Gülüştür, E. (2024). An Analysis of Grand Narratives in Jeanette Winterson's Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit. Bingöl University Journal of Social Sciences Institute, 27, 316-323. https://doi.org/10.29029/busbed.1440058

Article Type: Research ArticleDate Received: 19.02.2024Date Accepted: 24.04.2024

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# AN ANALYSIS OF GRAND NARRATIVES IN JEANETTE WINTERSON'S ORANGES ARE NOT THE ONLY FRUIT

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#### ABSTRACT

Jeanette Winterson, one of the most significant writers of the 21st century, touches on various topics in her *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit.* One of the subject matters that stands out is the novel's criticism of grand narratives through its main heroine, Jeanette. The question of grand narratives, touched upon and re-evaluated by postmodernism, has a substantial place in the narration of the novel. The ideologies, determined and limited by society as grand narratives, reject pluralism and differences. They defend a single ideology and undermine differences. The grand narratives examined under the subject of religion in this article determine social norms and lead them. Winterson's Jeanette is a character who tries to assume a different identity in a society where grand narratives are unshakably implemented and close the door to different ideologies. This article examines Jeanette's experiences and rebellion in a society surrounded by grand narratives. The study aims to show how the church and church society adhere to grand narratives and how the main character overturns established ideologies.

Keywords: Jeanette Winterson, Oranges Aren't the Only Fruit, Grand narratives, Church.

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Gülüştür, E. (2024). Jeanette Winterson'ın *Tek Meyve Portakal Değildir* Eserinde Büyük Anlatıların Analizi. *Bingöl Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi, 27*, 316-323. https://doi.org/10.29029/busbed.1440058

Makale Türü: Araştırma MakalesiGeliş Tarihi: 19.02.2024Kabul Tarihi: 24.04.2024

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## JEANETTE WINTERSON'IN *TEK MEYVE PORTAKAL DEĞİLDİR* ESERİNDE BÜYÜK ANLATILARIN ANALİZİ

Erol GÜLÜŞTÜR<sup>1</sup>

ÖΖ

21.yy'ın en önemli yazarlarından biri olan Jeanette Winterson, *Tek Meyve Portakal Değildir* eserinde çeşitli konulara değinir. Ön plana çıkan konulardan biri, romanın ana kahramanı olan Jeanette yoluyla büyük anlatılara yapılan eleştiridir. Postmodernizmin değindiği ve yeniden ele aldığı büyük anlatılar, romanda önemli bir yer tutar. Toplumun belirlediği ve sınırlarını çizdiği ideolojiler, büyük anlatılar olarak çoğulculuk ve farklılıkları reddeder. Büyük anlatılar, tek bir ideolojiyi savunup farklılıkları gözardı eder. Bu makalede din konusu altında incelenen büyük anlatılar, toplumsal normları belirler ve onları yönlendirir. Winterson'un Jeanette karakteri, büyük anlatıların sarsılmaz bir şekilde uygulandığı ve farklı ideolojilere kapıyı kapatan bir toplumda, farklı bir kimliğe bürünmeye çalışan bir karakterdir. Makale, Jeanette'ın büyük anlatılarla çevrili bir toplumda yaşadıklarını ve başkaldırışını inceler. Çalışma, kilisenin ve kilise toplumunun büyük anlatılara nasıl bağlı olduklarını, ana karakterin yerleşmiş ideolojileri ters yüz ettiğini göstermeyi hedeflemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Jeanette Winterson, Tek Meyve Portakal Değildir, Büyük anlatılar, Kilise.

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#### 1. Introduction

Postmodernism is a concept that emerged after modernism and criticized the previous intellectual systems. Although modernism tried to shape a new world system when it first made its name, it could not fully respond to the developing new paradigms and issues. Accordingly, certain parameters distinguished modernism from other movements. The unquestionable features of the Enlightenment, such as freedom, science, rationalism, etc, were the layers constituting modernism. The Second World War severely shook modernism, which tried to see and expound the world via certain motives. Being inadequate against the changing and transforming new dynamics, modernism relied on grand narratives, yet these grand narratives raised some questions. It was realized that they could not find solutions to challenging world hangups and began to lose their unshakable characteristics. Fundamentally, the idea of questioning and reconsidering everything caused the events to depend on the social, economic, and philosophical conditions emerging after modernism. Therefore, disbelief in the grand narratives, as Lyotard called them, led to a skeptical approach to the outcomes of the old conditions. The disbelief also required adapting to new circumstances. To illustrate, while the concepts of the Enlightenment or science were accepted as undoubted and definitive facts in modernism and regarded as unchangeable as well as definitive facts in clarifying events, they began to be doubted, decentered, or rejected by postmodernism.

In postmodernism, grand narratives can be criticized, questioned, and re-evaluated because postmodernism sees grand narratives as parochial and limiting. Since grand narratives reject multiple perspectives, entities are accepted as they are, people are asked to bow down, and no flaws are welcomed. This is the point that Lyotard and other postmodern theorists emphasize: the point is to question the rooted and unshakable truths and express distrust towards them. It can be suggested that great narratives can no longer be evaluated according to the old teachings of modernism, and the facts that determined and guided the basic intellectual principles for years are no longer the only criteria for shaping and directing the intellectual basis. Essentially, grand narratives have been used to understand history. It can be underscored that there are historical facts explaining historical events. Paramount events taking place in a certain century provide data to describe that period. Thus, we attempt to understand and interpret that period by means of the indicative events or phenomena. The dynamics within the period create grand narratives, and the period is identified with these narratives. As "a metanarrative is a general intellectual framework through which we view history" (Birx, 2009, p. 1030), freedom, religion, gender roles, social norms, science, etc. covered by the era are all considered grand narratives and are tackled within the intellectual system of that period. The established rules and norms are decentered, shaken, or eliminated on the assumption that no fixed entities are omnipresent. To this point, Linda Hutchinson asserts that "postmodernism ultimately manages to... undermine and subvert the conventions and presuppositions it appears to challenge" (2002, pp.1-2). To continue with Hutchinson's quote, it is argued that postmodernism re-evaluates previously accepted and unquestioned things and consequently puts them in a different dimension on account of the evaluation of multiple and various perspectives. Because postmodernism "challenges the ideological systems on which Western society is constructed" (Sturgeon, 1993, p.13) ideologies, fixed norms, and rules are ignored; thus, it turns to rescue the postmodern people from stucking in restricted zones. It suggests that societies are not subjected to only one predestined ideology or belief, but that other different, various, and abounding worldviews in society reveal the claim for postmodernism's multiplicity.

One of the focal points of postmodernism is that it not only claims that the teachings we apply, adopt, and accept are imposed on us by society but also suggests that society forces us to see them as indispensable elements of our lives as cultural norms. Once again, it implies that these teachings delimit postmodern people. At that point, Hutchinson signifies that "entities that we unthinkingly experience as 'natural' (they might even include capitalism, patriarchy, liberal humanism) are ... made by us, not given to us" (2002, p. 2). She questions and stresses the entities, and ideologies as impositions on us. In this regard, postmodernism reacts to their restrictive processes and regards them as things to be defamilirized with. "Its very significance is to... disseminate, and decenter" (Silverman, 2018, p. 1) the entities that are built on a barrier by established norms. To be the center of entities is denied by postmodernism because it leads to the birth of grand narratives, meaning that some norms are unquestionable and peremptory. Being "as discontinuous and fragmented" (Eriksen & Nielsen, 2013, p. 172), it overlooks certain ideologies and facts; it does not prioritize a single truth, instead, it aims to fragment a substantial phenomenon and makes meanings of that phenomenon. This representation shows that grand narratives are no longer accepted in postmodern thought. "A world of local, individual voices, rather than of hegemonic schools and ideologies" (Eriksen & Nielsen, 2013, p. 172) is underlined because hegemonic ideologies are limited and turn individuals into monotype beings. The individual becomes dependent on the

grand narratives created by hegemonic ideologies and sees these dominant ideologies (grand narratives) as the only truth. Postmodern thought breaks away from these dominant hegemonic thoughts and opens the door to individualism, that is, all kinds of different world views, and advocates them loudly. It suggests "splitting the truth, the standards and the ideal" (Birx, 2009, p. 1132) to make way for the multifarious meanings and interpretations.

As postmodernism turns to the rejection of single truths, ideologies, and standards, no substitution are welcomed, which may generate new grand narratives. It strictly refuses "new doctrine, theory or revelation to take the place of the discarded rules of the past" (Birx, 2009, p. 1132). Because it has nothing left to hold out the postmodern world, the grand narrative "has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation" (p. 37,1984) as Lyotard argues. Grand narratives, which are reflections of old-world paradigms, are no longer powerful. People no longer trust them; they are ineffective (Groves, 2012, p. 41). Normed truths and doctrines are split into pieces; for example, the concept of freedom does not have a single equivalent; it is bound to be divided into dozens of meanings and interpretations. While Lyotard calls postmodernism "incredulity toward meta-narratives" (1984, p. xxiv), he emphasizes that the great doctrines have lost their function and become outdated. Accordingly, history or our experiences cannot be explained and clarified through a single fact; when we attempt to explain things by means of a definitive fact, we tend to create our own grand narratives, which the postmodern outlook excludes. Focusing on the "death of the grand narrative" (Eriksen & Nielsen, 2013, p. 170), postmodernism addresses deconstruction because it takes over the opportunity of precisely questioning and criticizing through it. Thus, in addressing deconstruction, the aim is to disassemble and shake the message or ideology that the great narratives try to impose, stated as postmodernism "deconstructed the great synthetic projects, leaving the fragments spread out on the ground" (Eriksen & Nielsen, 2013, p. 170).

## 2. Repercussions of Grand Narratives on Jeanette's Existence

Postmodern authors do not create their works in light of certain teachings. As Lyotard emphasizes, they are not dependent on predetermined rules, and the work cannot be evaluated based on these rules (1984, p.81). The authors pen the work on the lines they determine without sticking to any sense of limitation. The author is exempt from the rules (Lyotard, 1984, p. 82). The postmodern writer deconstructs what is present, reshapes the text, and reconsiders historical events with original literary techniques. Jeanette Winterson, one of the most prominent postmodern writers, uses these original techniques masterfully. She turns grand narratives upside down, managing to bring the subject matters she deals with through normative ideologies and conceptual structures; she "explores territories of controversy and the unknown, she crosses boundaries and transgresses the sacred" (Wronka, 2017, p. 197).

Essentially, studying Winterson's writings, we get to observe that she decentralizes the concept of singularity and the established social and cultural teachings, thus turning them into more vulnerable entities. It is indeed likely to figure out the narrative and conceptual framework hallmarks expected from a postmodern writer in her works. Winterson, enriching her narrative by using "postmodern techniques, metafiction, and magical realism" (Rinawmi, 2010, p. 8), shakes the dominant ideologies (grand narratives) in society. Moreover, she ruins strong structures (Rinawmi, 2010, p. 8). As stated above, Winterson takes a stance against singularity. This stance stems from both her own sexual preference and her literary perspective. She fights heterosexual ideologies and a male-dominated perspective (Erkan, 2010, p. 114). In his postmodern condition argument, Lyotard states that totality must be resisted; it is a fact that differences exist and they must be used (1984, p. 37). Primarily, Winterson applies Lyotard's remark in a sense. That's why we see a critical approach and content in her writing. She overthrows stereotypes and takes a stance against clichés (Cokal, 2004, p. 18).

The concept of religion is a grand narrative on which Winterson dwells a lot. As grown in a religious entourage, she has deeply experienced and witnessed the impacts of religion on individuals and society. Religion, one of the dominant ideologies, is an important power structure used to shape and lead societies. As a great grand narrative, it is questioned and shaken by postmodernism. Because postmodernism rejects limitation and singularity, it criticises religions oppressing people or ruling religions' being at the center stage. If a single religion or doctrine is dominant, it prevents others from being visible on the periphery. It is regarded as suppressing postmodern people and confining them to certain forms of identity. As the individual adopts a single identity, different preferences and goals are diminished. Since postmodernism opposes universal truths, it adopts a local and libertarian attitude towards religion. So, religion, previously considered an unwavering truth and irreversible as scientific facts, is treated as a grand narrative in postmodernism. Winterson also treats religion and religious teachings as a grand narrative in her work and reveals its effects through her character, Jeanette.

Jeanette is a girl living with the harsh and challenging religious education of an ardent Christian mother. She

recounts her life story beginning at the age of seven, when she is obligated by the church and her mother to follow the oppressive rules imposed on her. Jeanette's life is dominated by her Christian fundamentalist mother, Louie, who dominates Jeanette's life as well as the life of the absent father. Jeanette's mother had educated her at home until the age of seven, mostly through reading the Bible and following its guidelines (Soumia, 2017, p. 527).

She is exposed to a dominant ideology and has to continue her life by means of a dominant religious teaching. Her family, the society in which she lives, and the religion she believes have strict expectations, and if she achieves them, then she "will become a productive member of her fundamentalist religious community" (Reisman, 2011, p. 14). Religion and religious ideology, considered substantial grand narratives, mark deep traces in almost all phases of her life, through whom Winterson refers to the "constructed and questionable nature of meta narratives and totalizing discourses" (Yağcı, 2022, pp. 86-87). She is so immersed in totalizing discourses that the Bible, her religious mom, and church are the single three components shaping and leading her life. Talking about her mother at the very beginning of the book, she implies that her mother has her own grand narratives and states that she adheres to them tightly. To her mother, "God" is the first to be seen as a friend, while "Devil" is the one she takes as an enemy (Winterson, 2014, p. 5). We observe that her mother constantly listens to and analyzes religious programs on the radio in order to raise her as a missionary (Winterson, 2014, pp. 6-7). Jeanette's life is made up of religious conversations and practices. Due to the mother's strict religious beliefs, the family keeps away from TV on Sundays and covers it up (Winterson, 2014, p. 14). Reading the Bible and acting accordingly is a part of their lives.

Religion, as a grand narrative, is highly immense in Jeanette's life. She figures that having high buildings and more rain depends on the piety of the city (Winterson, 2014, p. 21). Here, Winterson poignantly reveals the power of religion through buildings and rain in an overwhelming manner. Moreover, Jeanette's mother does not send her to school to prevent her from moving away from religion. School is used as a metaphor, which may destroy a stereotyped, unquestionable ideology. However, it is perceived in a negative light by her mother. The mother does not want her daughter to cross the boundaries of the church, warning that "they will lead you astray" (Winterson, 2014, p. 22) if she moves away from church. Another obvious example of religion as a grand narrative is the issue of Jeanette's brief deafness. Her mother and church members, who attribute an ordinary health problem to a religious justification, strictly adhere to the religious grand narrative. Religious people praise her, saying "how full of spirit" she is (Winterson, 2014, p. 33). They remark that the reason she is in such a situation is to be close to God, implying that she is one of the lucky servants. But when the problem grows and Miss Jewsbury realizes the actual reason, it becomes clear that Jeanette " is not full of the Spirit" (Winterson, 2014, p. 35). Jeanette is immediately taken to the hospital and treated to have temporary deafness. "The conventional religious community full of contradictions" (Shara, 2015, p. 239) is so immersed in the religious grand narrative that they cannot move out of its boundaries. Following the case, a transformation begins in Jeanette, and she begins to question the church, thinking that everything the church says, believes, or imposes may not be true; "the church was sometimes confused" (Winterson, 2014, p. 36). The fact that her deafness is misinterpreted and put on a different level of comment "destabilize[s] Jeanette's worldview and the worldview of the people around her" (Reisman, 2011, p. 16), which brings a turning point in her life. The questioning and doubt highlight the fact that she "gradually moves away from the Grand Narrative of the Church" (Yağcı, 2022, p. 79).

One of the turning points in Jeanette's life is when her mother decides to send her to school because she is afraid of being legally punished. Yet, at school, Jeanette reflects her religious personality so considerably that her teacher questions and expresses her discomfort regarding her situation. Jeanette uses religious elements in almost all her actions. For example, while other children give ordinary answers like "fishing, swimming, picnics" (Winterson, 2014, p. 49) to the question for the essay "What I did in my Summer Holidays" (Winterson, 2014, p. 49), Jeanette reveals what she lived at Colwyn Bay during their church camp (Winterson, 2014, p. 50), which surprises the teacher and the class. The teacher thinks she is "rather preoccupied with God" (Winterson, 2014, p. 54). The teacher is disturbed by Jeanette's religious immersion in the school and says that she terrorizes the children (Winterson, 2014, p. 55). She "became an outcast to both students and teachers. The teachers and parents complained that her thoughts and ideas were giving the students nightmares" (Jennings, 2011, p. 33) and later we witness the children run away from her (Winterson, 2014, p. 56). We can argue that all these experiences at school, to some extent, may have an impact on her subsequent change and transformation as well. After revealing Jeanette's experiences and the grand narrative of religion, Winterson includes Melani in the plotline, who leads Jeanette to question religion and church more and more. By involving Melanie in the plotline, the author overtly defies "traditional Western religious discourses and their accompanying rules"

(Erasmus, 2017, p. 7). We see the two girls being in a relationship, which will bring out Jeanette's "resolutions of divergent pulls of church" (Hints, 2005, p. 30). While manifesting Jeanette's love for Melani, Winterson focuses on history and refers to grand narratives. Being attracted to Melani, Jeanette essentially ignores history, historical ideologies, and grand narratives. She is conspicuously "rattling and even undermining the architecture of" (Hill, 2017, p. 36) the dominant power. She dismantles the "Christian status quo" (Erasmus, 2017, p. 18). Jeanette asserts that everyone writes their own history (Winterson, 2014, p. 120); in some way, she turns away from totalizing powers, welcomes individuality, and subverts grand narratives. Because history "involves several layers of truth and various possible interpretations" (Allan, 2014, p. 25) it cannot be restricted to only established rules or norms, but there are at the same time differences and various thought structures that prevent the generation of grand narratives. As a counter effect of totality, she "triggers the discussion about tolerance and freedom of choice, which so often appears to be repressed by the prejudiced voice of society" (Wronka, 2017, p. 197). As argued, "the singularity of the truth" (Yakut, 2011, p. 78) is impossible. Winterson underlines that if history is free of boundaries, then a barrier needs to be set to restrictions hindering individuals, as every individual writes their own truth or history. Winterson argues "by implication, how any religious claims based on that history can hold authority" (Hill, 2017, p. 41); that's why, going against the dominant ideology of the church and church society, Jeanette destroys the religious grand narrative. What she was undergoing showed that "the church's perfect theological views, which were perceived to lead its Christian followers to a "perfect" life, contained many flaws" (Jennings, 2022, p. 36). The relationship between her and Melanie puts her as a target, as "all of the community's resources are mobilized to exorcise these deviant impulses. She is threatened with permanent exclusion from the community of the saved" (Paliath, 2017, p. 360). She "poses a threat to the church" (Sturgeon, 1993, p. 17). To the church community, Jeanette and Melani "have fallen under Satan's spell" (Winterson, 204, p. 134). The church regards Jeanette as "Satan" (Winterson, 2014, p. 134); she is suppressed, and Pastor tells her mother, "Don't let her out of this room and don't feed her" (Winterson, 2014, p. 137). Janet "is locked in" (Winterson, 2014, p. 137). As a result of her transgression and "objections to grand narratives" (Yakut, 2011, p.75), she is ostracized and punished by her mother and the religious community. Winterson makes social criticism through Jeanette's mother and church. The community, thinking the walls it has built will never collapse, takes these walls under protection by means of strict ideologies. Used as a metaphor, the walls can be considered grand narratives. Just as it is tough to topple strong and hard walls, the same is true for grand narratives. The walls that the church and church community build do not allow different life and thought structures. Getting out of the lines of the grand narratives means being exorcised. Jeanette's community, by using grand narrative of religion, announces her as a scapegoat because she has transgressed the established ideology-the grand narrative of religion. "Oranges are the only fruit", a phrase repeatedly appearing throughout the novel, reveals getting stuck in grand narratives. However, Winterson points to the differences that prevent a dominant ideology from being thrust to the forefront. The dominant ideology, imposing grand narratives, maintains its existence by eliminating differences. Through the novel, Winterson indicates that Jeanette's life has been shaped by a strict ideology, but over time, she questions, doubts, and reaches a different level of thought. The author points out that imposed ideologies enforce grand narratives, which cause the generation of power and hegemonic structures. The fact that the religious community turned their backs tremendously transformed Jeanette's world, her identity, and her belonging. Jeanette "provides a counterpoint to deconstruct traditional religion" (Shara, 2015, p. 239) and for her, going beyond the boundaries set by religious grand narrative was an immense challenge, even though she seemingly regretted it and was subjected to exorcism.

#### 3. Conclusion

The statement "increduality towards metanarratives" (grand narratives) by Francis Lyotard in Postmodern Condition is one of the cornerstones of postmodernism. Grand narratives have played an important role in shaping history since ancient times. The unwavering belief in grand narratives has caused them to gain great importance and become unquestionable. Through grand narratives, a single ideology is accepted and adopted as the absolute truth, and other ideologies are overlooked or suppressed. This narrow-mindedness, which is contrary to postmodern thought, is a limiting barrier in postmodernism, so established convictions, norms, and totality are discarded by postmodern thought structure. Individuality and tolerance of differences limit grand narratives because they prevent individuals from committing to a single established ideology; instead, different thoughts and belief systems are adopted. Postmodern thinkers such as Lyotard and Hutchinson argue that the importance of grand narratives has decreased in postmodern thought because they put forward the idea that postmodernism subverts power structures. One of the writers who turns these power structures upside down is Jeanette Winterson. In Oranges Are not the Only Fruit, one of the most stunning postmodern works, we witness the main character's fight against the structures of power in society. She ignores the grand narratives of the church and its society, subverts them, and strives to create her own identity. In the novel, we get to conclude that individuals do not have to comply with the established or single ideology that creates grand narratives, and Winterson, through the heroine, highlights individual liberality and fights for totalizing powers. As the name of the novel hints, she asserts that grand narratives restrict and create barriers for postmodern individuals. The characters in the novel are observed to cling to grand narratives sharply, except Jeanette, who ends up with exorcism by the church society. Even though the heroine is punished and marginalized, she stands as the only character to have a say against the strict and rooted ideology of her society. Rebelling against the grand narratives, Jeanette demolishes totalizing powers and makes way for the differences that subvert hegemony. Hegemonic powers take advantage of grand narratives, suppress differences, and generate their own dominance. Winterson reveals the hegemonic power of the church and church society by stressing the grand narrative of religion being imposed on Jeanette, who breaks and liberates herself from the rooted ideology.

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## ÇALIŞMANIN ETİK İZNİ

Yapılan bu çalışmada "Yükseköğretim Kurumları Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiği Yönergesi" kapsamında uyulması belirtilen tüm kurallara uyulmuştur. Yönergenin ikinci bölümü olan "Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiğine Aykırı Eylemler" başlığı altında belirtilen eylemlerden hiçbiri gerçekleştirilmemiştir.

## ARAŞTIRMACILARIN KATKI ORANI

Çalışmanın tamamı tek yazar tarafından yürütülmüştür.

## ÇATIŞMA BEYANI

Araştırmada herhangi bir kişi ya da kurum ile finansal ya da kişisel yönden bağlantı bulunmamaktadır. Araştırmada herhangi bir çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.