

The age of awakening

[Life](#), [Relationships](#)



Revelations, hardships, worldly experiences and a difficult search for one's identity. Such are the conventions of the coming-of-age genre. Which aims to focus on the psychological and moral growth of a novel's protagonist from youth through to adulthood. By analyzing *Call me by your name* (André Aciman) and *Oranges are not the only fruit* (Jeanette Winterson) the themes of relationships, religion, identity, sexual expression and sexual orientation the elements of the Coming-of-age genre will be examined.

The first person narrative technique of *Oranges are not the only fruit* allows for readers to assess the inner workings of Jeanette, the protagonist's mind, her experiences, her opinions and track her growth as she is explored in greater detail than any other character. In this novel other characters act to support the main character and enrich her journey. However *Oranges are not the only fruit* makes use of the second and third person narrative. Jeanette often understands conflict in her life through her often comical retelling or referencing fables, biblical tales and fictional stories (ie *Jane Eyre*). She does so in the third person. Jeanette uses the second person to address the readers a number of times. Thus the structure of the novel moves mostly chronologically but with scattered flashbacks and fictional stories throughout. As opposed to *Call me by your name* which strictly uses the first person narrative technique as Elio, the protagonist sequentially recalls the events of the summer of 1987. Both novels make use of this narrative technique as the main form of narration. This technique effectively guides the reader along the characters respective journeys of self discovery and creates a sincere relationship between the speaker and the reader. Thus

proving to be a very beneficial tool in connecting readers to characters in the coming-of-age genre.

Jeanette as a character As previously stipulated, the supporting characters in *Oranges* are not the only fruit are rather flat. Although they do play major roles in Jeanette's formative years and her overall attitude to life they are not as fully delved into. Jeanette's mother is a religious fanatic and acts as the constant reenforcer of Christianity in Jeanette's life. Which was a considerably large part of Jeanette's life and constituted many of her opinions, mannerisms and actions in her youth. An example of her putting the Lord before anything would be when Jeanette said, " I love you almost as much as I love the Lord." to Melanie [pg 133]. Other characters like her apathetic father who isn't present for much of the novel and Melanie, her first (lesbian) lover are shown to not love Jeanette as much as she loves them. Such experiences encourage Jeanette to journey further on her quest of self appreciation and acceptance.

The same cannot be said about the characterization in *Call me by your name*. Understandably Elio Perlman is the most established of all the characters. He comes across as a very cultured and inquisitive teenage boy. As Elio becomes increasingly infatuated with Oliver an older more mature character readers simultaneously get a look at his repressed intimate nature. Which Oliver prompts him explore throughout the novel through their relationship. Elio is blossoming with desire and passion: " Do with me what you want. Just ask if I want and see the answer you'll get, Just don't let me say no" and insecure " I tried imitating him a few times but i was too self-

conscious. Like someone trying to feel natural while walking about naked in a locker room only to end up aroused by his own nakedness” [Part 1], when it comes to accepting his feelings for Oliver, his first male love-interest. He is very timid “ Why wouldn’t I show him how like butter I was? Because I was afraid of what might happen then? Or was I afraid he’d laugh at me? Told everyone or ignored the whole thing on the pretense that I was too young to know what I was doing” [Part 1]. Elio also proves to be very impressionable: “ The summer I learned to love fishing. Because he did. To love jogging. Because he did. To love octopus, Heraclitus, Tristan.” [Part 1]. Inquisitiveness and insecurity are common attributes of these the main characters and are often explored in coming-of-age stories.

Along with those common personality traits there are common themes which are used to explore the genre of coming-of-age. In both novels the themes of sexuality (orientation and expression), religion (how it shapes people’s lives and opinions) and family (how family supports or doesn’t support the main characters growth). Religion is used in both novels to push the protagonists closer in the direction of their true selves. In *Oranges are not the only fruit* Jeanette tackles the notion that heterosexuality is a must in the Christian faith. As a young girl brought up in a Northern English church in the 1960’s the church and all its conformities were all she knew and she was shielded from ‘unnatural behaviours’ which were never explicitly spoken of but were constantly alluded to. Conservative Christian views of sexuality in this novel demonstrated by Jeanette’s mother and Pastor pressure Jeanette to find herself and become independent of her family and show how isolated Jeanette is from society as a lesbian such views are exhibited when

Jeanette's mother says "The Devil looks after his own" [pg 174], in the moment Jeanette is cast out of her home. However in *Call me by your name* Elio never feels the pressure to be heterosexual because of his Jewish beliefs. However he does feel isolated from society as a Jew in 1987 Bordighera, Liguria (Italy) but s both Oliver and Elio subscribe to Judaism the religion serves to bond the two rather than divide as it does in *Oranges are not the only fruit*. Unlike Jeanette all of Elio's desires are explicitly made known to readers and it apparent that Elio has more freedom to express his sexual fascinations without judgment from religion or family. Which can be credited to the novels descriptive and confessional style.

Each of the novels makes use of fruit to symbolize the emotional state of the protagonist. In *Call me by your name* Elio pleasures himself with a peach and Oliver devours it after he catches Elio in the act. The peach then comes to symbolize the height of intimacy between the two of them and open themselves up to loving each other, "I simply let myself go, if only to show him something equally private about me as well. I reached for him and muffled my sobs against his shoulder." [Part 2]. The sexual act of one person becomes the moment in which two people are the closest to one another. This symbol appears only once in the novel as opposed to the use of the orange in *Oranges are not the only fruit* which appears throughout the novel. Oranges represent the lack of emotional support Jeanette receives particularly from her mother and they act as her comfort. An example of such a situation : "My mother looked horrified and rooting around in her handbag she gave me an orange. I peeled it to comfort myself, and seeing me a little calmer, everyone glanced at one another and went away" [pg 36].

Her mother offers her oranges in time where her emotional support would be better suited as depicted when Jeanette is temporarily deaf in hospital.

“ When she couldn’t come herself she sent my father,
usually with a letter and a couple of oranges.

“ The only fruit,” she always said” [pg 39]

The authors of these two novels explore the genre of Coming-of-age using the above literary elements very effectively. The first person narrative and chronological capture the finer details of the main characters psychological and emotional growth. The protagonists are complex and although they are very different they share many qualities that are common to characters of the coming-of-age genre. The authors utilize settings to shape the characters opinions. The two novels illustrate the respective journeys and experiences two young people face that are pivotal for their overall self-development.