

# Ethical Concerns of Jeanette Winterson as Shown in *The Gap of Time*, a Rewriting of William Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*

Li Na & Tian Junwu

**Abstract:** Jeanette Winterson's *The Gap of Time* is an adaptation of William Shakespeare's *The Winter's tale*, a tragic-comedy in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Though the settings are transplanted from the ancient pastoral lands of Sicily and Bohemia into contemporary London, Paris and New Bohemia City of America, and the Shakespearean kings, queens, princes, princesses and courtiers are changed into modern professional people like bankers, chanteuses, game designers and car salesmen, the basic plots and ethical concerns of the adaptive novel are nearly identical to those of the Shakespearean play. As far as the ethical dimension of *The Gap of Time* is concerned, it reveals Winterson's ethical concern, that is, bad ethical environment leads to the prevalence of animal factor of human beings over human factor, which damages the ethical harmony of human relationships. It is only love and forgiveness that redress the unhealthy ethical environment, depress animal factors in human nature, repair the ethical human relationships and finally cure the ethical trauma of the main characters.

**Keywords:** Jeanette Winterson; *The Gap of Time*; *The Winter's Tale*; ethical literary criticism

**Authors:** Li Na is a Ph. D student in the School of Foreign Languages at Beihang University. **Corresponding author:** Tian Junwu is Professor and Ph. D supervisor at the School of Foreign Languages at Beihang University (Beijing, 100191, China). His research area focuses on American literature and comparative literature (E-mail: tjw1966@163.com).

**标题:** 詹妮特·温特森在莎士比亚《冬天的故事》改写本《时间之间》中的伦理关注

**摘要:** 詹妮特·温特森的《时间之间》是对威廉·莎士比亚传奇剧《冬天的故事》的改写。尽管故事的场景从古代西西利亚和波西米亚王国移植到当代的伦敦、巴黎以及新波西米亚市，人物也由莎士比亚时代的国王、王后、王子、公主和臣僚置换成现代的银行经理、女歌手、游戏设计师和汽车销售商等，

这部改写本小说的基本故事情节和伦理关注与莎士比亚的剧本别无二致。就《时间之间》的伦理维度而言，它揭示了温特森的伦理关注，那就是：邪恶的伦理环境会导致人的兽性因子压倒人性因子，从而破坏人际关系的伦理和谐。只有通过爱和宽恕才能矫正不健康的伦理环境，抑制人性中的兽性因子，修复人际伦理关系，并最终医治人们的伦理创伤。

**关键词：**詹妮特·温特森、《时间之间》、《冬天的故事》、文学伦理学

**作者简介：**李娜，北京航空航天大学外国语学院博士研究生在读，研究方向为英美文学。田俊武，北京航空航天大学外国语学院教授，博士生导师，研究方向为英美文学与比较文学。本文为北京航空航天大学人文社科拔尖人才项目【项目编号：ZG226S189J】阶段性成果。

Jeanette Winterson (1959—) is a contemporary female English novelist famous for her *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985), *Sexing the Cherry* (1989), *Written on the Body* (1992), *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal* and *The Power Book* (2000), most of which deal with LGBT( lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) issues. For instance, concerning *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985), Mara Reisman explores the privileging authority's "naturalizing moral judgments and perpetuating social, political, religious, and sexual norms" (Reisman 11). Julie Ellam locates Winterson's strong belief in true love, "an ongoing concern with the bonds of love" (Ellam 79). As far as *Written on the Body* (1992) is concerned, Ellam associates the "transcendent and powerful love" (Ellam 87) in this novel with Winterson's deconstructed narrator, asserting that love is eternal. Jose Sanchez shares Ellam's viewpoint, arguing that Winterson "creates a sexually undefined character who escapes any attempt of classification into the categories of female or male subjectivity" (Sanchez 96). However, Winterson's *The Gap of Time* (2015), a rewriting of William Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* in celebrating the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the bard, is scarcely explicated by critics except book reviews published in newspaper columns. Up to the present, there are only two research papers on Winterson's rewriting of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*. In his "The Trauma of Time in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* and Winterson's *The Gap of Time*," Evrim Dogan Adanur mentions that "Jeanette Winterson's *The Gap of Time* is a rewriting of William Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*," and both the original play and the rewritten novel "have a preoccupation with time and are attempts to recover from what is lost in time by employing different approaches" (Adanur 471). Paul Joseph Zajac holds that Winterson's *The Gap of Time*, an adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, represents "the struggle to attain and maintain intimacy" (Zajac 332). However, the ethical concerns of the novel, which have also

been the consistent concern of Winterson, are unnoticed by critics. Therefore, in this paper, by employing Nie Zhenzhao's ethical literary criticism, we will reveal Winterson's profound ethical concerns that lie beneath the superficial issues of triangle love and foundling.

### **Awful Ethical Environment and Ethical Confusions**

In comparison to the previous adaptations of Shakespearean plays, which were usually transformations from plays to plays or from plays to films, Winterson's rewriting of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* into a contemporary novel is certainly a retrorse one. However, despite of their great differences in story settings and character names, *The Gap of Time* keeps its intrinsic relationship to *The Winter's Tale* through transtextual means. *The Winter's Tale* dramatizes how the jealousy of King Leontes of Sicily destroys his conjugal relationship with his pregnant wife Queen Hermione as well as his friendship with his childhood friend King Polixenes of Bohemia and how time, as a major character, erases the discords between King Leontes and his queen Hermione, between King Leontes and King Polixenes, and between King Leontes and his lost daughter Perdita. Winterson's *The Gap of Time* inherits the characters and plots of the original play, with Leo Kaiser, Xenon and MiMi respectively responding to Leontes, Polixenes and Hermione. Other characters like Shep, Perdita, Pauline, Tony, Milo, Clo, Zel also have their basic correspondence to the characters of the original play. Although the story settings are transplanted from ancient Sicily Kingdom and Bohemia Kingdom to contemporary London, New Bohemia City of America and Paris, and the character identities are changed from ancient kings, queens, princes and princesses into contemporary professional people like banker, chanteuse, game designer and car salesman etc, the basic plots of Winterson's novel still follow jealousy-destruction-repentance-serendipity-reunion, which is the storyline of *The Winter's Tale*. Despite the basic differences in settings, character identities and themes, *The Gap of Time* still inherits the ethical concerns as expressed in *The Winter's Tale*.

Leo, Xenon, MiMi, Shep, and Tony, the main characters of *The Gap of Time*, all suffer from ethical confusions. Because of the awful ethical environment in which they are brought up, it is hard for them to acquire normal ethical consciousness.

Meanwhile, Leo and Xeno's animal factors<sup>1</sup> win over their human factors<sup>2</sup>, destroying their ethical consciousness and rational will. Leo's twice fratricidal "killings" of Xeno, together with Xeno and MiMi's possible incest, display how animal factors are powerful in destroying human relations. During their struggle in walking out of the ethical dilemma, Perdita's love and MiMi's music play an important role. They purge the characters' ethics and make them rediscover what has been lost. Besides, Xeno and Zel's affection for literature propels their efforts to renovate the embarrassing father-son relationship. In this light, the novel not only discloses the ethical traumas brought by the prevalence of animal factor over human factor, but also highlights that ethical selection, guided by love and forgiveness, can function like time, erasing the ethical traumas of the characters and restoring harmony to their relationship again.

When *The Gap of Time* is published, Allan Massie pinpoints that the novel has "dark shadows where danger and corruption lie in wait" (Massie, *Book Review*, 2015). Lucaster Miller thinks that the novel expresses "hope that human beings can muddle through" (Miller, *Book Review*, 2015). We share their comments on the novel, and incline to further point out that the "dark shadows" refer to the "ethical environment" and the "hope" is the "ethical consciousness" accomplished through "ethical selection." In *The Gap of Time*, Leo's twice fratricidal "killings" of Xeno, Xeno's awkwardness in father-son relationship, and Tony's fondness of plants can be partly explained by their ethical environment. When transplanting William Shakespeare's Sicily into London, Winterson exhibits the overall ethical environment, "this crazy, reckless world" (Winterson, *The Gap of Time* 13)<sup>3</sup> with "corporate control that runs the world for the few and ruins it for the rest of us" (162). In the beginning, Shep "saw the strangest sight tonight...the night hot and heavy...the weather broke in two and the rain came down like ice...it was ice-hailstones...The street had all the heat of the day, of the week, of the month, of the season...it was like throwing ice cubes into a fat fryer" (5-6). As T.S. Eliot puts it, "outward scene never exists for its own sake and the world which is being created from these sensory impressions and concrete objects is a world of emotional

1 The animal factor is human beings' animal instinct, which is mainly controlled by their primitive desires. As an irrational element, the animal factor accounts for the animal instinct retained in human beings in the evolutionary process. See Nie's "Towards an Ethical Literary Criticism" published in *Arcadia* 50. 1 (2015): 83-101.

2 Normally, the human factor is superior to the animal factor, and hence the former can take control of the latter, which explains why a man can become a person with ethical consciousness.

3 The quotation is from *The Gap of Time* published by Penguin Random House, 2015. Subsequent citations from this novel are noted with only page numbers parenthetically.

realities” (qtd Drew 33). In the same way, Shep’s witness of such terrible weather indicates the stifling ethical environment in which he and the other main characters grow up. According to Nie, “Ethical literary criticism pays particular attention to the analysis of the ethical environment, which comprises the historical conditions for the production and dissemination of literature. Ethical literary critics are thus exhorted to set their study in a certain historical context. In other words, they need to investigate literature in a given ethical environment” (Nie, *Towards an Ethical Literary Criticism* 91). As far as a concrete literary text is concerned, an ethical environment may refer to the humanistic or moral environment in which characters live and have ethical relationship with other characters. When he was young, Leo was left by his father at a boarding school, and his mother was a lesbian, leaving his father for another woman. Even as a grown-up, Leo still cannot catch his mother’s reason for leaving him away. Without parental love, Leo feels unsafe in the society and sometimes resorts to alcohol to eradicate his ethical loneliness. His sense of ethical loneliness is also demonstrated in his not daring to make a love proposal to MiMi, only asking Xeno to give a letter to her. Hearing what has been written in the letter, MiMi smiles, and Xeno says, “No, listen...he’s awkward, but he means it. This is his way of being sure” (65). Leo and MiMi’s new room is “private and secure”, and his tight hold of MiMi testifies to his scrupulousness in the marriage. In order to monitor MiMi, Leo installs a webcam in her bedroom without sound, and when Leo “pressed ZOOM but the image went fuzzy” (50). It can be concluded that MiMi’s ostensible adultery with Xeno is Leo’s own illusion that is refuted by Pauline, “If MiMi has any sense she’ll divorce you” (88). Ultimately, the shadow of his miserable childhood shatters his marriage with MiMi, almost killing her and his own daughter. Xeno, Leo’s business partner, grows out of a boy in the same boarding school with Leo, and his mother is alcoholic and mentally unstable. Apart from their similar “horrible families”, the boarding school where they had once been left by their fathers was shabby, neither fashionable nor academic, yet it made their fathers believe that their sons were brought up safe and sound. When others went home on weekends, Xeno, together with Leo, “invented worlds where they could live” (26-27). His parental abandonment gives rise to his sense of homelessness and pathological mentality, paving the way for his playing with women and formulating of an agreement of marriage of convenience with Zel’s mother.

MiMi, the singer, also shows concerns about her marriage with Leo. In her letter to Leo, she is frank about her broken family relationships, “neither of us have a happy-ever-after story written inside us. We both come from broken families. We

are wary as wild animals” (102). The pathetic ethical environment and her loss of Leo’s love and trust batter her, “she’s not alive in any way that makes being alive a life” (210). In the game designed by Xeno, MiMi behaves like a living corpse, awaiting the kiss. However, the kiss never comes, and she cannot come to life mentally and spiritually. Consequently, in order to heal her loss of Leo and Perdita, she walks on every day’s early morning “with her head down as far as the mouth of the Canal Saint-Martin, where she stands like a statue, her hands in her pockets, watching the water that has no memory and wanting to be like water” (228). Shep, Perdita’s adoptive father, is a black, and once came to London on a slave ship. In his eyes, “the world was getting darker, not brighter. The poor were poorer, the rich were richer. People were killing each other in the name of God...through ‘World of Warcraft’” (154). He now lives in New Bohemia, a former French colony with “sugar plantations, big colonial homes, beauty and horror all together” (10). His African bloodline is deemed as a stain by his Christian neighbors who close their windows as he and his son Zel move before their houses. Such miserable ethical environment pushes his smothering of his wife so as to end her sufferings. Since the death of his wife, Shep cannot sense love any more. Even though he can shelter himself from rain in the church, he cannot walk out of his sorrow of losing his wife.

Tony Gonzales, Leo and Pauline’s gardener, is another victim of the awful ethical environment. His parents were Mexicans, who eloped to England in the 1950s. Unfortunately, his father was killed on a building site when Tony was only two. Very soon, his mother got married to the site’s foreman, and this aroused Tony’s aversion to his mother’s immorality as well as his suspicion that the foreman had killed his father for the sake of marrying his mother. After the new marriage, Tony’s mother had more children, and Tony was neglected and was always beaten by his stepfather. Disgusted by his stepfather and deserted by his ineligible mother, Tony left home at sixteen. Lack of belonging and security, Tony even turns to plants for warmth and “plants were better” (98). BabyHatch, the “saddest thing you ever saw” (121) emerges in Shep’s reminiscence. It is a wrong and immoral place for infants because “once the baby is inside and the hatch is closed, a bell rings in the hospital and it doesn’t take long for a nurse to come down, just long enough for the mother to walk away...” (6). The three foundling girls HollyPollyMolly were born there and they later name their band The Separations, demonstrating their affliction aroused by their parents’ desertion and the degenerative ethical environment of the BabyHatch. Similarly, Perdita was also left in BabyHatch where Shep’s wife died. The minute she learns of the fact, she sits down with fear, “laughing as well as crying” (192). She even questions her identity as Shep’s daughter and Clo’s sister,

and this ethical confusion permeates her whole life.

### **Sphinx Factors of the Main Characters**

In *The Gap of Time*, nearly all the main characters possess the double features of good and evil. This good versus evil can be best explicated by Nie's theory of "Sphinx factor." According to Nie, the head of Sphinx symbolizes the rational will of mankind that is achieved through a long process of natural selection, and the Sphinx body configures the form of a snake, representing the animal factor remaining in human beings. Meanwhile, Nie contends that "from an ethical perspective, mankind exists as a Sphinx factor, which is composed of both the human factor and the animal factor. The Sphinx factor can be seen as the kernel element that literature expresses and explores" (Nie, "Ethical Literary Criticism: Ethical Selection and Sphinx Factor" 1). The combination of a human head and an animal body in Sphinx suggests "firstly, the most important feature of a human image lies in its head, which stands for reason as a result of the evolutionary process, and reason is a decisive factor that enables human beings to be human beings. Secondly, it indicates that human beings have evolved from animals yet still contain some features belonging to them" (qtd Baker, 15). In Winterson's novel, Shep's smothering of his wife manifests his animal factor, yet his confessions to the pastor is an exhibition of his human factor perfecting his human nature and redeeming himself from the sordid world. Autolycus, a character that appears in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, is reimaged as a used car-dealer in Winterson's *The Gap of Time*, and is delineated as "part crook, part sage" (135), saliently conveying the bond of animal factor and human factor. His animal factor emerges when he plans to ditch the DeLorean to Clo as Clo's birthday present to his father Shep. Hidden behind his animal factor is his human factor, evidenced by his offer to the slight Zel some kind of place to sleep in. To him, even though the society is brutal and cruel, "there's no need to be hurtful" (180).

Unlike Autolycus, Leo, when overwhelmed by his animal factor, harms people around him both verbally and bodily. "He's got his own way all his life so he can't control his emotions, desires, rages, affects. He's a typical Alpha Male. They don't grow up, they just get meaner" (57). Being hit by the eggs thrown by protesters out of the bank, Leo "tore off his jacket and grabbed two of the kids, throwing them down onto the pavement. He punched a third against the wall and broke his nose" (20). His almost twice fratricidal "killings" of Xeno once more prominently reveal his animal factor. One "killing" happened during a bicycle race in the boarding school one Saturday afternoon, and it bruised Xeno's legs and scratched

his face. The other “killing” happened during his chase of Xeno in the park. Xeno attributes Leo’s frenzied chase to the fact that he “got off his head” (79). Nie holds that “the head” represents mankind’s human factor or rational will. Without his head, Leo has no rationality, allowing his animal factor to abuse its power. His twice fratricidal behaviors subject Xeno to physical and mental tribulation, and bring shadows to their friendship. Besides, Leo disconnects all his phones with the outside world and confines himself to his own narrow room, illustrating his hurt head once again. Even in front of his own newborn daughter, Leo “couldn’t lift his head. He couldn’t look up” (87). All his losing of his head incarnates his animal factor gaining an upper hand over his human factor, placing him in an ethical dilemma and messing his ethical identity. Despite of his overt animal factor, Leo is undeniably a good father towards his son, Milo. “Leo’s softness was here, with his son” (20), and “they talked about football in the car and Leo promised to take him to a game at the weekend” (100). Even his pernicky secretary Pauline holds that Leo “got a good heart” (57). Nonetheless, Leo’s lack of parental love makes it hard for him to get rid of the manipulation of animal factor, engendering his tight hegemony over and strong desire for having sex with MiMi.

The animal factor also exists in Xeno’s head. In the boarding school, Xeno enjoyed playing a rabbit-shooting game in the forest. “I’m in a forest...My own cabin. Rabbits come and I shoot them. Bang bang bang” (27). His revelry in target range competitions reflects his remaining animal factor. As Leo’s once gay partner, Xeno also loves MiMi, Leo’s wife. Xeno’s affection for MiMi may reflect the natural will in his human nature. However, according to Nie, this natural will is a will symbolizing the animal factor, which is reflected in various forms of desires, such as the lust for food and sex. Winterson is never mean in her delineation of Xeno’s paradoxical state of mind when he is with MiMi. As asked by Leo to send a proposal letter to MiMi, Xeno wanders:

What would it be like if we didn’t have a body? If we communicated as spirits do? Then I wouldn’t notice the...hair that falls into your eyes...the way you hook your boots on the bar of the chair...the word that comes to mind and is dismissed is love. Do you always leave your top button undone like that? Just one button? So that I can imagine your chest from the animal paw of hair that I can see? Disconcerting, the way you look at me when we talk...MiMi was sitting with her knees up, bare legs, her eyes like fireflies (66-67).

Winterson’s ambiguous portrayal of Xeno and MiMi is a precise mirroring of Xeno’s inclination to have sex with MiMi, displaying his animal factor. MiMi, at the same time, is attracted by Xeno, and her seemingly flirtation with Xeno is

recorded. After the dinner, they go to MiMi's apartment. As soon as they arrive, MiMi stands "framed in the window in her blue dress in the yellow light" (68), and Xeno moves directly behind her. She turns right into Xeno, takes his hand and leads him to her bed, lifting her hand and stroking Xeno's nape. Such details convey MiMi's lust for having sex with Xeno, which is vindicated by Xeno: "She trusted me. She was physically comfortable with me...I really think she loved me" (208). MiMi's greediness of sex with Xeno verifies her free will, one emblem of animal factor. Whether it is Xeno's or MiMi's active flirtation, the likely adultery evidences their powerful animal factors, ruining Leo and MiMi's marriage, Milo's life and the friendship between Leo and Xeno. Nevertheless, Xeno's and MiMi's human factors cannot be neglected. When learning from Cameron that Leo's madness originates from his "having an affair with MiMi", Xeno firmly refutes, "I'm not having an affair with MiMi" (79). His human factor prevails over his animal factor, and he decides to stop his ambiguous relationship with MiMi. Though hurt by Leo, MiMi forgives him, which indicates an active response to Winterson's statement that the novel is "a play about forgiveness" (284-285). Forgiveness is one type of kindness and it symbolizes mankind's human factor. It is MiMi's forgiveness that saves her from the physical and spiritual pain, making her a singer again.

### **Ethical Selection of the Main Characters**

According to Nie, natural selection is "the process of evolving from ape to man. It is the selection of the form as man but not man as the civilized one...takes role only in human form evolving from ape but not in transformation of savages into civilized ones. Even though we have completed it in the history of evolution, everyone still must undertake it within context of ethical selection" (qtd from Ross, 11). In *The Gap of Time*, the ethical identities of Leo and Xeno both undergo a long process of ethical selection until the reappearance of MiMi and their encounter with Perdita, and this ethical selection succeeds in their recognizing and confirming their ethical identities and achieving their ethical consciousness.

Leo, "a reformed character" (210), is captured by MiMi's charm. His first meeting with MiMi is in a jazz club where "a small, slight, boyish woman with a face like a pretty sailor in red lipstick, wearing a black dress, holding the microphone like it had something to say to her, started to sing" (44), and Leo "felt the wind blowing through him. He felt lighter. She blew through him like a salt wind off the sea" (45). In this light, her love awakens him, and he makes up his mind to treat MiMi with his kindness, "he loved her so much. His feelings were a mixture of tenderness and pleasure...There was nothing he wouldn't do for her.

He kept cuttings of all her press notices. It was him, not her, who had the awards lined up in his study at home” (80). Milo’s birth is the best evidence for their love. MiMi’s love cures Leo’s sense of non-belonging, and aids his completion of ethical selection, to some degree. Their union is supposed to be a happy one. Pitifully, Leo’s dislocated identity gives rise to his irrational disbelief in MiMi and accuses her of an adultery with Xeno. In her farewell letter to Leo, MiMi interrogates Leo’s mistrust, “I am married to you, Leo. I would not use Xeno to end our marriage. If I no longer loved you I would leave you. Do you not know that about me? Not even that? ... Is it because you would do such things that you imagine it is what I am doing to you?...When did I lose your love?” (103) Apart from MiMi’s divorce from him, Milo’s death is also an aftermath of Leo’s crappy ethical identity. Suggested by Pauline, Leo determines to see MiMi after her giving birth to Perdita. Milo, the little “lighthouse”, stands between Leo and Mimi, “between the rocks and the shipwreck.” Having perceived their split, Milo “went quietly down to the kitchen” (101) and dies afterward. The injury caused by his parent’s broken relationship, for the most part, is the hidden reason for Milo’s death. Associating with the frightening ethical environment in which Leo is brought up, we can conclude that Leo’s distorted ethical identity makes him difficult in believing MiMi and in having confidence in their marriage.

As a matter of fact, Leo is psychologically and emotionally attached to MiMi. He hangs a big black and white photo on the wall of his office and keeps its digital version as his iPhone screen. Even when he attempts to gain Milo’s custody from Mimi, all he inclines to do is to “put his arms round his wife and cry until his tears made a river that would float them both away from this landlocked place” (102). Regretting, yet having no way to compensate for what he has done to MiMi, Leo arranges a room for her in his new house. However, MiMi will never be together with him, and what he can only do is to bury his face in her sweater, “his back against the wall, knees up, his head resting on his arms. No excuses. No reasons, No forgiveness. No hope” (230). He sentences himself to living his life as a punishment for his distorted ethical identity. Though falling in his life, Leo is still redeemed. In the novel, Winterson employs the narration intensity “Of course he loves you he worships you he can’t get enough of you you have been the making of him he knows that his life would be empty without you...I know he isn’t that attentive but he watches your every move” (57) to lay Leo’s true love with MiMi bare. Only MiMi can save Leo from the hell. At length, MiMi is reborn, “a woman is standing like a statue in the light. She’s wearing a simple black dress and red lipstick, her heavy hair cut short. She doesn’t move. Then she does” (284). As soon

as Leo hears Mimi sing on the stage, he completes his ethical selection and gains his ethical consciousness. Put it in another way, to Leo, it is MiMi's immensity of love that lifts him up from the corrupt world, "grabbed her hand like he was steadying himself from falling" (81). Ultimately, his distorted ethical identity is set right.

Xeno, another victim, does not possess sound ethical identity, either. When asked about the reason for his sudden leaving, Xeno explains that he has a call from Zel's school for he does not speak in the class again. Prevented from leaving, Xeno contends, "my son is more important than a meeting" (36). It is a sarcasm that Xeno declares Zel as his son. On the basis of "an arrangement" (99), Zel's mother is only Zel's mother, not Xeno's wife. Therefore, Zel considers him "a vanity project" (170). The freakish father-and-mother relationship and family structure exert negative influences on Zel and he abhors Xeno. His parents are like strangers to each other, and there is little possibility for them to bring up Zel with their love. Therefore, Zel's loneliness and self-abasement are inevitable, so that he is not brave enough to show his love to Perdita, only "put himself outside...looked in dumbly through the window of his longing, hurt and beaten and knowing that he had hurt and beaten himself but still he did it, over and over" (169). Besides, as soon as he hears Xeno's voice, he feels tense, "the softness in his face froze over like he was staring at Medusa" (175), reprimanding his father's superficiality "you're just a coward. You control life by avoiding it...relationships, children, people. You don't know how to love...that's all...it's not noble and tragic, it's pathetic" (211). Disgusted with Xeno's ostensible easiness and gentility, Zel wants to "hit his father out of existence" (176). Overall, Zel's detestation of Xeno is not accidental, but out of his recognition of his father's distorted ethical identity of father.

However, Xeno manages to perfect his distorted ethical identity through wide reading. As he is widely read, Xeno is popular among women. On the contrary, Leo dislikes reading books as he thinks games are better than books. Xeno retorts Leo's wrong idea about reading books, saying that "games are too passive. Books change the way people think about the world" (32). To further make his friend realize the importance of reading, Xeno gives a Yiddish literary book to Leo as the Christmas gift. According to Nie, literature is an art of ethics, the primary function of which is to offer human beings moral enlightenment and moral lessons for the advancement of human civilization. Xeno even puts his literary knowledge into his game design, "I want to invent a game that's like a bookshop...layers, levels, poetry as well as plot. A chance to get lost and to find yourself again" (61), "why can't games be a game-changer?...why can't a game make us understand more, see more, feel

more?” (32). Thanks to Xeno’s fondness of reading literary works, he is elevated, trying to fix his terrible relationship with and rectifying his wrong doings to his son Zel. The embarrassing yet authentic dialogue between Xeno and Zel before the initiation of the concert expresses their wish to have a better and deeper knowledge of each other:

‘Nice suit.’

Zel hesitated. Then he smiled. Xeno hesitated. Then he smiled. ‘I’d like to get to know you.’

Zel hesitated. ‘I guess I’m walking down there. You walking too?’ (281)

Following his father’s step, Zel develops a love for reading. When asked who really knows about love, Zel chooses “a book.” His knowledge of love from the book is shared with Perdita, who is mighty enough to row Zel from his “lonely island” back to “the lights and the warmth” (169). To Zel, Perdita is “sight of land” (200), and he walks out of his own cave, smiling “his slow, awkward, full-face smile like the sun coming through the clouds” (170) as he resolves to get married to Perdita.

### **Love and Forgiveness as Ethical Salvation**

Having delineated the rain and the bloody grappling in the first part of her novel, Winterson begins the second part with the title “Saturday morning. Spring day” (133). The skyline of the city breaks the distant horizon, and the early sun turns buildings into gold ingots. The air is fresh and it starts to warm. This forms a sharp contrast to the weather in the first part of the novel, and of course, it symbolizes a different ethical environment from that in which Leo, Xeno and MiMi live. The green in spring symbolizes Perdita being reborn with Shep and Clo’s loving care as well as their own life vitalization. The newborn baby is named “Perdita”, meaning “little lost one” (105). What has been lost? Coincidentally, the cinema to which Tony and Pauline go is called *Everyman*, and the movie they are to watch is *To Have and Have Not*. By intertextually associating the cinema’s name to that of a morality play in the Middle Ages and also the movie’s name to that of a Hemingway novel, Winterson subconsciously answers the question as to who is rich and who is not. Leo, the seemingly successful entrepreneur, loses his wife, his daughter, his friend and his spiritual well-being. Shep and Clo, the despised blacks, lead a rich life with love. The contrasting lifestyles of the characters verify Winterson’s affirmation that life without love is like stagnant water. Recalling his

deceased wife, Shep cries out, “where are you...Will I see you walking towards me at the end of the day...Look up and we see each other, first far away, then near...The atomic shape of your love” (13-14). Without his wife, Shep feels spiritual emptiness. He appears in the BabyHatch with his tyre lever and soaked clothing. The appearance of Perdita suddenly stuffs his lonely heart. He lifts “out the baby and she’s as light as a star” (9). However, as a black, Shep has no right to keep a newborn white child at that time. Thus, Shep and Clo sell their house and move to another place. When Perdita grows up, her “unimaginable, vast love” (289) mends Shep’s broken heart, as is said by Clo, “after Mom died he had a broken heart. You mended his heart” (193). Even Shep himself is honest about Perdita’s redemption, “Perdita happened, like a miracle—it was a miracle—like a new start—she was my instructions to love” (276). Owing to the appearance of Perdita, Shep thinks that he has a home again. In Shep’s seventy-year-old birthday party, Perdita voices her sincere gratitude to her adoptive father, “thank you...for being the best dad in the world” (165). From the start to the end, Perdita regards Shep as her father, “I love Shep. He’s the one who’s my father” (173). Perdita’s frank indebtedness reminds Shep of that stormy night, “storm and rain and the moon like a mandala when the clouds parted, it was the moon that made him know...a map of discovery” (164). The discovery of Perdita opens Shep’s heart again and it is conducive to his acquisition of ethical consciousness. In the meantime, the discovery of love fills the time gap and remedies mankind’s psychic fragmentation, accelerating the process of growing into an ethical man.

As Leo’s competent secretary, Pauline cannot be overlooked, and Winterson, indeed, speaks highly of her, “she ran things the way she wanted them to be run...Thanks to Pauline, Sicilia was compliant, transparent, charitable and, if not exactly ethical, they had standards” (34). Not regretting to be a career woman, Pauline still has a sense of loss in her heart. Tony’s appearance gradually stuffs her loneliness, and their mutual attraction bourgeons. As Tony works in her garden, Pauline perceives his distinction as if he “was a man from another time” (98). Because of his miserable ethical environment, Tony never gets married and intends to love nobody until his encounter with Pauline. After their watching the movie, Tony is “strangely, or not strangely, light-hearted” (110). The similar ethical reaction goes to Pauline as well. She looks at “herself in the hall mirror, thinking that she’d pop to the chemist in the morning and get a new lipstick” (110). Their love embryo sprouts, replenishing their life and hearts. Pauline even imagines her having a family with Tony in “the wide, welcoming hall with flowers on the table” (263). Even though there is a death gap between them, love exists in their hearts.

Tony's entrustment of Perdita to Shep is to save a newborn life, and Pauline's suggestion to Leo on the construction of a playground for the kids whose parents can purchase those affordable houses delivers her "doing good in the world" (226). Due to their love and universal benevolence, they are successful in becoming ethical human beings.

Ellam holds that "the appeal of God's love, which is first described in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, reappears as a faith in familial and romantic love and undermines postmodern uncertainty. This proffered solution, that is, love being depicted as an answer, necessarily marks Winterson as one who is tied to the faith by which Jeanette is betrayed" (Ellam 83). Winterson's advocate of love accounts for MiMi's formidable appeal to Leo and the magic power of "Music" to redeem mankind from moral degeneration. In human relationship, ethics is a key to all the problems besetting mankind. According to Nie, "literature is fundamentally an art of ethics", and "moral enlightenment is the primary function of literature" (Nie, "Ethical Literary Criticism: Its Fundamentals and Terms" 12). The intimate cooperation between "Music" and literature advances MiMi, Shep and Perdita's morality. As far as time is concerned, the discontinuity of time engendered by the random flowing of time can only be seamed with mankind's completion of ethical selection and accomplishment of ethical consciousness. To sum up, Winterson's *The Gap of Time* reveals the ethical disasters caused by the animal factor in human nature and advocates that love and forgiveness are the only panacea to depress the animal factor, to set men into healthy ethical environment and to cure the ethical trauma brought by human evils.

## Works Cited

- Adanur, Evrim Dogan. "The Trauma of Time in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* and Winterson's *The Gap of Time*." *Gaziantep University Journal of Social Sciences* 17. 2 (2018): 471-478.
- Baker, William & Shang Biwu. "Fruitful Collaborations: Ethical Literary Criticism in Chinese Academe." *TLS (Times Literary Supplement)* (2015): 14-15.
- Drew, Elizabeth. *T. S. Eliot: The Design of His Poetry*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949.
- Ellam, Julie. "Jeanette Winterson's Family Values: From *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* to *Lighthousekeeping*." *Critical Survey* 2 (2006): 79-88.
- Massie, Allan. "Book Reviews: The Gap of Time by Jeanette Winterson," *The Scotsman*, October 3, 2015. Available at: <https://www.scotsman.com/lifestyle/culture/books/book-reviews-the-gap-of-time-by-jeanette-winterson-1-3905707>
- Miller, Lucaster. "The Gap of Time by Jeannette Winterson, book review: A Modern Rewriting." *Independent*, October 1, 2015. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/>

books/reviews/the-gap-of-time-by-jeanette-winterson-book-review-a6675676.html

Nie, Zhenzhao. "Ethical Literary Criticism: Ethical Choice and Sphinx Factor." *Foreign Literature Studies* 6 (2011): 1-13.

—. "Ethical Literary Criticism: Its Fundamentals and Terms." *Foreign Literature Studies* 1 (2010): 12-22.

—. "Towards an Ethical Literary Criticism." *Arcadia* 1 (2015): 83-101.

Reisman, Mara. "Integrating Fantasy and Reality in Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*." *Rocky Mountain Review* 1 (2011): 11-35.

Ross, Charles. "A Conceptual Map of Ethical Literary Criticism: An Interview with Nie Zhenzhao." *Forum for World Literature Studies* 1 (2015): 7-14.

Sanchez, Jose Francisco Fernandez. "Play and (Hi)story in Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion*." *Atlantis* 1/2 (1996): 95-104.

Winterson, Jeanette. *The Gap of Time*. London: Penguin Random House, 2015.

Zajac, Paul Joseph. "Distant bedfellows: Shakespearean struggles of intimacy in Winterson's *The Gap of Time*." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 59.3 (2018): 332-345.