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# Well-Worn

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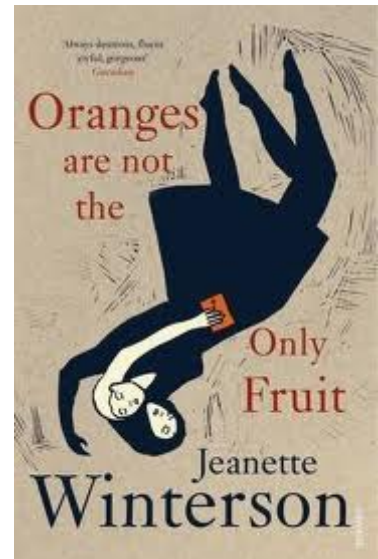
By Meredith Doench

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**From the host of the blog 1 Bookshelf:** For those of us who read and write, books have a way of shaping our lives. As I look at my bookshelf, I realize my life is reflected in the books I have read. Examining one shelf, I see six months or a year or a lifetime of experiences. It's not only what's in the book that shapes the experience. I've found part of the book experience is where I've read it, and what I was doing at the time, and who with. When I pick up a book, I see friends, family, and situations. 1 Bookshelf is a way to share our book experiences one shelf at a time. When you look at one shelf, what story does it tell? If you're interested in sharing your bookshelf, and partaking in this mini oral history project, see our simple guidelines page. [Meredith Doench's essay >>>](#) can also be viewed on the blog. [View other 1 Bookshelf essays here >>>](#).

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**T**echnically it's not a bookshelf, but a collection of paperbacks stacked beside my nightstand. Most second-hand booksellers would term the current state of these paperbacks as *well-worn*. Multiple pages of these works are dog-eared, while the margins are filled with my scribbled thoughts and connections. The covers are permanently bent, torn, and haphazardly mended after so many harried shoves inside my cluttered book-bag. When I think of this book collection, I'm reminded of how my favorite music looked before the invention of the Ipod. My beloved tapes and CDs had been played so much, most of the printed material had rubbed off. Littered with cracks and scratches, it wasn't hard to tell which tapes or CDs were a favorite at any given time. For me, well-worn equals well-loved.



I like to think of this corner heap of literature as a greatest hits hoard similar to one of the multitudes of playlists on my Ipod. Always in flux, the collection grows and diminishes with different works. I have rigid rules for inclusion, though. Without these strict guidelines the pile would quickly grow beyond my ceiling or spill onto the nightstand, which is solely reserved for current books I'm in the process of consuming.

## Rules for the pile:

1. I must mourn the inevitable end of the book. I've been known to slow my reading down to a crawl at the last leg of the book in order to savor every word: *Please, please, please, don't let it end!*
2. Even though my reading experience with the book may cease, my obsessive thoughts of the story and characters do not. It must beckon my return to re-join the shelter of that conjured world. If I've conducted multiple Google searches on any aspect of the book and/or author, it's a keeper.

3. The book must change me in some way. James Joyce may have been known for his use of epiphany with character, but readers also need them.

So, you ask, what books are in my corner heap of literature? What's the central core of my well-worn books?

- Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Aren't the Only Fruit* and *Written on the Body*.
- Tana French's *In the Woods*.
- Stephen King's *It* and *Four Seasons* collection (mostly for "Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption" and "The Body").
- Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.
- Gary Gach's *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Buddhism*, third ed.
- Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*.
- Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*.

In my life, music and literature have always been connected. Both offer a sense of shelter—a rabbit hole of pure adventure. Similar to the way The Indigo Girls, Bruce Springsteen, and Alison Krauss are able to transport me to inspiration-land with the mere sound of their voices, my pile of literature takes me there with only a well-turned phrase. It serves as my foundation as a reader and a writer—as I grow, my well-worn collection will, too. It's as alive as me—fluid and dynamic—even vivacious at times. Still, no matter how much I grow as a reader and writer, I'll always return to this core of literature next to my nightstand where I'm set on SHUFFLE CONTINUOUS REPEAT.

**Meredith Doench** writes and teaches in Dayton, Ohio. She has published in literary journals such as *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Women's Studies Quarterly*, and *So to Speak*, among others. She is one of the fiction editors of the literary journal *Camera Obscura: Journal of Literature and Photography*.