

## Unseen extract 2: *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*

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Read the extract carefully. It is taken from *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* by Jeanette Winterson which was first published in 1985. The novel tells the story of a girl named Jeanette, who is bought up by her adoptive parents in northern England. Jeanette's dominant mother is a fundamentalist Christian who educates Jeanette through study of the Bible. In this extract Jeanette recounts her mother's preoccupation with saving her 'godless' neighbours.

### Sample question

Explore the significance of moral attitudes in this extract.

Remember to include in your answer relevant detailed analysis of the ways that Winterson shapes meanings.

### Extract

The Heathen were a daily household preoccupation. My mother found them everywhere, particularly Next Door. They tormented her as only the godless can, but she had her methods.

They hated hymns, and she liked to play the piano, an old upright with pitted candelabra and yellow keys. We each had a copy of the *Redemption Hymnal* (boards and cloth 3 shillings). My mother sang the tune, and I put in the harmonies. The first hymn I ever learned was a magnificent Victorian composition called *Ask the Saviour to Help You*.

One Sunday morning, just as we got in from Communion, we heard strange noises, like cries for help, coming from Next Door. I took no notice, but my mother froze behind the radiogram, and started to change colour. Mrs White, who had come home with us to listen to the World Service, immediately crushed her ear against the wall.

'What is it?' I asked.

'I don't know,' she said in a loud whisper, 'but whatever it is, it's not holy.'

Still my mother didn't move.

'Have you got a wine glass?' urged Mrs White.

My mother looked horrified.

'For medicinal purposes, I mean,' added Mrs White hurriedly.

My mother went into a high cupboard, and reached down a box from the top shelf. This was her War Cupboard, and every week she bought a new tin to put in it, in case of the Holocaust. Mostly it was full of black cherries in syrup and special offer sardines.

'I never use these,' she said meaningfully.

'Neither do I,' said Mrs White defensively, clamping herself back against the wall. While my mother was covering up the television, Mrs White slithered up and down the skirting board.

'We've just had that wall decorated,' my mother pointed out.

'It's stopped anyway,' panted Mrs White.

At that moment another burst of wailing began from Next Door.

Very clear this time.

'They're fornicating,' cried my mother, rushing to put her hands over my ears.

'Get off,' I yelled.

The dog started barking, and my dad, who had been on nights the Saturday just gone, came down in his pyjama bottoms.

'Put some clothes on,' shrieked my mother, 'Next Door's at it again.'

I bit my mother's hand. 'Let go of my ears, I can hear it too.'

'On a Sunday,' exclaimed Mrs White.

Outside, suddenly, the ice-cream van.

'Go and get two cornets, and a wafer for Mrs White,' ordered my mother, stuffing 10 shillings into my hand.

I ran off. I didn't know quite what fornicating was, but I had read about it in Deuteronomy, and I knew it was a sin. But why was it so noisy? Most sins you did quietly so as not to get caught. I bought the ice-creams and decided to take my time. When I got back my mother had opened the piano, and she and Mrs White were looking through the *Redemption Hymnal*.

I passed round the ice-creams.

'It's stopped,' I said brightly.

'For the moment,' said my mother grimly.

As soon as we had finished, my mother wiped her hands on her apron.

'Ask the Saviour to Help You, we'll sing that. Mrs White, you be the baritone.'

The first verse was very fine I thought:

*'Yield not to Temptation, for yielding is sin,*

*Each Victory will help you some other to win.  
Fight manfully onwards, Dark Passions subdued,  
Look over to Jesus. He will carry you through.'*

The hymn had a rousing chorus that moved my mother to such an extent that she departed entirely from the notation of the *Redemption Hymnal*, and instead wrought her own huge chords that sounded the length of the piano. No note was exempt. By the time we got to verse 3, Next Door had started to bang on the wall.

'Listen to the Heathen,' my mother shouted jubilantly, her foot furious on the hard pedal.

'Sing it again.'

And we did, while the Heathen, driven mad by the Word, rushed away to find what blunt instruments they could to pound the wall from the other side.

Some of them ran into the back yard and yelled over the wall. 'Stop that bloody racket.'

'On a Sunday too,' tutted Mrs White, aghast.

My mother leapt from the keys and rushed into our back yard to quote the scripture. She found herself staring at the eldest son who had a lot of spots.

'The Lord help me,' she prayed, and a piece of Deuteronomy flashed into her mind:

*'The Lord will smite you with the boils of Egypt, and with the ulcers and the scurvy and the itch of which you cannot be cured.'* (Revised Standard Version.)

Then she ran back inside and slammed the back door.

'Now then,' she smiled, 'who's for a bit of dinner?'

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