “Being adopted is a passive situation,” Novy asserts. “Looking for birth parents, by contrast, is a choice” (qtd. in

Van der Wiel 2012, 213). It signals “a new direction, a renewed willingness and ability to work through the founding trauma” (Van der Wiel 2014, 213) or, in other words, a disposition to reclaim agency. For Winterson, meeting her birth mother necessitates a drastic modification to her identity: “my whole identity was built around being an orphan – and an only child. But now I had a selection of uncles and aunts . . . and who knew how many bits of brothers and sisters?” (Winterson 2012, 204). As mentioned earlier, the knowledge of having a new family also has a profound impact on her writing and authorship. The wound becomes a scar. Winterson’s posture has marked out her position in the literary field in a singular way: the wound enabled her identification. Now that the desire to keep the wound and the narrative open is gone, Winterson’s reading public may still expect her to “do Winterson” but without the compulsive return of the traumatic adoption story which characterises some of her novels. The story is moving on. “I have no idea what happens next,” Winterson concludes (230). She can continue relegating her adoption to the past and at last she can think about and face the future.

This chapter has demonstrated how exactly *Oranges* is characterised by a certain distance on Winterson’s part from the personal and traumatic material of her childhood and how *Why Be Happy* signifies a turn to the traumatic real and as such signals the necessity of a drastic modification to her identity. A complicating factor in this particular reading of *Oranges* is, of course, the fact that is necessary to make a distinction between Jeanette and Winterson while the former without doubt shares characteristics with and performs a function for the latter, but the author’s metanarrative commentary in the introduction offers freedom. In 1985, when *Oranges* was published, Winterson seems to have been unable or unwilling to work through the event of being given up for adoption. She used the novel to grant herself agency and authority via Jeanette, but this is distinctly lacking regarding her adoption. The narrative suppression of her biological mother in combination with the pervasiveness of Mrs Winterson suggests that she was still under the spell of her adoptive mother and lacked something which gave her an incentive to set to seeking recovery. In 2011, by contrast, the search for the birth mother had been triggered by the discovery of her formal adoption papers and a relationship breakdown. Winterson is tormented by eruptions of trauma and feels the need to heal her wound. She creates a new identity and bears no malice against her mothers: Mrs Winterson gave her “a dark gift, but not a useless one” (214).

## Conclusion

Founded on theory from the interrelated fields of life writing, literary theory, and trauma theory, this thesis has critically investigated the correlation between a sense of vocation (authorship) and a desire to escape from an oppressive environment or painful past (adoption, in particular) in the life writing of Jeanette Winterson. The point of departure was the idea which emerges from *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985) and *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* (2011) that her adoption and adoptive mother on the one hand and her storytelling skills and self-invention on the other hand define her and are essential. The main research question was: how does the representation of adoption as trauma in Jeanette Winterson's semi-autobiographical novel *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* and in her memoir *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* contribute to the construction of her authorship? The hypothesis broadly distinguished between the novel and the memoir. The general expectation was that in *Oranges*, Winterson is unable or unwilling to work through the trauma of adoption, whereas she employs narrative techniques to actively work it through in *Why Be Happy*: the work of art functions as a container for her, ultimately enabling her to achieve psychological distance. The critical analysis of the unique relationship between the novel and the memoir in relation to adoption and authorship has aimed to be a valuable contribution to the study of Winterson's writing as well as to advance research in the academic field of life writing.

In Chapter 2, called "Fact, fiction, and the autobiographical pact", the following sub-question was central: with regard to the author's construction of authorship, in what way and to what effect for Jeanette and Winterson do these works read life and writing as fact and fiction? What both works ultimately endorse is the socially constructed and performative nature of identity and thus of writing the self. Winterson understands the self as a fiction and life writing as a form of art. She believes that people are and mostly understand themselves through an endless series of stories. As such, reading especially literary texts and writing autobiography offer the individual an opportunity to create an identity and write the story of one's life. Selves are products of narration. The main narrative of *Oranges* is interspersed with biblical allusions as well as fantasy elements, and these strands enter into a reciprocal relationship for Jeanette. The biblical allusions are largely deployed in deliberately incongruous ways and in completely rewritten forms, so that Jeanette fashions herself through her refusal of evangelicalism. The

resulting discourses become her way of challenging the oppressive view of the parent who negotiates her initiation into the world and of developing artistically. The fantasy elements mainly perform a similar function for Jeanette, utilising her powers of language and storytelling in a literary project of self-creation and self-explanation. Though the novel offers a grotesque portrait of Mrs Winterson, Jeanette's mother is shown to be the moving force which underlies the girl's identity formation. This is exactly the point which the beginning of *Why Be Happy* gets back to. Writing becomes bound up with notions of self-invention and survival. *Oranges* is presented as a compensatory narrative with harsh reality and even trauma located beyond its margins, full of veiled black humour and deafening silence. Things may have been bad in her self-created fictional world, but reality was much worse. Being a blessing in disguise, however, the utter loneliness which was the result of her rigid upbringing did stimulate the imagination of the young writer-to-be. Winterson's posture propagates a view of literature which involves a belief that fiction can very often convey more emotional truth than fact – if these categories are distinguishable – and it brings the analysis round to trauma.

In Chapter 3, called “Narrativising and working through the adoption”, the following sub-question was central: in what way and to what effect for the adoptee do these works represent the traumatic experience of the adoption? It was in this chapter that authorship was linked up with a traumatic adoption story. The hypothesis was corroborated for *Oranges*. The *why* of Winterson's inability or unwillingness to work through the adoption trauma emerges most clearly in the memoir, but the novel suggests that author and protagonist are still under the spell of Mrs Winterson. The *how* of it all is found in the narrative suppression of the biological mother and the narrative dominance of the adoptive mother, who hangs on to Jeanette to secure an account of selfhood. Though their relationship gradually deteriorates because both mother and daughter feel betrayed by each other, the peculiar bond persists and Jeanette's emotions are deeply buried. For *Why Be Happy*, the hypothesis was not entirely corroborated. Winterson works through or at least makes a start with working through her adoption trauma, but this should be attributed both to what she did and to what she wrote. Besides, the process is not evenly spread across the memoir. The purport of the first part is one of sharing of traumatic experience with the reading public, positing it as that which typifies the author. In the second part, by contrast, Winterson shows progress by seeking and finding her biological mother and accepting the necessity of creating a new identity.

Following this line of reasoning, it is concluded that the representation of trauma in the life writing of Jeanette Winterson moves from covert to overt. This can partially be ascribed to the distinct genres of life writing as well as to the tone, style, and mood of the different works. These choices follow naturally from the manifestation of the trauma in the life of the author in 1985 and 2011 – that is, from external circumstances. Thus, the memoir functions as container due to its realism, but the working through is above all fuelled by the search for the biological mother, which in turn was initiated by Winterson's discovery of her formal adoption papers and a relationship breakdown and the subsequent "madness" or eruptions of trauma. Just like self-invention, the working through is principally practised first in living before it is continued and formalised in writing. Since her adoption constituted her founding trauma and the focus of her authorship, a chapter had to be closed and a new (literary) identity embraced. The text of the works, however, is all that the reader has to go by, so the actual self-knowledge which is gained or produced there is unknowable for the reader.

The research question which was the basis of this thesis gave much grip and generated some very valuable additional insights into the works in question. In constructing her authorship the way she does, Winterson engages with literary theory, endorses Eakin's view of life writing as a mode of self-invention and of the autobiographer as both artist and historian, and even neatly "confirms" literary trauma theory, thus representing herself as educated, a woman of wide reading. No reader will be able to get round the connecting thread in *Oranges* and *Why Be Happy* that is reading, being present in all aspects. It can also be said that Winterson is seriously inclined to not only establish a causal connection between her original abandonment and her current authorship, but also to explain the behaviour of her younger self in the light of adoption, which implies that there are retrievable memories about the relinquishment. The memoir, however, is a snapshot in time: in the middle of the adoptee's quest, adoption might seem like a plausible explanation of almost anything.

The theoretical framework which was set up in Chapter 1, "Jeanette Winterson, the self, and writing the self", was invaluable. Though literary critics have largely neglected the paradigms of trauma theory and life writing in their engagements with Winterson's oeuvre, the tools necessary to fill this void were readily available. The works which are cited in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 are mainly works which directly engage with the works under discussion in this thesis. Van der Wiel represents the category of works about *Why Be Happy* on her own, and her

pioneering work helped map out the leading idea. The works which do not directly engage with Winterson's works are infrequently cited in the main chapters, but the chapters are suffused with their ideas. The same certainly goes for the concept of authorial posture, which was briefly explained in the Introduction of this thesis. The concept itself was useful, but the elements of definition which were developed by Meizoz proved to be rather elaborate for a project of limited scope such as this one. The four levels of representation within the domain of auto-representation of Ham's posture analysis model were applicable due to their resemblance to the autobiographical "I"s of Smith and Watson. The likeness between the concepts was enlightening, but the added value of Ham's model is questionable. It was developed for fiction, but it appears to be most applicable to life writing. Scholars in this field, however, are already equipped with Smith and Watson's completely worked-out model. Nevertheless, the concept turned out to be more relevant than expected, because Winterson must alter her self-representation to make it compatible with her healed wound.

The work taken on by Van der Wiel is of inestimable value, so Winterson's original narrative compulsion to repeat the traumatic adoption story in novels does not invite further research. What does welcome further research is simply *Why Be Happy*, a work which is full of other equally significant topics. Adoption narratives generally span all members of the triad: birth parent(s), adoptive parent(s), and adoptee. Winterson's father, however, has been given little attention, though it must be said that he was more visible in the memoir than in the novel. A critical gap could be filled by making visible Winterson's depiction in the memoir of her father and men in general and comparing this with *Oranges* and any other novels which put forward Wintersonian masculinities. Another suggestion is to examine how Winterson in the memoir represents her social class in close combination with the environment in which she grew up. She emphasises that they are inextricably bound up with each other, displays pride of both, and discusses her childhood environment at length and in detail. A final suggestion is to examine the memoir in relation to other works of literary fiction which relate to adoption and authorship and connect them. An example of one such work could be *Mothering Sunday* (2016) by Graham Swift (1949), which features Jane Fairchild, orphan and housemaid, but also writer-to-be. A comparison with this work or a similar work could reveal more about the process of self-invention in adoptees, writers, and writers who were adopted.

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