

DEMOCRATIC AND POPULAR REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA  
MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH  
UNIVERSITY OF ABDELHAMID IBN BADIS- MOSTAGANEM  
FACULTY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH



## **The Postmodern Representations of Femininity in Jeanette Winterson's Selected Narratives**

**A Thesis submitted to the Department of English for the Requirements of the  
Doctorate in British and Anglo-Saxon Literature**

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**Academic Year: 2022-2023**

## **Dedication**

*I dedicate this work to my beloved and caring grandmother, my parents and my sister who have provided me with their support and encouragement in all possible forms.*

*This work is also dedicated to my husband who has always offered reassurance and encouragement throughout the process.*

*To all my extended family*

*I also dedicate this accomplishment to my daughters: Amani, Inès and Tasnim, who are the light of my life.*

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank, in the first place, my supervisor and mentor, Professor Abbès BAHOUS, for his guidance, stimulation and patience during all these years.

I also owe many thanks to the board of examiners who have accepted to read and evaluate this humble work. I am equally grateful to my friends for their constant support, encouragement and friendship.

Special thanks go too to my university teachers who have always inspired me through their lectures, pieces of advice and generous kindness.

My final heartfelt thanks go to the staff at the library of the University of Mostaganem for their prompt services.

## Abstract

Identifying femininity has always been linked to gender roles and responsibilities associated with society's expectations of women. Gender, particularly femininity has been a central concern to feminist theory which has put a great deal of energy to combat traditional gender ideologies about women's inferiority to men. This research work attempts to contribute to the study of gender in literature through addressing femininity representations in Postmodern British fiction, taking Jeanette Winterson as one of its representatives. The attempt is to analyze Winterson's novels which are respectively: *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985), *Written on the Body* (1992) and *Lighthousekeeping* (2004) and how they foster to depict the complex reality of female protagonists who are torn between expressing their femininity and societal expectation of women. Winterson presents her heroines in an endless struggle to overcome gender norms and embark on a journey self discovery. In doing so, she relies on postmodern techniques such as intertextuality, storytelling, fairytales and mainly parody of Biblical events all of which aid relentlessly to the portrayal of the protagonists' femininity. It has been argued that the three novels at hand endeavour to foster non conformist and powerful women who dare to challenge and transgress the sacred (religious and social norms) in order to subvert the prevailing patriarchal and heterosexual discourses. Using different portraits like lesbian, androgynous, and sexually empowered women, Winterson depicts strong willed protagonists who not only deconstruct the binary opposition system between man and woman, but also reconstruct a new paradigm of femininity and sexuality. Indeed, this depiction takes up the Butlerian strategy (Judith Butler) that '*gender is always becoming rather than being*'. On the whole, this Wintersonian portrayal which is crafted by postmodern techniques is in fact a revolt against all kinds of women suppression, and an alternative way for Winterson to create the world she would want it to be.

**Keywords:** Femininity; Representations, postmodernism, gender, transgress, gender norms, non conformity, performativity.

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## Abbreviations

<b><i>OAF / Oranges</i></b>	<i>Oranges Are not the Only Fruit (1985)</i>
<b><i>WB</i></b>	<i>Written on the Body (1992)</i>
<b><i>LHK</i></b>	<i>Lighthousekeeping (2004)</i>

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# General Introduction

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## General Introduction

Throughout history, gender has always played an important role in the lives of human beings, beginning from the moment of their birth when they are given a blue or a pink blanket and sent ahead on a path that would turn them into what their society considers proper men or women. Men and women have traditionally been represented differently; they have been assigned different roles, behavioral norms, and even different feelings and thoughts based on their gender. To define ‘what gender is’ was not, and still is not, an easy task for scholars and theorists who have spilled a lot of ink on deciphering its real nature.

The distinction between gender and sex has disquieted the minds of many scholars and thinkers particularly since the last century – Hélène Cixous and Judith Butler, to name few - as a dominant discourse that has been under continual dispute struggling endlessly to find a space in gender studies. The terms gender and sex are often used interchangeably; theorists’ claims vary in their contrasting views. Some of them try to emphasize the role of sex in forming gender, and others (such as Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler) find out that it is, in fact, gender that produces sex. To clarify the haziness of the term, we raise the following questions: Is gender similar to sex? Or does gender rank after sex? Is gender innate or a construction evolving through time?

The above questions have lead to contrasting views on gender between essentialists and constructivists. Gender essentialists, who believe that gender is inborn and biologically determined, indicate that everyone has either a male or a female ‘essence’ or ‘nature’ that is defined by biology and that one’s sex is assigned at birth. The constructivists, on the other hand, proclaim that labeling a person

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‘man’ or ‘woman’ is a social issue rather than a purely biological matter. For them, gender is not something one is born with, but it is socially constructed in historical and social contexts.

The definition that gender as being socially and culturally constructed was the premise of many feminist critics like Judith Butler, who is considered as one of the most influential radical philosophers and whose inspiration comes from her predecessor Simone de Beauvoir. Taking her claims from De Bouvoir, Butler argues that gender is constructed and therefore; it can be a form of choice; metaphorically, ‘woman is not born, but made’: “One ne nait pas femme, on le devient” (1988). In this respect, Butler explains that gender is an aspect of identity gradually acquired through time. Hence, the implication of gender is controversial and much more complicated than it appears to be (Grosz 1994)

Gender is then one of the debatable and vaguest notions to be discussed in different fields: philosophy, psychology, political science, cultural studies and most notably literature. Addressing gender issues has become one of the pertinent literary themes of postmodern literature where authors have enthusiastically thrown themselves into an investigation of gender and particularly the representations of femininity in literary works.

As a literary movement, Postmodernism frequently reveals distressing truths regarding the inferior position of women inside a patriarchal system since it questions the very underpinnings on which society bases its cultural constitution and political goals. It also gives voice to marginalized groups, seeking for social recognition and cultural expression. Postmodern literature has served as an outlet

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and sounding board of women's rights and feminist pioneers. Hence, a great interest is given to women and to the way they are portrayed from a postmodern prospect.

Furthermore, Feminism as a movement which advocated for women's rights has also had a significant impact on how literary texts are read and evaluated. It has in fact emphasized the role of literature in bringing gender discrimination and equality to the forefront. In many ways, feminist criticism has provided distinct approaches to the representation of women in literature, increasingly challenging the male literary canon in order to address the biases of patriarchal discourses. Regardless of the form that feminist criticism takes, feminist literary critics oppose all presumptions that deny women's significance in the literary field. Women, therefore, are represented culturally in various forms. Whatever the causes, the representations of women have always been raised compulsively. They are projected differently according to their caste, racial status, class and position as inferior or as powerful.

Historically, women used to be misrepresented literally particularly by male writers; often portrayed as weak, passive, emotional and neurotic; and this misrepresentation is justified through males' domination throughout history. In early Victorian literature for example we can see how women were treated as angelic figures, but at the same time, weak creatures. Heroines created by males seemed to follow prescribed roles for women. Robert Brwoning's poem "*Women and Roses*" can be regarded as a good instance to convey man's perspective on women throughout time (Hughes 2019). These textual depictions confirm the subjection of women by advocating the inferior position assigned to them in various contexts.

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As far as women status is concerned, Virginia Woolf was a pioneer to study how social and cultural conditions can be constraints for women as individuals and writers as well as to challenge the established Victorian phantom known as '*the Angel in the House*' (an expression borrowed from Coventry Patmore's poem (1854) recognizing domestic happiness).

Along the same path, many postmodernist female authors consider Woolf as their role model and look to represent women in their literary works as compelling female characters who are notably active and capable of confronting obstacles on their own. This portrayal is indeed a reflection of the historical changes of women's position in society and chiefly of the female figures that women desired to be.

Jeanette Winterson, one of Britain's quintessential authors, has already become one of the most controversial and innovative novelists in contemporary Britain whose works mainly deal with gender, femininity, sexual identity and female experience within a framework of postmodern feminism. Winterson's special approach to femininity representations breaks down barriers, overcome boundaries and challenges fixed ideas about women and their roles in contemporary British society. Through her fictions, she protests against the passive representations of women which often confine them to roles that limit their creative and intellectual achievements. These representations urge to open an umbrella of reassessment and a reconstruction of women's image in Winterson's texts.

Since our first reading of a chapter in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985), a novel by Jeanette Winterson, we got inspired by her special approach in depicting her female characters mainly the protagonist. This protagonist who bears the same name as the author 'Jeanette' and functions as her alter ego is portrayed as a non conformist, a powerful woman and a reversal of the traditional female who is

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subject to male gaze. In this novel the author deconstructs the binary opposition system dominated in the heterosexual world, and reconstructs a liberated view on love through subverting traditional norms. The protagonist's arousing desire to subvert social and religious standards is a clear transgressive act which results in a truthful representation of her femininity.

Therefore, such concern appealed to our research's interest and motivated me to read more about Winterson. And to quench my desire, I decided to investigate more on Wintersonian portrayal of her female heroines from a postmodern perspective. Indeed, Jeanette Winterson changes women's portrait of femininity through deconstructing the socially established convictions and attitudes about women as stereotypically passive and limited agents.

This thesis carries out an analysis of femininity which is crafted by postmodern techniques in Winterson's selected narratives. *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985), *Written on the Body* (1992) and *Lighthousekeeping* (2004) are the selected literary works that furnish relevant materials to explore the thesis concern. The study initially focuses on the narratives' female protagonists and the way they are represented within a postmodern framework.

In this work, the researcher argues that Winterson's female protagonists live their lives on their own terms and have to accept the drawbacks that come with such attempts to challenge social structures. Writers down the centuries have often depicted women as being suppressed; however, the current selected narratives boast powerful female characters that subvert patriarchal and heterosexist discourses. Sexuality and the female body present also another challenge to traditional masculine and feminine codes. For Winterson's heroines, sexuality is an alternative

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way to exist in a society dominated by a patriarchal culture. In fact, these female characters vary from society's expectations and act as rebellious and apparent in their refusal to conform to religion and social norms that are tools of manipulation asserted to control them.

Equally important, Winterson's female characters embark on a quest of femininity discovery through creating their own kingdom/*queendom* in which they refuse to abide by the demands of society and subvert gender roles. Through different portraits: -lesbian, androgynous, and sexually empowered women-, she creates strong willed characters who react as best as they can to live the way they like. Hence, women and the world in her stories are the one which mirror the world as Winterson would want it to be.

Winterson presents her female characters with a skilful talent of writing and a use of postmodern techniques. Intertextuality, storytelling, fragmentation fairytales, irony and Biblical illusions characterize her narratives and serve as a literary means to ridicule religious doctrines, oppose the authoritative constraints prevailing in her society and to subvert traditional gender norms. She presents her novels in a series of narratives and fairytales; each one is different from the other intertwined and with many literary allusions to a variety of other texts namely: *Jane Eyre* (1847) by (Charlotte Bronte), *To the Lighthouse* (1927) by (Virginia Woolf) and *Treasure Island* (1883) by (Robert Louise Stevenson).

In this work, we perform close reading analyses of three novels selected from Winterson's canon, as sketched above, which I view as corresponding to my topic of research. In fact, our concern will fall on the examination of the literary representations of femininity in the author's selected narratives. The main interest is



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then to highlight the way throughout which the author reveals her feminist thoughts through the exploration of her protagonists' gender troubles. In this view of things, we assume that the fluidity of gender that Winterson presents, creates an alternative way of constructing identity where femininity and masculinity trespass the 'either/or' relationship. Hence, to enlarge our store of knowledge, the following questions might be raised:

1. Torn between constructivism and essentialism, how is gender, particularly femininity defined and employed as well in Winterson's selected novels?
2. To what extent do Winterson's representations of female protagonists challenge the traditional stereotypical association of femininity with domesticity and passivity?
3. How is female sexuality (female body) encoded in Winterson's novels as an expression of self-empowerment?
4. How does Winterson's proficient use of postmodern narrative techniques redefine her portrayal of female characters?

To investigate these research questions, the following hypotheses are put forward:

Firstly, given that Winterson is one of the contemporary postmodern feminists, she interrogates traditional views of gender and redefines femininity in a postmodern world in which it is seen as transgressive, socially constructed and free from masculine colonizing discourses. Secondly, the author's heroines do not fall prey to repressive gender stereotypes that stifle them in favor of developing the story's male character. They often twist and reverse gender roles in order to gain their goals and identities at the end. Thirdly, taken into account the fact that the author is a lesbian, it is suggested that her characters' revelation of their desire and

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sexual orientations is a reflection of Winterson's beliefs. The writer presents a new twist of plots in which her female protagonists accept their sexual preferences and do not attempt to combat them instead, they transgress the obstacles to they confront and oppose to play 'damsel in distress'. Fourth and last, Winterson tackles femininity through postmodern techniques such as intertextuality, fairy tales and a slew of others through which she builds a bridge between them and her life.

This dissertation is divided into five chapters; the first two are theoretical and provide the research with a review of previous works as well as bestow a philosophical inquiry on the key concepts of the thesis. The three remaining chapters are dedicated to the literary analysis of the selected novels, all of which form the pillar of the work.

The first chapter entitled "*feminism, Postmodernism and Literary Feminist Criticism*" aims at giving a historical background of Feminism with its major theorists. It also provides a theoretical account of postmodernism along with an insight on postmodern literature and its major features. The last part of the chapter takes a closer look at Feminist Literary Criticism and the way it develops and analyzes women writers and their writings from a female perspective.

The second chapter entitled "*Gender and Sexuality: a Philosophical Inquiry*" dwells on the understanding of the concept of 'gender' which is torn between gender essentialism and structuralism. Judith Butler's text: *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1997) is a leading text in this section of the work. Most importantly for this project is Butler's revelation that 'gender' is always becoming rather than being. Moreover, keeping in line with butler, the theoretical part also sheds light on Butler's "*Bodies that Matter: on the Discursive*

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*Limits of Sex*” (1993) which presents a quite radical notion of gender that develops into queer theory. This section ends in an attempt to discuss and identify femininity and masculinity especially in a time when the idea that there are more than two genders is increasingly widespread.

The last section of this chapter discusses the issue of sexuality and the female body in relation to gender and femininity from a Foucauldian point of view. Since sexuality is recognized as a strong presence in Winterson’s works, it is seen quintessential to provide an understanding of the term relying on Michel Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality* (1976) from which he endeavors to prove that sexuality is constructive and it is a practice of self formation.

The third chapter, entitled *Transgressive Femininity in Oranges are not the Only Fruit* (1985), attempts to analyze the protagonist’s femininity traits in relation to her environment. Classified as a bildungsroman, *Oranges* traces the development of an adopted young girl “Jeanette” who is in the process to come to terms with her own femininity, yet, in doing so, she is obliged to subvert the restrictive system or the patriarchal ideology that restrain her from discovering her true self. Additionally, this practical part endeavors also to throw some light on the postmodern techniques used by Jeanette Winterson to depict her heroine whose life story is a series of narratives and fairytales.

The fourth chapter that is under the title of *Femininity as Camouflage in Written on the Body* (1992), deals with the analysis of the second novel. As the title suggests, Winterson teases the readers about the true identity of the protagonist or the narrator which not revealed. Such strategy of obscuring the narrator’s gender, in fact, transforms the traditional narrative into a postmodern game of uncertainty and

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unreliability. Through a genderless protagonist, the author emphasizes Judith Butler's theory of '*Gender Performativity*'. In addition, the novel seeks to interpret the female body as a pure entity inscribed by society's practices corresponding to the Foucauldian view.

The fifth chapter is the last practical part of this work. This section is concerned with the literary analysis of the last chosen material: *Lighthousekeeping* (2004). As a semiautobiographical novel, the story revolves around Silver, an orphaned girl who grows up in a lighthouse on a Scottish coast with a blind wise man named Pew. When analyzing *Lighthousekeeping* (2004), storytelling presents itself as Winterson's major postmodern features in addition to intertextuality. The novel shows basically the importance of stories present in the narrative in defining the existence and forming the identity of the protagonist. Again, in this literary work, Winterson dares to portray her heroine as a non conformist woman, a rebellious and a dynamic person who is able to confront difficulties on her own instead of waiting for a man to solve her problems.

In conclusion, as one of the prominent postmodern authors, Winterson explores territories of controversy trying to create an alternative way of perceiving femininity by bestowing extreme freedom as one of its characteristics. The different representations adopted by her female protagonists challenge the dominant male discourse and directly mirror the 'real women experience', which not only enriches the female experience, but also free it by breaking the different taboos set by patriarchy. In *the Semiotics of Sex* (1995), Winterson states that her work is "always pushing at the boundaries we thought were fixed" (116).



# Chapter One : Femnism, Potmodernism and Feminist Literary Criticism

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## 1.1. Introduction:

We have now moved into an epoch where truth is entirely a product of consensus values, and where 'science' itself is just the name we attach to certain modes of explanation (Baudrillard qtd. In Christopher 169)

Postmodernism is that movement which emerged as the dominant intellectual, literary and artistic trend of the late twentieth century, and characterized by broad skeptical rejection of the idea of 'reason' which had been prevalent during the Enlightenment (The Enlightenment believed in the power of reason and rational reasoning). Unlike Modernism, Postmodernism breaks away from the modernist assumption that contemporary Man may achieve long-term order and control of the world through reason and science. Instead, Postmodernists sought a new way of describing and defining knowledge that undermined the foundations of Enlightenment, Humanism, and Modernism aiming to prove the misconception of the universality of human understanding ( man could reach the world's understanding through reason).

Along similar lines, postmodern literature emerged to react against modernist approaches to literature favoring some literary conventions like paradox, unrealistic plots, parody and black humor. Postmodern texts are fragmented often chaotically. Unlike modernist literature, the postmodern texts often eschew the quest for meaning

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and truth. According to the postmodernist theorist Baudrillard, postmodern texts abandon their search for truth simply because the world is seen from the eyes of the postmodernists as meaningless and an uncertain place where reality is undetermined. Postmodernist literature is characterized, among others, by radical loss of belief in metanarratives upon which Western thought is based.

Furthermore, it also gives voice to marginalized groups, seeking for social recognition and cultural expression. Hence, Feminism has also a prominent role in influencing the way literary texts are read and evaluated. In relation to literature, the feminist movement has focused on the role played by literature to bring out gender discrimination and equality in the forefront. Great interest was given to women and to the way they were portrayed from a postmodern prospect. Thus, Feminism movements take part in seeking to analyze any notions that have led to gender inequality. By supporting different discourses, deconstructing texts, and attempting to foster subjectivity, postmodern feminists try to promote gender equality.

## 1.2. Feminism

“The great question that has never been answered, and which I have not been able to answer, despite my thirty years of research into the feminine soul, is: what does a woman want?”  
Sigmund Freud (qtd. in Felman 73)

The question “what does a woman want?” which has been formulated by Sigmund Freud at the beginning of the twentieth century, still seems a challenging question that needs to be answered. Historically, women have been treated unfairly and strict expectations have been placed on them as being inferior to men.

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Throughout history, women were victims of “a social stereotypical image”, some rules had to be followed and certain ‘ideal’ women images had to be kept.

The traditional Victorian ideal womanhood was always related to the home as paradise. This evidence was well established and well documented through literary works. *The Angle in the House* (1854) by Coventry Patmore is a good example of nineteenth century reality. Home and family were of paramount importance to woman’s life. This belief was the result of the emergence of the Industrial bourgeois class which not only opposed the new proletariat, but also was involved in recodifying ideologies about women. Among those ideas was to emphasise women as passive and domestic beings, more particularly as wives and mothers. Thus, the values of a domestic life were highly praised, being seen as the place for a proper religious life. It means a True woman was expected to serve as the protectress of religion. This view was communicated to young women through their families, churches, and schools, as well as periodical and popular literature and medical texts. Cowper refers to:

Domestic happiness, throw only bliss  
Of paradise that has survived the fall ( Cowper, 1889)

The thinking of domesticity resulted in the division of the world into two spheres; the public and the private. For Victorian people, specifically Evangelicans<sup>1</sup>, the world outside is hostile, full of sins and distracting, however, home is peaceful and loving. This split arose a kind of exaggerating separation between the two sexes. Therefore, Home became women’s universe and and the world outside was men’s space par

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<sup>1</sup> Belonging to one of the Protestant Churches or Christian groups which believe that the teaching of the Bible and persuading other people to join them is extremely important.



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excellence (Evans 9). Consequently, this idea became clearly established for Victorian people. Differences were seen as natural. Women were regarded naturally as weak, sensitive and fragile; and all these characteristics needed a kind of reserve at home. Men, on the contrary, were seen as powerful and courageous enough to face the world outside. Mary Evans, in her book *Feminism: Feminism and modernity* (2001) comments on his idea:

woman is mainly seen as a 'relative creature' who had to preserve a warm spirit of love and devotion. In other words, there was probably no greater praise for a woman than the one who is obedient and satisfying to her husband whose happiness she creates (45)

The stereotypical image of woman and the domestic sphere became an integral part of the dominant Victorian culture. The two sexes were regarded as separate spheres, only coming together at breakfast and again at dinner. This Victorian ideology rested on a common definition of a 'natural' characteristic of men and women. Hence, women were considered physically weak, yet at the same time supposed to be morally able to support men and be at their side.

By the 1830's and 1840's this had been promoted through propaganda as the only proper way to live. Even at the level of government working wives and mothers were seen as unnatural and immoral; they were generally criticized for being poor and inadequate mothers and wives. Women were discouraged from being wage earners by the belief that women who earned wages were "unnatural." In addition, low wages, the absence of upward mobility, depressing and unhealthy working

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conditions, all made marriage an attractive survival strategy for working-class women. (Smith - Rosenberg 13).

Expanding throughout the nineteenth century, a new movement developed in response to women's plight at that time. This Woman Movement promoted a series of new reforms for women. It called for a new image of womanhood, a change in cultural attitudes towards gender and a steady movement for women's issues towards the twentieth century feminism.

Feminism is a troublesome term which inspires controversy when defining it. The term is derived from the Latin word "feminina" which means woman, and was first introduced to refer woman's issues as power, rights and opportunities. It is, therefore, a protest against social, legal and economic restrictions on women's rights and male's oppression which have existed since antiquity. Nonetheless, the term did not gain widespread popularity until the 1970's when it began to be used in public more frequently.

France and Britain were mainly among the first countries that witnessed the contest fight for women's rights. British women started calling for their rights and above all for respect against oppression during mid 1850's when the first suffragist movement emerged. Since then, women began working on accomplishing their goals to have the same rights as men.

According to Gornick (1978), women's battle for their rights started with Mary Wollstonecraft's publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). Wollstonecraft controversially proposed that women ought to make more use of their

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intellect than what they did as mothers and wives (32). From this point forward, feminists sought to ask for equality of women in different areas such as education, politics and work. Mary Wollstonecraft was the founding mother who “spoke up, quite loudly, for what had been until then a largely silent section of the human race” (Chernock 2). Despite the fact that Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication* received the lion’s share of attention through its advocating of women’s potential and self-intelligence, but feminism did not become a recognized movement until the nineteenth century.

In common with Wollstonecraft, Florence Nintingale pioneered women’s emancipation, asked for better education and declared women’s potential as men. In Gornick’s view: “the conviction that men by nature take their brain seriously, and women by nature do not, is based not an inborn reality, but on a cultural belief that has served on deepest insecurities” (Gornick, 2008: 40). Since that time, these individual movements have become later on waves of feminism.

The first wave feminism refers to a period of feminist activity (women’s suffragist movement) which took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and which focused on officially mandated inequalities, primarily on gaining women's suffrage. This wave led to an increase in education opportunities and property rights:

For a married woman, her home becomes a prison-house.  
The house itself, as well as everything in it belongs to the  
husband, and of all fixture the most abject is his breeding  
machine, the wife. Married women are in fact slaves, their  
situation no better than that of Negro in the West Indies  
(Walters 44).

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At that time women were treated like servants and slaves with no right of possession. Feminists of this wave questioned the reasons why women were limited by domesticity and suggested that children and household care should be the interest of both sexes.

Among the prominent figures of this wave were the modernist Virginia Woolf, who has been referred to as the founder contemporary debate about feminism, and Simone de Beauvoir whose work "*The Second Sex*" (1949) challenged human history from a feminist perspective, and pronounced issues that later on feminists returned to. Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* demonstrates a feminist existentialism which prescribes a moral revolution. She examines the notion of woman as 'Other' in a patriarchal society. It is the social construction of woman as the other that Beauvoir identifies as essential fundamental to woman's oppression. Her ideas about woman were highly provocative.

As an existentialist, de Beauvoir focuses on the philosophical view that individuals are free, responsible and can overcome roles imposed by their society. She supported "One is not born a woman, but becomes one", "Man is the subject, he is the absolute: she is the other!" (De Beauvoir 172) .De Beauvoir's most famous lines indicate that roles given to women are not given to them by birth, but they are socially constructed. Women are taught to be the 'other'; they are taught what they are supposed to be in society in virtue of being the second sex. This notion of otherness led women to experience a painful struggle between their femininity and society.

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On the other hand, men are taught to be ‘the self’, the free, the active and self determining agents who identify themselves through their existence. De Beauvoir confirms:

No man would consent to be a woman, but every man wants women to exist. 'Thank god for having created woman.' 'Nature is good since she has given women to men.' In such expressions man once more asserts with naive arrogance that his presence in this world is an ineluctable fact and a right, that of woman a mere accident- but a very happy accident. (De Beauvoir: 173)

Interestingly, *the Second Sex* (1949) led the ground for second wave feminism. While first wave feminism tackled suffragist rights, second wave broadened the focus on a larger kind of issues including sexuality and reproductive rights. Second wave saw women’s cultural and political inequalities as “inextricably linked and encouraged women to understand aspects of their personal lives as deeply politicized” (qd in Harees Lukman. 2012: 546). At this stage, women tried to communicate better social positions, equal pay as well as free abortion and contraception.

One of the prominent works of this wave that spilled enough ink over feminism is *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) by Betty Friedan. Being influenced by Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949, Friedan rebelled against the patriarchal image that position women to inferior roles of a wife and a mother. Feminists of this wave were concerned to protest against the current ideology of the patriarchal system which

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kept them in home or in pitiful jobs of low pay. Moreover, this second phase aimed also at establishing a relationship between class, race and gender oppression. Hence, feminists of this period not only advocated middle class white women, but also defended women of colour for the purpose of calling for womanity, solidarity and sisterhood.

The third wave of feminism or what may be called ‘post feminism’ started in the mid 1990’s. The movement’s interest marked a gradual change from the second wave. This period focused less on law and politics, but more on woman as an individual self. Women at this level sought to subvert the roles of being victims of a patriarchal society. They described this wave to be more individual, complex and imperfect than the previous one. Women of this stage were emphasizing women empowerment and a process of re-theorizing gender. The third wave feminism is committed to a view of “the personal (sexuality, body image, relationships, the impact of cultural representations) as political. It seeks to represent young women as angry, in charge and taking action.” (Qtd.In. Zhen 203).

The fourth wave of feminism which starts around 2012 to the present day witnessed a radical change at the level of women rights. The rapid social change in societies has typically resulted in a shift towards more liberal attitudes on family norms, sexuality, education, race and ethnicity. It became a movement for women to speak up and share their experiences about sexuality, sexual abuse and violence. It also emphasized women empowerment and gender equality through internet and social media which gave them the opportunity for their voices to be heard. Hence, Internet activism became prominent during this phase of feminism. The use of print

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and social media platforms to speak out against violence and sexual harassment was a key feature of this wave.

Over the several decades, feminism supported women to stand by themselves and to be acknowledged in society. However, feminism today cannot be strictly defined. It is no more as clear as it used to be in the previous waves especially when it comes to women's personal choices. In the present time, the movement undergoes new changes and diversities. For some women it becomes a negatively loaded concept, and some of them do not even want to be associated with it under the pretext that it turns to be an outdated movement. Truly, women today are having more freedom and control over their bodies, their sexuality and their lives in general. They are in fact more independent when it comes to sexual orientation, employment or education. This idea is explained by Toril Moi (2010) claiming:

We are witnessing the emergence of a whole new generation of women who are careful to preface every gender- related claim that just might not to come across as unconventional with "I am not a feminist, but..." ( 9)

Moi explains that women's thinking overcomes the traditional feminist ideas and looks toward new conflicting discourses of women empowerment. Women positioned themselves against previous wave's discourse of feminism in order to claim a different position. This area, according to them, allows for more room of individuality and difference. In other words, they aim at showing a version of feminism that is more inclusive of sexualities and multiculturalism which make them appear to be a new and distinct generation of feminism.

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## 1.3. Postmodernism

Postmodernism is fundamentally a movement that grew out of a reaction against Modernism. The latter which was influenced by the Enlightenment, rejected power, authority and tradition and favoured reason and science. Postmodernism expressed a sharp break from the modernist belief that Man can reach the understanding of the world through relying on science and reason. Modernism is the mindset that emerged during the Enlightenment, an optimistic faith in the idea that methodology of science can lead the human sciences to meaningful psychological understanding of people. Postmodernism, on the other hand, starts with a loss of faith in the dreams of modernism. It gives a new vocabulary, a new language game, for helping us notice dimensions of experience that were obscured by the modernist vision. It is a dynamic language game, with meanings evolving and changing that call our attention to new dimensions ( Jordan 55).

Postmodernism is without doubt an international phenomenon; its impact has been felt in the works of many authors from all over the world. Unlike modernism, the beginning of postmodernism is difficult to define. According to Cahoon (1996), the term entered critical literary vocabulary in the 1950's and was widely adopted to refer to all cultural products that were indicative to some important changes in the cultural atmosphere after the Second World War (1939-1945). These changes were associated with a new period of development from modernity to postmodernity.

Unlike modernity, which is deeply influenced by the rise and quick advance of Industrial Capitalism, post-modernity is regarded as a new type of social life and economic order. It is a post-industrial society, the society of the media and or



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multinational capitalism. Media and advertising have a strong influence on postmodern societies. Since economies became more independent on the production of information services, postmodern society witnessed a new kind of social and cultural rifts. These changes were the core of interest of many postmodern philosophers who pointed to destructive impacts that the economic and cultural productions have on the state of postmodern culture: mere changes in taste (influenced by advertising and media images) promote the sale of goods, so that fashion takes over from culture, and the media-led opinion-forming is vital to the economic process” (Butler, C. 117).

In a different light, in conjunction with feminist theory and poststructuralism, postmodernism provides an outlet for both author and audience to denaturalize existing cultural conventions. While postmodernism was originally connected with architecture, the labels 'postmodern' and 'postmodernism' have become increasingly associated with other areas such as film, literature, and art over time. As a result, no definitive definitions of postmodernism have evolved, and postmodernism's broad characteristics have come to dominate current cultural analysis. As Linda Hutcheon puts it, postmodernism 'manifests itself in many fields of cultural endeavour' and takes:

the form of self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-undermining statement. It is rather like saying something whilst at the same time putting inverted commas around what is being said. The effect is to highlight, or 'highlight,' and to subvert, or 'subvert,' and the mode is therefore a 'knowing' and an ironic -- or even 'ironic' -- one. Postmodernism's distinctive character lies in this kind of wholesale

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'nudging' commitment to doubleness, or duplicity. In many ways it is an even-handed process because postmodernism ultimately manage to install and reinforce as much as undermine and subvert the conventions and presuppositions it appears to challenge. (1-2).

Hutcheon further explains that nonetheless, it appears safe to suggest that the postmodern's primary concern is to alter some of the dominant features of our way of life; to indicate that those institutions that we unthinkingly experience as 'natural' (they also might involve capitalist system, patriarchy, and liberal humanism) are cultural; created by us, not given to us. She adds ironically that even nature might be unnatural, as postmodernism might argue, does not grow on trees.

In addition to challenging the fixed absolutes that dominate canonical forms, postmodernism as a cultural discussion fosters multiple or pluralistic readings of literature and culture. Postmodernism, in the words of Randall Stevenson, "not only radicalizes forms, but also satirizes them, exposing their inability to connect with reality and the resulting potential for distortion" (25). In literature, postmodernism largely serves to disintegrate individual subjects and discursive systems in the same way as poststructuralist theory does.

Thus, Postmodernism, in conjunction with feminist theory and poststructuralism, offers both author and audience an avenue for denaturalizing existing cultural codes. While postmodernism was originally associated with architecture, over the years the terms 'postmodern' and 'postmodernism' have increasingly been allied with film, literature, and art among other subjects. As a result, no firm definitions of

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postmodernism have emerged, and general attributes of postmodernism have come to dominate contemporary cultural analysis.

Postmodernism which began as a movement among artists and writers is eventually becoming an actual condition of society. One of the most influential works about the plight of knowledge in a world shaped by information technology and media images is eventually presented by Jean- Francois Lyotard. In his most famous work *the Postmodern Condition: A Report of Knowledge* (1984), Lyotard presents the idea of knowledge in advanced societies which witnessed an information revolution. He argues that the consequences of this revolution result in the mercantilization of knowledge. In highly computerized societies, knowledge turned into a market commodity. In other words, in today's industrial world, science is no more aiming to find the truth; but rather looking for the best performing method (performative criterion). The purpose of knowledge is no longer to reveal the objective truth. This performative criterion, for example, has been reflected on education. The majority of educational institutions focused more on skills rather than ideals; they become more functional (p 88).

In addition, in his reaction to postmodernism; Lyotard constructs his arguments around the hypothesis that "grand narratives" (or grands récits) of modernism have collapsed and hence, lost their validity. For him, these master narratives have been used as tools of domination and oppression. They have been employed to shape social and political systems. Meta-narratives can be defined as: " a comprehensive totalizing story, which accounts for everything and reduces all little stories to its terms (Belsey, p 113). Such narratives are seen as a system of thought that shapes the major social and cultural practices of individuals in their community and explanation

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of the nature of the world. In his essay *Epic Arts*, Frederick Turner describes well how these narratives can be a tool to maintain authority of the dominant class by those who are in power. He explained:

One of the major theories of the postmodern movement held that our political, juridical and economic lives were governed by social and cultural “grand narrative” or “master narrative”..... the disciplines of the arts and crafts, the forces of advertising and popular culture, even the natural sciences, were ‘social constructions’, reinforcing “logocentric”, “Eurocentric” or phallogocentric” regimes of power and knowledge. ( Turner 23).

As can be seen, grand narratives are authoritative, establishing their political or cultural views as absolute truths beyond any means of criticism. They have a totalizing effect on the culture. The Lyotardian aim is to call for a new world of knowledge based on mininarratives which do not necessarily contain any universal truth, but they form a body of knowledge which describes more the contemporary condition than the generalization of ideologies of the master narratives. To put it differently, postmodern societies are as Lyotard claims defined by their skepticism towards metanarratives since they failed to provide an edequate vision about the improvement of the human condition. They are, in fact not being able to serve the world: “the grand narrative has lost its credibility” ( Lyotard, 1984, 37).

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## 1.3.1. Postmodern Fiction

Postmodern literature is a form of literature which serves as a reaction to the ideological and stylistic limitations of modernist literature which began to emerge by the end of the Second World War. While modernist literary writers such as Ernest Hemingwa, Virginia Woolf, and F. Scott Fitzgerald often depicted the world as fragmented, troubled, and on the verge of disaster, postmodern authors, however, attempted to depict the world as having already experienced countless disasters and being beyond redemption.

Postmodern fiction, for example, is featured by various characteristics in terms of novelistic forms with less reliance on the old forms of character development. It is a response against modernist approaches to literature favoring some literary conventions like paradox, unrealistic plots and parody. Moreover, postmodern texts are fragmented often chaotically and celebrate the multiplicity of points of view. The American critic and writer John Barth declares that postmodern fiction is a continuation, but modification of cultural modernism, a way of "telling stories" that have become indistinguishable from what was once assumed to be knowledge (scientific "truth", ethics, law, history...) (Qtd in Mc Hale 45).

However, in his approach to define postmodern fiction, Brian McHale claims that postmodernist literature foregrounds its ontological structure as opposed to modernist literature, which is based on an epistemological dominant. Modernist literature is centered on the pursuit of knowledge, asking (cognitive) questions such as: "How can I interpret this world of which I am a part? And what am I in it?" Postmodernist works, on the other hand, foreground the plurality of ontologically distinct worlds as

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they elicit (postcognitive) questions such as: "Which world is this? What is there to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it?" (32-34). This dominant is explained by McHale as:

...the focusing component of a work of art: it rules, determines and transforms the remaining component. It is the dominant which guarantees the integrity of the structure... a poetic work is a structured, regularly ordered hierarchical set of artistic devices (34).

To put it differently, McHale explains that postmodern fiction is based on an 'ontological dominant' contrary to modernist writing 'epistemological dominant'. In his view, modernist fiction was characterized by its focus on the individual consciousness in trying to know the world which is unified and objective. Postmodernist fiction in contrast, considers that the world is not one, and people function in an ontological variety of experiences.

In Mc Hales's account, "the dominant" is the focusing component of art. The dominant of modernist fiction is epistemological that focuses on an individual's knowledge and aims at knowing the way to interpret the world (asking cognitive questions). How is knowledge transmitted and the degree of its certainty? What kind of knowledge must be known? These questions according to Mc Hale, are handled in fiction "through the use of characteristically modernist (or epistemological) devices such as: interior monologue, juxtaposition and point of view. In other words,

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modernist texts are highly related to the epistemological dominant; the text is given with a limited point of view and all details come from the narrator's perspective.

For him, a literary text can have different dominants depending on the way we approach a text. If one goes through the text with a feminist or a Marxist attitude for example, the text will be automatically feminist or Marxist to the reader. In contrast, the dominant of postmodernist fiction is ontological. That is it foregrounds questions about the world itself (post-cognitive questions). For Mc hale, we function in an ontologically plural universe of experience. Epistemological dominant elicits questions as: which world is this (aspect of plurality)? What is there to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it? (32-34).

Postmodern fiction draws attention to its status as fiction by offering and questioning the reality presented within the framework of the story, and demanding the reader to acknowledge the fictionality of literature. The texts themselves stress the reader's own self-awareness of his or her status as a reader. Metafiction is a key term in postmodern literature which describes the text in question. It constantly reminds the reader that the work of fiction is fiction. It is not a representation or reflection of the world, but rather it draws attention to the texts' status as artifacts. Metafiction is much conscious about the language of the text, its storytelling and literary form.

Therefore, the goal of the texts within this category is to reveal fiction as being fictional. The features of this kind of fiction are mainly: the absence of a grand narrative, multiple plausible endings, intertextuality and experimentation, as it favours some literary conventions like paradox, unrealistic plots, parody and black

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humour<sup>2</sup> . Nevertheless, Patricia Waugh's definition of metafiction is the most suitable to understand its meaning in literature. In her view, metafiction is

...a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictitiousness of the world outside the literary/fictional text (Waugh 2).

By using metafictional elements, postmodern authors underline the distinction between reality and its linguistic representation, as they point out the fact that language operates on different principles than reality. At the same time, metafictional features highlight the fictionality of fiction, engage the reader in the formation of meaning for the literary (artistic) text, and demonstrate a distinction between past and present forms of art, as well as past and present sensibilities and worldviews. Metafiction can be expressed not only in a direct addressing, but in a variety of ways such as: allusion, fake quotations, paraphrasing, parody, irony, intertextuality, and many others.

All of these strategies establish a link between the literary text a reader is reading and other works of art like documents, historical records, or theories. This relationship with these writings is not mechanical or random, as it is in conventional

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<sup>2</sup> It is a form of humor that regards human suffering as absurd rather than pitiable, or that considers human existence as ironic and pointless, but somehow comic. In literature and Drama it is combining the morbid and grotesque with humor and farce to give disturbing effect and convey the absurdity and cruelty of life.  
<http://www.dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/>



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literature; rather, postmodern authors modify and create a new meaning by transforming the meaning of referred or parodied texts, by placing them in a different (often contemporary) context.

Postmodern authors change and create new meaning, which is frequently based on the allegorical premise. In other words, there is a secondary meaning woven throughout the text in addition to the primary meaning. In Brian Mc Hale's words, this postmodern allegory is a kind of metaphor creating:

[...] a text-length trope which preserves the two-level ontological structure of metaphor (literal frame of reference, metaphorical frame of reference), but in which, instead of being announced explicitly, the two-level structure remains implicit, disseminated through the text [...] The fictional world of an allegorical narrative is a tropological world, a world within a trope [...] allegory offers itself as a tool for exploring ontological structure and foregrounding ontological theme" (140).

Hence, allegory has two levels of meaning: a literal level that tells a surface story and a symbolic level in which the abstract ideas unfold. An allegorical text expresses itself openly, but differently, metaphorically and symbolically.

Moreover, another crucial aspect that is strongly related to metafiction is intertextuality. As defined by the French/Bulgarian theorist Julia Kristeva, the term expresses a relationship between texts through different methods and approaches. It is, however, more than a simple mechanical connection; it is a creative transformation of the referred texts in many languages and cultural contexts. Julia

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Kristeva takes her notion of intertextuality from Michael Bakhtin's concept of a "polyphonic novel"<sup>3</sup> which means that the text is disposed to various interpretations.

Another technique used in postmodern literary texts is 'collage'. This technique disrupts the narration's linearity, allowing stylistic and generic hybridity, and providing a diverse, pluralistic, and often relativistic view of the world.

[...]Unlike modern collage which is unified by its overall uniformity of technique: by being painted in the same style and with the same kind of paint, and by being arranged according to a balanced and pre-determined structure, with postmodern collage, the various fragment assembled on the canvas are left unchanged, untransformed. Each retains its materiality ( D'haen 220).

One can deduce from the above passage that unlike modernist collage, postmodern collage brings to mind the effect of multiplicity which relates to many other postmodern techniques such as fragmentation and plurality. For instance in many postmodern works, extracts, letters and even short stories from other famous works are inserted purposefully so that they create meanings in the texts.

In the same vein, in postmodern literary texts, the representation of reality often overlaps with fiction. Postmodern texts allow authors to experiment with content, characters, and form; it also frees them from realistic and naturalistic constraints.

When readers are presented with experimental, frequently incoherent, and non-linear

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<sup>3</sup> A feature of narrative, which includes a diversity of simultaneous points of view and voices. Polyphony literally means multiple voices. The concept was introduced by [Mikhail Bakhtin](#), using a metaphor based on the musical term [polyphony](#). Bakhtin reads Dostoevsky's work as (Dostoevsky is a Russian novelist, short story writer, essayist, and journalist) containing many different voices, unmerged into a single perspective, and not subordinated to the voice of the author. Each of these voices has its own perspective, its own validity, and its own narrative weight within the novel.

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texts, the numerous readings that can be derived from postmodern literature also liberate the audience from traditional literary interpretation procedures. In this way, postmodernism produces 'pluralist' writers and readers. Because postmodern literature frequently subverts 'realistic' literary texts, writers who embrace postmodernism and experimentation deliberately challenge 'accepted' discursive and literary norms those who:

seek not truth, not total coherence, not even correspondence to reality. For the traditional cognitive ends, [pluralists] substitute practical or rhetorical effects on readers and societies, 'pedagogical communities' or 'negotiating' communicants. What we are promised is liberation from an inhibiting bourgeois search for certainties: a new freedom, a new creativity (Wayne 415)

This way, postmodern writers challenge fixed conceptions about 'truth,' subjectivity, and objectivity by proclaiming a new awareness of the ambiguous nature of ideological foundations and formulating new definitions of the literary canon.

Equally important, postmodern literature intends to be assigned to "historiographic metafiction"<sup>4</sup>, a concept coined by Linda Hutcheon which denotes how postmodern texts reflect and revise the past and its authenticity through the process of reportedness. She classifies historiographic metafiction in the sense that fiction is at once metafictional and historical (40). Historiographic novels can be easily accessible to us in textual forms.

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<sup>4</sup> Coined by Hutcheon's *A Poetic of Postmodernism* (2003)

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Keeping in line with postmodern literature, some critics believe that postmodernism denies the female voice. Sherzer claims: “to this date, postmodernism in literature has been associated with texts written by men, and texts written by feminist writers have been classified under feminism” (156). Similarly, Craig Owens claims that the failure to confront the question of sexual difference is a blind spot in postmodernism's discourse. He affirms that postmodernism ignores or suppresses the feminist voice, as it "may be another masculine invention engineered to exclude women” (95).

Sherzer and Owens (1991) bring up an essential aspect in the postmodern debate: women's exclusion and the female voice. This point is indeed debatable if women are fully denied a voice and have yet to find a position within the postmodern movement. To be sure, many critics, such as Edmund Smyth, exclusively address postmodernism in terms of men ignoring women's place in it. In spite of that, many women writers like Jeanette Winterson, Angela Carter, Toni Morrison, Margaret Atwood and many others are involved in the creation of postmodern experimental literary productions. This simply shows that the absence of the female voice in postmodernism stems from critics who consciously or unconsciously prevent women authors from being evaluated as postmodern experimental writers.

Postmodernism frequently reveals distressing truths regarding the inferior position of women and other marginal figures inside a white phallogentric/patriarchal system since it questions the very underpinnings on which society based its cultural constitution and political goals. As a result, postmodernism, like feminism, is a political project because

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its representations – its images and stories -- are anything but neutral, however "aestheticized" they may appear to be in their parodic self-reflexivity'; above all, postmodernism wants 'to "de-doxify" our cultural representations and their undeniable political import ( Hutcheon 97)

Male institutions and ideas that confine women to passive roles limiting their intellectual and creative endeavors and frequently lead to female alienation and fractured subjectivity are being attacked and criticized. Together, postmodernism and feminism constitute a deliberate determination to disrupt and trespass patriarchal male rule.

Since postmodern fiction written by women denaturalizes current cultural conventions, it is frequently criticized by the male literary establishment. Jill Dolan answers to masculine skepticism of women's postmodernist endeavour:

Feminist postmodernism does not play indulgently with meaninglessness or plurality, charges that might be leveled against some postmodern performance auteurs. Feminist postmodernism is committed to meaning, to sifting through the referents of material reality and drawing blueprints of their construction that can be historically revised and changed (69).

Postmodern feminist writing deciphers women's status in all cultures and worlds. Postmodern experimental women's literature exposes the discursive factors that alienate women and cause mental fragmentation, calling for a re-assessment of existing hierarchical assumptions in order to resist and suggest resistance change to the dominant male voice.

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## 1.4. Feminist Literary Criticism

The literary works of male authors describing experience from a male point of view was considered the standard of universality and a major criterion of greatness. Because the works of female authors do not describe experience from a male point of view they were not considered universal and thus did not become part of the literary canon. Even when women authors came out as great writers, there have always been a tendency to under-represent their literary contribution, i.e. they were not represented on an equal basis with male authors.

Feminist literary criticism is literary criticism that is influenced by feminist theory or, mainly by feminism's politics which is concerned with "the ways in which literature reinforces or undermines the economic, political, social, and psychological oppression of women" (Tyson 83). This school of thought challenges the stereotypical assumptions about women (woman as the Other) which were thought to be universal and with great endeavor supports including women's knowledge in literature and recognizing women's experiences.

As a social movement, feminist criticism highlights the various ways women, in particular, have been oppressed by patriarchy. Moreover, Feminist literary criticism also suggests that women in literature have been historically presented as objects seen from a male perspective. Feminist literary criticism admits that literature produces prejudices and other cultural preconceptions. As a result, feminist literary criticism investigates how works of literature embody patriarchal attitudes and looks at how aspects of culture and society are inherently patriarchal (male dominated) and

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intends to display implicit or explicit misogyny in writing about women. According to Lisa Tuttle (1986), the ultimate goal of feminist criticism is “to develop and uncover a female tradition of writing,” “to analyze women writers and their writings from a female perspective”, “to rediscover old texts”, “to interpret symbolism of women's writing so that it will not be lost or ignored by the male point of view” “to resist sexism in literature and to increase awareness of the sexual politics of language and style” (Tuttle 184).

Feminist criticism has, in many ways, offered particular ways of approaching the representation of women in literature and increasingly challenging the male literary canon aiming to address the biases of patriarchal discourses. Despite the fact that feminist criticism takes a variety of forms, feminist literary critics resist all assumptions that dismiss women’s importance in the literary area. As Tyson puts them, feminist shared premises might be listed as follows:

- 1- . Women are oppressed by patriarchy economically, politically, socially, and psychologically; patriarchal ideology is the primary means by which they are kept so.
- 2- In every arena where patriarchy exists, woman is other: she is marginalized, defined solely by her difference from male norms and values.
- 3- In Greek and Roman literature and mythology, women have been portrayed as the symbol of evil. The Biblical portrayal of Eve for example as the source of sin and death in the universe is profoundly ingrained in patriarchal ideology, as is the case with all of Western (Anglo-European) civilizations.

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- 4- The ultimate purpose of all feminist activity, including feminist theory and literary criticism, is to transform the world by encouraging gender equality. Thus, all feminist activities can be seen as a form of activism.
- 5- Gender issues affect all areas of human production and experience, including literary creation (Tyson 92).

Feminist literary criticism is diverse, as are feminist themes, which span cultural, social, political, and psychological dimensions. Regardless of the type of analysis carried out, feminist criticism's ultimate purpose remains the same which is to gain a better knowledge of women's experiences in the past and present and encourage our appreciation of women's importance and value in the world. In reading a text, feminist literary criticism asks the following questions:

- 1- Does the work reinforce or undermine patriarchal ideology? How are women portrayed? What relationship may exist between these portrayals and gender issues of the time period in which the novel was written or is set?
- 2- What does the work suggest about the intersections of race, class, and/or other cultural factors with gender in shaping women's experience?
- 3- How is the work "gendered"? That is, how does femininity and masculinity appear to be defined? Is the behavior of the characters always consistent with their assigned genders? Does the work suggest that there are genders other than feminine and masculine? What attitude does the work provide about the gender(s) it depicts? For example, is the work a rejection, an acceptance or a questioning of gender stereotypes?



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- 4- What does the work suggest about women's creativity? To answer this question, biographical information about the author as well as historical data about the culture in which she lived will be needed.
- 5- How does the writer's style contribute to the ongoing efforts to define a uniquely feminine style of writing?
- 6- What role does the work play in terms of women's literary history and literary tradition? (Tyson 119).

More to the point, in addition to these questions, , feminist literary criticism helps also knowing the way women characters are described in novels, stories, plays, biographies, and histories, especially if the author is male. Furthermore, it also shows relationships established between the literary text and some ideas like: gender, sexuality, power ...etc. feminist criticism also reclaims the 'female voice' as a meaningful and valuable addition to literature even if it was previously overlooked. Whatever kind of analysis is undertaken, feminist literary criticism looks at giving voice to the voiceless women in literature.

### **1.5. Women's Representations in Literature**

The term 'representation' means the use of one thing to stand in for another in order to transmit meaning; the construction of meaning through the use of signs and concepts. (Miller and Browit 239). Literature is basically one form of representation. Representation in literature does not mean only providing fixed and exact meaning through the literary text, but it depends upon a person's social, linguistic and cultural backgrounds which are certainly subjected to changes through time. Most discussions about women's representations in literature start with an initiation of

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feminist criticism. In the traditional discourse, women have always been absent and silent in society. And when it comes to cultural representation, women are represented as misandry or gender biased. Therefore, the textual representations often emphasize the same androcentric beliefs. Catherine R. Stimpson (1989) explains more the role of feminist literary criticism in evaluating women's textual representation:

Feminist critics have decomposed the representation of women in culture; the images, stereotypes, and archetypes. They have found women as beautiful other, as aesthetic object whose power is that of eros, glamour and fashion. They have found woman as mother; whose will and power if checked and directed, will succor. They have found mother as schemer, whose will and power, if unchecked, will devour. ( 117)

Women, therefore, are represented culturally in various forms. Whatever the cause, the representations of women are recurrent in literature. They are projected differently according to their caste, racial status, class and position as inferior or as powerful.

Generally speaking, women used to be misrepresented literally; and this misrepresentation is justified through males' domination throughout history. These textual depictions confirm the subjection of women by advocating the inferior position assigned to them in various contexts. Virginia Woolf, for example, studies how social and cultural conditions can be constraints for women as individuals and writers. In her fictionalized essay “ *A Room of One's Own* (1928), she deeply

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criticizes and makes a difference between “ a woman as an object of representation” and “a woman as an author of representation”, and as a result, she creates an area for modern feminist criticism.

Influenced by Woolf’s standpoints and writings as well, the American critic Elaine Showalter divides feminist criticism into two varieties: feminist critique and gynocriticism. The first studies women’s representation in male’s texts. It is the reading of male text by feminist criticism i.e., it is concerned with women as readers. The second, however, is concerned with women writers rather readers. It deals with how women represent themselves through their texts (women as products of literary texts). This kind of criticism which concerns itself with developing a female framework of works written by women, argues that women writings express a different female consciousness than men. Showalter offers mainly four models of critics of literary texts written by women: biological, linguistic, psychological and cultural. This categorization is, in fact based on the mode of analysis adopted to analyze women writers and their texts. (Showalter 342).

The biological model emphasizes the importance of women’s body as a source of inspiration of their writings. The defenders of this model stress the undeniable prominence of women’s body as “anatomy of textuality” (336). Feminist criticism completely rejects literal biological inferiority preconceived by Victorian theorists and scientists. Showalter writes: “Victorian anthropologists believed that the frontal lobes of the male brain were heavier and more developed than female lobes and thus that women were inferior in intelligence” ( Critical Inquiry 187). Feminist critics here emphasize the significance of the body as a source of imagination and imagery which influences women’s writing as long as factors are involved not anatomy.

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On the other hand, the linguistic model focuses on language as gender marked. It explores how men and women use language differently. Language as Julia Kristiva demonstrates is not an intellectual luxury, but it is a crucial part of the fight for woman's freedom. The linguistic oriented feminist criticism seeks to analyze how language manipulates women's lives and how it becomes a tool of either oppression or liberation. In terms of the linguistic model, Mills (1995) appreciates what Virginia Woolf terms as: "women sentence". For Woolf, certain women crafted a new type of sentence which is more creative than the male sentence. This view seems to be echoed in the most recent statements by French feminist such as Luce Irigary and Elene Cixous...both Woolf and some French feminists assert that there is a difference between men's and women's writing. (Qtd. In. Cameron 30)

On the other hand, the psychoanalytical model delves into the female mind which affects writing. The supporters of this kind see the difference of women's writing is found in the writer's psyche. Psychoanalytical criticism deals with feminist interaction with psychoanalysis. "It incorporates the biological and linguistic gender difference in a theory of female psyche or self, shaped by the body, the development of language, and by sex role socialization" (Showalter 342).

In the same vein, in her feminist article: '*Professions for Women*'(1931) Virginia Woolf rejects the representation of women as "the Angel in the House"<sup>5</sup> (to be housekeepers, wives and mothers). For her, the notion of "Angel" should be abolished because of its ambiguous inclination. Woolf wonders who the "Angel in the house is". Is it about a submissive wife? Or is she the pure naive woman who has

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<sup>5</sup> The phrase is taken from a narrative poem by Coventry Patmore, published in 1854. Believing that his wife Emily was the perfect (submissive, powerless charming, graceful, and above all naive) Victorian wife, he wrote the "Angle in the House about her. It portrays the popular Victorian image of the ideal wife/woman who was expected to be submissive and devoted to her husband.

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not an identity of her own? Or maybe the loving mother who devotes her entire life for serving her family.

Thus, this notion of “Angel in the House” has been put under the umbrella of criticism for twentieth century feminism critics who called for a rebellious angel who should be strong and proud of her female superiority against male’s domination rather than being a submissive and docile angel. Moreover, Woolf also makes references to the male gaze that accepts woman only as an object that is designated to appeal to his taste and desire. The other point Woolf mentions is the difficulty of “telling the truth about my own experiences as a body” (12). Similarly here, Woolf refers to the idea of being in the margins since such a state goes against the ideal, pure image of woman and brings her closer to sexual exploration.

As a reference to Woolf, *A literature of their Own* (1977) by Showalter gives a detailed analysis of woman writing from the Bronte sisters of the Victorian period to Lessing of modern era. Showalter’s work summarizes women’s journey in literature and studies the development of female tradition and aesthetics in the novel. She divides women in literature into three phases: the feminine, the feminist and the female:

First there is a prolonged phase of imitation of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition and the internalization of its standards of art and its views on social roles. Second, there is a phase of protest against these standards and values and the advocacy of the minority rights and values, including a demand for autonomy. Finally, there is a phase of self discovery, a turning

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inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity. (13)

In this classification, Showalter identifies the feminine phase as a period of imitation which begins from the 1840's to the 1880's. The feminist phase from 1880 to 1920 is however a period of protest when women starts demanding their rights and calling for equality between the two genders. The last phase which is the 'female' from 1920 to the present is a period of self awareness.

In common with Woolf, Showalter believes that Victorian constraints are the origins of women's alienation and lower status. She claims: "thus women writers often perpetuated the stereotypes of female ignorance and inaptitude" (42). Throughout her work, Showalter criticizes harshly the plight of women during the Victorian era. For her, women inferior position is widely accepted and even women authors are expected to "possess the sentiment, domestic expertise knowledge of the female character" and to "lack originality, humor, self-control and knowledge of male character" (90).

Showalter's most prominent statement on this idea is that a woman writer must get rid of the Angel in the House that is the "phantom of female perfection who stands in the way of freedom" (365). She argues: "For Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot, the Angel was Jane Austen. For feminist novelists, it was George Eliot, for mid-twentieth century novelists, the Angel is Woolf herself" (265). To put it another way, this metaphor of 'angel' is a dynamic device that changes with time whenever it stands as an obstacle in the way of women's liberation.

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The last model for Showalter is cultural. She insists that culture can be a satisfying element to show the main difference of women's writing than the other theories based on psychoanalysis, biology and language. Showalter's cultural model incorporates ideas about women's language body and psyche and interprets them in the social context acknowledging class, national, historical and racial differences.

The cultural experience between women authors can tie up them to each other in spite of the racial and class difference. Women's culture redefines women's aims and activities from a woman's centered point of view as it offers a collective experience that unites women shaping a binding force over time and space. Women's culture emphasizes a consciousness of sisterhood and shapes a unified experience of women within the dominant culture. So, the cultural model looks at how the surrounding environment affects women's writing. As it has also to do with how women's stereotypical image has been formed by the society they belong to and how it is reflected in their texts.

Another crucial point feminist literary criticism takes into consideration is the way female characters are represented in literature in the context of male attitudes towards feminist consciousness which is to a larger extent biased and stereotypical. Some writings portray female characters as deficient, passive and envious of males in their societies. These writings recognize males as the only sex in which any value resides. For Golden (2004), literary texts have put female characters under a negative light where they are regarded as mere minors. Theses texts in fact function as the place where the authority of men over females in a patriarchal society is established.

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Further evidence in support of the preceding point is provided by Korobov (2011) who sees that traditional feminine characters are also depicted as fragile, nurturers, passive and emotionally committed in attracting the male gaze. Furthermore, traditional femininity implies that women are passive partners in the intimate side; they do not initiate sexual relationships or express needs or desires. They instead prefer to accept male advances or wait for male pursuit in the matter.

Contrary to the previous point, a new set of female characters that defy these stereotypes comes to the scene. A 'new female character' is the image postfeminists<sup>6</sup> works, a feminist paradigm that demonstrates the interconnection of feminism, postmodernism, poststructuralism come with. The female body, sexuality, and personality are central to postfeminist femininity. Characters are featured as intelligent, educated, apparently well-rounded, sexually liberated, and empowered by Second Wave Feminism rewards.

Based on theses points, various female characters' traits fall into several categories, or states that differ from the traditional pay of depicting female characters in literary texts. A recent study (by Levant et al 2007) shows the different perspectives female characters are depicted in the old traditional way and contemporary or postfeminist period. The following table summarizes well this idea:

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<sup>6</sup> A discourse originally coined by the media in the 1990s as a reaction to feminist theories of the 1970s and 1980s, often based on the premise that the "battle of the sexes" is over. A shift in popular rhetoric from 'women's liberation' to 'girl power.' It is distinguished by a (essentialist) focus on femininity as well as 'the career woman.' The feminist assumption of women as passive victims of patriarchy is denied by American post-feminists Naomi Wolf (b.1962) and Camille Paglia, for example (b.1947).  
<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority>.



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Female Traits	Traditional Portrayal	Postfeminist Portrayal
Mental State/Traits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>limited/ignorant/short sighted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intellectual/egalitarian</li> </ul>
Physical Traits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conforming to beauty standard: thin body/ * emphasizing attractiveness through body and clothes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emphasis on sexuality (more sexually revealing)</li> </ul>
Emotional Traits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sentimental, overemotional</li> <li>dependent on men</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Determined, strong and dynamic</li> </ul>
Sexual Traits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Function as sex tool to male's gaze/ weak to initiate sexual desires</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sexually empowered</li> <li>Enjoy multiple sexual partners/ or against heterosexuality</li> </ul>
Cultural and Familial Traits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Shy/inferior/secondary/subservient/ housewives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rebellious/independent</li> <li>Individualistic/equal to men/capitalist</li> </ul>

**Table:** Traits of Traditional and Postfeminist Female Characters

Female representations, according to the conceptualizations presented in Table above, may occur in a variety of ways, including mental, physical, emotional, cultural, sexual and cultural. Female characters in the traditionally feminine mental state are depicted as weak, limited nor uneducated women, whereas characters in the postfeminist mental state are illustrated more educated, egalitarian, and mentally strong women.

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Furthermore, women in literature, regardless of the decade, are frequently depicted a sexual object for male's gaze. However, one of the most significant changes from traditional to postfeminist women representation is their portrayal as reliant on men for emotional stability in the traditional sense. This perception changes to the independent, determined and full of agency women in the postfeminist sense. Similarly, with regard to women sexuality, female characters are empowered by their sexuality and free from male's gaze.

In a nutshell, feminist literary criticism sought not only for women's writing recognition, but also for a radical assessment of the conceptual ground of literary study. Showalter confirms that feminist criticism aims to demystify all disguised questions that that have always disguised the relationship between genre and gender, sexuality and textuality, stereotypes and female identity. Likewise, feminist literary criticism has also given voice to shadowed women's writing as science fiction, diaries and letters. Therefore, feminist literary criticism serves as a recovering of an entire culture of women that used to be absent in a patriarchal culture and that is decoded in favor of men.

## **1.6. Conclusion**

Postmodernism emerged as the dominant intellectual, artistic and literary movement which grew out of a rejection of Enlightenment. It is a reaction against the intellectual assumptions that were taken for granted during the Enlightenment period. Though postmodernism is a break away from modernist stance, they still share some common features. The subject in both movements is often decentred, and always without meaning in life. Simultaneously, postmodern literature celebrates

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fragmentation and chaos; and gives multiple interpretations to the texts initiating a major shift the literary tradition.

Feminism has also a prominent role in influencing the way literary texts are read and evaluated. In relation to literature, the feminist movement has focused on the role played by literature to bring out gender discrimination and equality in the forefront. Feminist as well questions the long standing and dominant male phallogentric ideology and patriarchal attitude toward women. It works to disrupt traditional boundaries which subsist between art and life, between women and men, between the masculine and the feminine.

Postmodernism and feminism together encompass an agenda of resistance and change and represent a conscious determination to subvert and to undermine sovereign male rule. With the rise of feminism and feminist criticism, prominent women writers defended the perception of “woman in society”. Virginia Woolf vividly portrayed the unequal treatment given to women seeking education and alternatives to marriage and motherhood. Likewise through *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), Woolf developed and enlarged Mary Wolstonecraft’s ideas in the recognition of women. She declares that women must reject the prevailing patriarchal orders and establish their own identity, developing a female discourse that will accurately portray their relationship to the world of reality not to the world of men.

According to feminist literary criticism, the roots of prejudice against women have long been embedded in western culture. The ancient Greek, for example declare the male to be superior. In Aristotle view: The male is by nature superior, and the female inferior; and the one rules and the other is ruled. Woman is “matter, waiting

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to be formed by the active male principle”(qtd. In. De Prudence 102). Hence, it is until the publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) by Mary Wolstonecraft that awareness was acknowledged to women’s struggle for equal Rights.

This chapter has addressed postmodernism as a movement and an ideology. It compares different viewpoints and analyzed alongside the variant discourses that challenge fixed absolutes which used to dominate canonical forms and initiate pluralistic reading of the text and society as a whole. In terms of representation, postmodernism with its emphasis on the politics of representation, has given an opportunity to women writers to challenge and subvert constructed realities defined by patriarchy. Additionally, the last part of the chapter was devoted to feminist literary criticism which is an important element in this research. This school of thought seeks to view women in a new perspective supporting their knowledge in literature and valuing their experiences.

## ***Chapter Two: Gender and Sexuality: A Philosophical Inquiry***

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### **2.1. Introduction**

The end of the twentieth century, mainly the 1970's witnessed heated debates about gender and sexuality that had been at the heart of many taboos and customs. Such issues that used to be considered as powerful repressive tools were discussed in public as well as in academia. Many psychologists who were concerned with issues of sexuality and gender feel that our gender identity or our sense of being either woman or man is at the center of our identity. For some, this is a simple biological fact: one's gender. For others, it is a social construct which is the outcome of society's rigorous and insistent education that begins at birth.

Gender studies emerged as a new field of research in the mid to late 1970's and the beginning of the 1980's when the study revolved around all gender formations: heterosexuality and homosexuality. According to Linda Hutcheon, this shift in the development of gender studies is related to the postmodern contestation of values and ideologies that characterize Western culture as androcentric, phallogentric, and heterocentric (30).

These questions as well have an integral part in the studies of contemporary feminism and poststructuralism which appear to be two of the most prominent political and cultural movements of the late twentieth century. Their latest partnership has been defined by a particularly active engagement with the work of French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926). Foucault is famous as one of the 20th-century's most innovative outstanding and wide-ranging thinkers of his time. His work specifically the *History of Sexuality* (1976) - the last work Foucault was able to finish before his death in 1984 - has been helpful in shaping the study of gender and

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feminist theories. Through this project, he develops a more robust interpretation of the term sexuality from a profoundly different perspective. In common with Foucault, Judith Butler, an immensely significant figure in the field of gender theories, was a precursor in embracing the constructivist view of gender and sex in her well known work *Gender Trouble* (1990) which will be explained in the next portion of the work.

### **2.2. Sex/Gender Distinction**

The Distinction between gender and sex is an issue that has always been under recurring dispute. The 1970s and the 1980s was the time when theoretical discussions about sexuality and gender were particularly intense. The terms gender and sex are often used interchangeably, but these terms define different concepts and are not interchangeable. Therefore, the sex/gender distinction is conceived by theorists in different way. Some of them try to emphasize the role of sex in informing gender, and others found that it is in fact gender that produces sex. Other scholars, however, take the other way round emphasizing the social and cultural construction of sex. For them, labeling a person ‘man’ or ‘woman’ is a social issue rather than a purely biological matter. So, does gender rank after sex?

#### **2.2.1. Gender Definitions**

As a term, ‘gender’ is ever-present in every aspect of life; it is in fact rooted extremely in our beliefs, desires and actions and appears to us to be completely natural. While many assume it has a clear meaning, however, it is much more complex to define. Gender was developed and still often used as a contradictory term to “sex” to represent that what is conventionally and socially constructed is

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contrasted to what is biologically given. On this usage, gender is thought to refer to personality traits and behavior in distinction from the body. According to Lizbeth Goodman, sexuality refers to “the realm of sexual experience and desire” or “to a person’s sexual orientation” (homosexual or heterosexual) (vii). Gender, on the other hand, refers to “the way of seeing and representing people and situations based on sex differences...it is influenced by stereotypes about female and male behavior that exist in our attitudes and beliefs (Goodman vii).

From a different angle, Jeffrey Weeks claims that sexuality is “related not only to the physical body but also to beliefs, ideologies, and imaginations [...] it is ‘a social construction’ and ‘a historical invention” (366). Weeks stresses that gender, as related to “the social differentiation must be understood as different from the term sex, which “refers to the anatomical differences between men and women” (367). Despite the differences between the two terms, these definitions call for social construction of both. However, one may suppose that the implication of gender and sexuality is much more complicated than it appears to be. The coming lines will present a theoretical body of a discussion on gender and sexuality from the point of view of Judith Butler and Michel Foucault.

### **2.3. Gender: Judith Butler’s Conception and Theoretical Complication**

Gender was the preoccupation of feminist criticism of the twentieth century who focused on the distinction between gender and sex. The definition that gender as socially and culturally constructed was the premise of many feminist critics like Judith Butler, who is considered as one of the most influential radical philosophers and who asserts that the notion of gender is interrelated

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with alternative notions that represent social relations. She challenges the understanding of the category of *women*, asserting that there is much more complexity to the category *women* than is generally represented by the term. For her, *women* have different experiences and face varying levels of oppression based on their contexts. Butler explains as follows:

If one is a 'woman', that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pre-gendered "person" transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. As a result, it becomes to separate out "gender" from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained. (Gender trouble 4-5)

Relying on Butler's claims, one can deduce that the commonly interpretation of the term 'women' as used by feminist theory is not exhaustive. Not only is the term deficient, but also inadequate. The intersection of this notion with social life circumstances leads to the complexity of gender identity, indicating how fundamental social discourses that classify individuals into man/woman are. Therefore, the essentialist definition of gender (gendered identities are fixed and totalizing) are erroneous and fail to consider the complexity of gender identity.



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Additionally, one of the most prominent contributions of Butler to gender studies is her opinion that the distinction between sex and gender set by feminist critics is still questionable. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler questions if gender is constructed, could it be constructed differently or does its construction involve some form of social determinism; and what mechanisms of this construction?

For Butler, our perceptions of gender are culturally influenced; patriarchy heavily destroys its real assumption. She finds Julia Kristeva's theory, which asserts that 'maternity is how women rediscover themselves and understand themselves in a patriarchal world' as a product of a patriarchal discourse. Butler explains: "Insofar as Kristeva conceptualizes this maternal instinct as having an ontological status prior to the paternal law, she fails to consider the way in which the very law might well be the *cause* of the very desire it is said to *repress*" (10). To make it short, to Butler, there are certain laws that generate gender into different bodies where these bodies are regarded as passive recipients of merciless cultural laws. And since gender is understood in terms of these laws, then it seems that gender is determined and fixed. (11) .

On the other hand, Simone de Beauvoir suggests in *the Second Sex* ( 1949) that "one is not born a woman, but becomes one". For Beauvoir, gender is constructed and therefore can be a form of choice; metaphorically, "woman is not born, but made". In this respect, Butler explains that gender for Beauvoir is an aspect of identity gradually acquired. She is apparent that one "come to be" a woman, but always under a cultural obligation to become one. And hence, there is nothing in her account that assures that the "one" who becomes a woman is automatically a female and it is not biologically determined. It is not a stable identity, but an

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identity that is constituted through a repetition of acts. Butler extends her arguments on the distinction between sex and gender asserting that “sex is as culturally constructed as gender” and she concludes that if that is the case, then gender and sex are the same. She furthers her arguments:

If the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called “sex” is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all (10-11)

For her, sex is no more associated or determined by the body, but it is a cultural norm. She defends that notions of biological basis should never be taken for granted in the definition of gender identity.

Additionally, another contention presented by Butler is identified with the intractability of the notion of “sex”, “gender” and even “construction”. She argues that even if ‘gender’ or ‘sex’ is fixed or free is a function of a discourse; the complexity of these terms imposes limits to the cultural opportunities related to them:

The limits of the discursive analysis of gender presuppose and preempt the possibilities of imaginable and realizable gender configurations within culture...these limits are always set within the terms of a hegemonic cultural discourse... Constraint is thus built into what the language institutes as the imaginable domain of gender (12).

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This is to say that hegemonic cultural discourses anticipate gender definition to be absorbed or consolidated by society and condition the gendered experiences. In this context, the notion of gender identity proves to be questionable. What can be meant by identity?, then what grounds the presumption that identities are persisting through time as the same, unified and coherent? Butler affirms that “persons” become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility (22). She suggests that identity is a social phenomenon, and that gender must also be socially recognizable. By this she means that a person is considered coherent and comprehensible in relation to social norms and expectations that show coherence between sex, gender, sexual practice and desire.

As such, cultural norms constitute identity intelligibility; these norms require one to perform in a specific way to be intelligible (specific performances). Butler goes on to explain that the “‘coherence’ and ‘continuity’ of ‘the person’ are socially maintained standards of intelligibility” (23). That is, the body becomes gendered through becoming conceptually linked to specific manners of performances. This draws the conclusion that performance determines gender.

This interpretation leads directly to Butler’s theory of ‘performativity’ which was inspired by John Austin, an “ordinary language” philosopher who is credited with initiating the study into performatives. Austin in his work *How to Do Things with Words* (1962) asserts that every act is itself a recitation” (Butler 187). So how is linguistic performativity linked to gender? The answer is that when something is performative, it produces a series of effects. So, a ‘performative utterance’ was a speech act that creates events or relations in the world.

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One of the most important aspects of performativity is the repetitiveness of the acts that are being done (Butler 2011, xii). On this basis, Butler states that gender is performative; gender “is real only to the extent that it is performed” (527).

In addition, gender identities are constructed and constituted by language, which means that there is no gender identity that precedes language. It means that language and discourse “do” gender not the other way around (not identity “does” discourse or language). In Butler’s words, There is no “I” outside language since identity is a signifying practice, and culturally intelligible subjects are the effects rather than the causes of discourses that conceal their workings (GT: 145). It is in this sense that gender identity is performative. In other words, gender is an identity constituted through a repetition of acts. She elaborates this idea in the first chapter of *Gender Trouble*:

Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being. A political genealogy of gender ontologies, if it is successful, will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate and account for those acts within the compulsory frames set by the various forces that police the social appearance of gender (25).

According to Butler, gender, or sex, is always "something that one becomes, gender is then itself a kind of becoming or activity". She describes it as a non static cultural

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marker, but an incessant and repeated action of some sort. Here we can say that gender identity does not exist before but only during gendered acts. Butler believes that gender utterances, such as the first medical interpellations for the baby: "It's a girl" or "It's a boy" are performative. This utterance belongs to the process of constituting the girl, performing the "girling" of the person, while the referent "girl" does not have ontological existence outside the discursive event. It means that gender is not only discursively, but performatively constituted.

Here according to Butler, the act of uttering "it's a girl" is itself an act of gendering it into a 'girl'. All in all, we can say that to Butler, Gender is constituted in performative discourses. So far in *Bodies that Matter* (1993), she argues:

...In that naming, the girl is "girded," brought into the domain of language and kinship through the interpellation of gender. But that "girling" of the girl does not end there; on the contrary, that founding interpellation is reiterated by various authorities and throughout various intervals of time to reinforce or contest this naturalized effect. The naming is [ ... ] the repeated inculcation of a norm.(7)

Such attribution or calling is in fact a part of a discourse or a power; this interpellation is itself a citation or a repetition of gender norms regulated by heterosexual standards. This leads automatically to the conclusion that "performativity is construed as that power of discourse to produce effects through reiteration" ( 20)

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Curiously enough, the final conclusion that Butler comes with is a new kind of gender subversion that is exemplified in queer movement. It appears that the purpose behind advancing the theory of gender performativity is to justify her queer feminist point of view. Instead of focusing on classical feminist issues like women's rights, inequality, gender stereotypes, gender roles, Butler creates a space for a new theory of gender performativity that emphasizes the role of queer communities in challenging gender ideologies.

Furthermore, Butler suggests that heterosexuality is not "the normal" and it does not precede homosexuality. Heterosexuality is to place all people who sexually individuals of the same sex at a lower position. For her, the repeated act of heterosexuality is what renders the heterosexual identity the illusory quality of being natural and original. This is to say the more children acquire and what they are taught by society, the more stereotypical gender roles are considered natural by the community. In *"Imitation and Gender Subordination"*(1991), Butler discusses the implications of the relation between gender presentation and sexuality:

Sexuality always exceeds any given presentation or narrative which is why it is not impossible to derive or read off sexuality from any given gender presentation...Sexuality is never fully "expressed" in a performance or practice...part of what constitutes sexuality is precisely that which does not appear and that, to some degree, can never appear (725)

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In this sense, Butler explains that there is no continuum between sexuality and gender presentation, so that the way a person behaves outside does not necessarily express their sexual identity or practices. “It is the performance that produces the illusion of an inner sex” (728).

This queer theory as developed by Butler serves as a scrutiny against the existing social frameworks and identity categories produced by them. She finds those categories as oppressive and any political agenda that is taken from them is necessarily reinforcing this oppression. Therefore, according to queer theorists, there is a need to challenge the existing system and to blur its boundaries.

### **2.3.1. Butler’s Queer Theory**

The Oxford Dictionary defines the word ‘*queer*’ as ‘strange’, unusual and odd. Originally, *queer* comes to refer to people whose sexual orientation is not heterosexual or those with same-sex desires and relationships. This refers exactly to a person whose gender identity and/or gender expression falls outside of the dominant societal norm. Historically, the term queer has been used to silence, suppress, and shame practices, identities, and values located outside of perceived social boundaries (Butler, 1993).

To be labeled as queer means a symbol of perversion, contempt, disease, and silliness. Queerness is, therefore, defined in terms of social practices, identities, and values as opposed to what is deemed normal. The idea is to create social regulation so that people may control themselves (and each other) based on what is right and wrong, good and evil, and so on. The current reclamation of the term queer signifies a resistance effort, headed primarily by academics and activists, to turn the term's

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oppressive origins into a positive, political, and desirable portrayal of the self, particularly for people of diverse genders (Pinar 33).

Moreover, to have a specific date for the emergence of 'queer' is rarely possible. Many critics and theorists have attempted to date it back to the 1990's. However, Susan Hayes gives exclusively a perception of this movement throughout history through some pertinent events which are successively interconnected:

First there was Sappho (the good old days). Then, causally to skip two millennia, there was Oscar Wilde, sodomy, blackmail an imprisonment, Forster, Sackville-West, Radclyffe Hall, inversion, censorship. Then, there was Stonewall (1969), and we became gay. There was feminism, too, and some of us became lesbian feminists and even lesbian separatists. There was drag and clones and dykes and politics and Gay Sweatshop. Then, there was Aids, which, through the intense discussion of sexual practices (as opposed to sexual identities), spawned the Queer movement in America. Then, that supreme manifestation of Thatcherite paranoia, Clause 24, which provoked the shotgun marriage of lesbian and gay politics in the UK. qtd. in Jagose 76)

Queer theory refuses of identity categorization and rejects the conventional heteronormative understanding of gender and sexuality.

Along with the dominant view, queer movement gives voice to the marginalized voices and dissolves all classifications, borders and hierarchies. Sexual polarities and diversity are valued and appreciated beyond the dichotomous, bi-polar, and definite arrangement of sexuality. Queer theory thus refutes the idea that "sexual attitudes and



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practices or gender norms [are] 'natural' and immutable." It might be argued that the area owes its existence to Poststructuralism, which is rooted in the philosophy of French scholars like as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida.

Poststructuralists or supporters of queer theory problematize the essentialist assumption of using subjects as a reference point for external reality and achieving a stable and unified self (descending from Descartes's assertion that "the National independent subject is the ground of both ontology (being) and epistemology (theories of knowledge)( Namaste 195). Because subjects are not autonomous individuals detached from the social network surrounding them and capable of ordering their lives or molding themselves, poststructuralism demonstrates that there is no such thing as an immutable self/subject. They are, on the other hand, entangled in a social network in which traditional discourses and social institutions, all intertwined.

Furthermore, queer theory reconsiders notions of plurality, intersectionality, and fluidity in discourse creation by questioning fixed and stable identity categories such as male/female, masculine/feminine, and lesbian/gay/straight distinctions. According to queer theory, these categories of "lesbian and gay" or the usage of the binary "heterosexual/homosexual" to indicate heterodominance are social creations and thus artificial. Queer theory aims to deconstruct the constant use of categories and labels that stereotype and damage those who are marginalized, such as lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender people (LGBTs)<sup>1</sup> (de Lauretis, 1991).

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<sup>1</sup> **LGBT:** Abbreviation that stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender. An umbrella term used to refer to the community as a whole. These terms are used to describe a person's sexual orientation.

Lesbian, Gay and transgender Resources

<https://lgbt.ucsf.edu/glossary-terms>

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Queer theory introduces the concept of heteronormativity ( the belief that heterosexuality is the logical and normal mode of sexual orientation), which is a powerful discourse that constitutes human relations according to heterosexuality. In this regard, Michael Warner (2002) asserts:

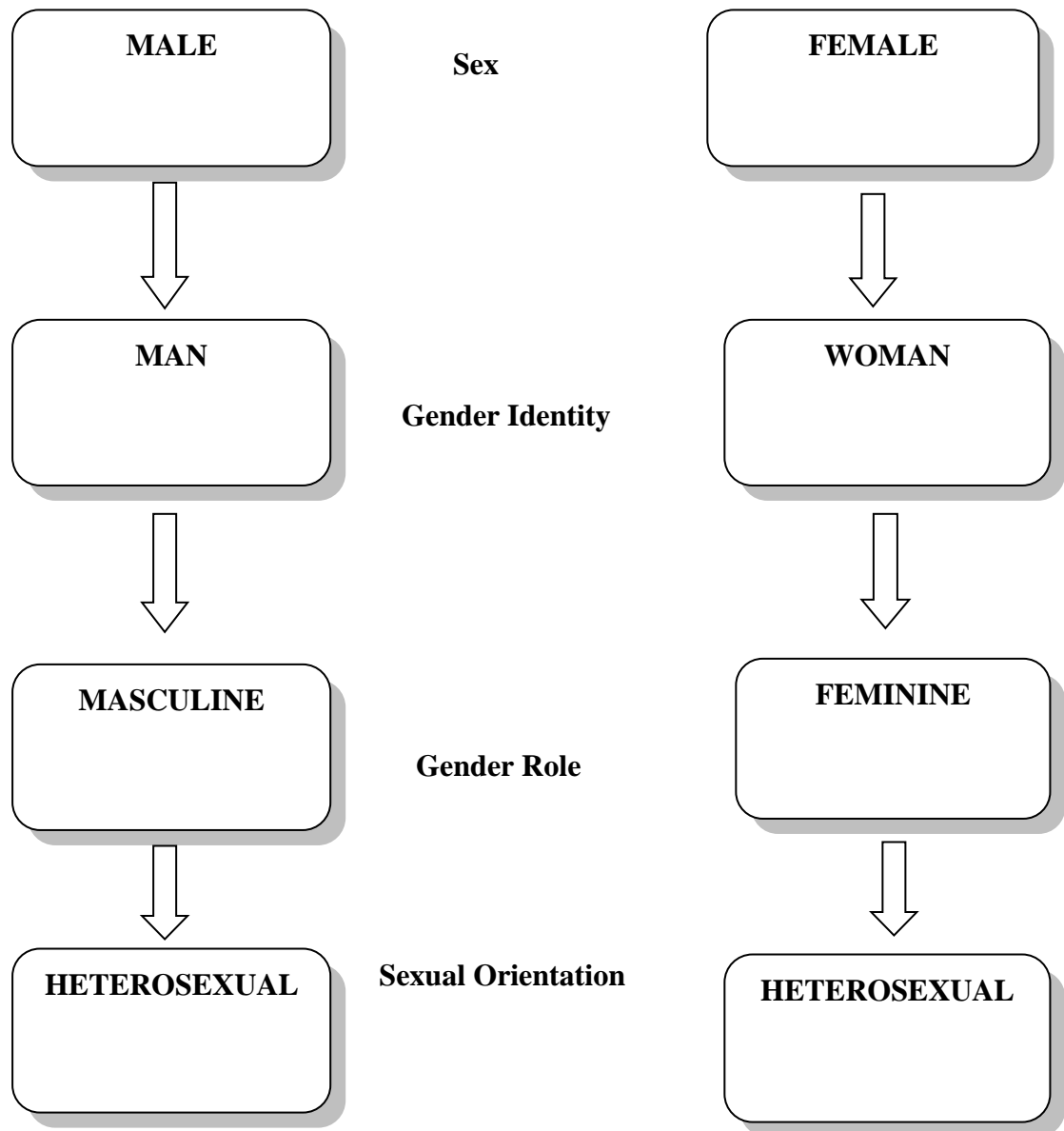
... A whole field of social relations becomes intelligible as heterosexuality, and this privatized sexual culture bestows on its sexual practices a sense of rightness and normalcy. This sense of rightness—embedded in things and not just in sex—is what we call heteronormativity (194).

Heteronormativity is then interfering individual psyche as well as social institutions and behaviors in order to establish heterosexuality as the dominant sexuality. These heteronormative discourses enable one to assume that relationships are heterosexual and thus silence sexual differences.

Homosexuality is then considered as ‘other’ as a way to strengthen the naturalness of heterosexuality. As it can be seen in Figure I below proposed by Aarlen Lev, male is identified with its opposite female, and this pairing is regarded to be natural. Thus, any other different matching out of this framework is viewed as odd and unnatural.

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**Figure 1:** It is assumed that each of these components lines up and ensures the next (Lev 2004).

Lev diagram starts naturally with sex which is the first component of human identity. Then comes the second component of sexual identity which is referred to as gender identity (man or woman) and it is the sense of belonging to one sex. The third component is gender role which is the expression of femininity and masculinity and

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which refers to the socialized aspect of gender that impacts behavior, personality and appearance. The last ingredient is sexual orientation which is the person's perception of his/her sexual and/ or emotional desire.

\* If a person is a male, he is a man.

\* If a person is a man, he is masculine.

\* If a person is a masculine male man, he will be attracted to a feminine female woman.

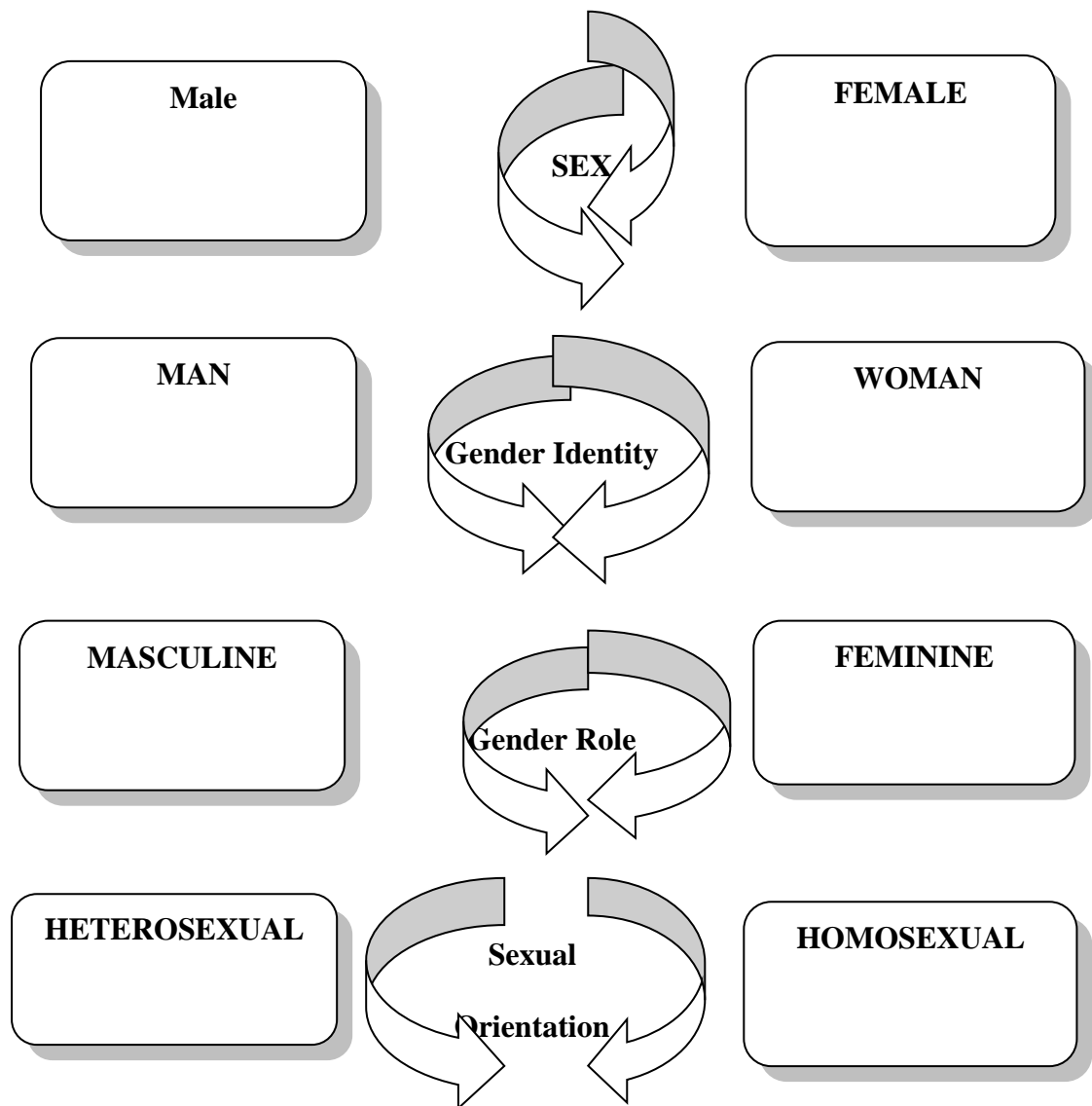
\*If a person is female, she is a woman.

\*If a person is a woman, she is feminine; she will be attracted to a masculine male man (Lev 2004)

However, **Figure II** demonstrates that all the components have a flexible and elastic essence that exists on a continuous spectrum, allowing for the existence of different sexualities and gender kinds such as bisexual, transgender and intersexes.

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**Figure2:** Sex, gender identity, gender role and sexual orientation are assumed to be bipolar opposites (Lev 2004).

As it is observed in **figure 2**, Lev's model presents that all components are in a continuous process; they have a flexible nature, and can be experienced in a more fluid way .

Keeping in line with queer theory, Butler (1999) puts forth the notion of 'performativity' in which she proclaims that gender identity is "performative," whereby individuals "perform" their gender according to social rules and cultural

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practices. As has been explained in previous sections, performativity in this sense suggests that gender identity categories are fluid and not stable. As far as Gender is concerned, The goal of queer theory is to problematize identity and its unchangeableness based on normalized conceptions of heterosexuality.

In her *“Imitation and Gender Subordination”* butler came perfectly clear as a lesbian where she shows her embarrassment from identity categories: “I am permanently troubled by identity categories, consider them to be invariable stumbling- blocks, and understand them, even promote them, as site of necessary trouble” (121).

For Butler, the assertion of any identity category is always predicated to the denial of another. Categories can only exist and make sense if they can be distinguished from one another; for example, "homosexual" as a category of identity can only exist and be understandable if there is a 'heterosexual' to distinguish it from and describe it as not –homo-. These dual dichotomies are not neutral, however, they are based on hierarchy. The existence of one identity category depends on the exclusion of someone else identity.

Continuing along this point, Butler questions the idea of originality or authenticity. She problematizes the heterosexual claim of authenticity claiming that there is no origin at all:

In other words, the negative construction of lesbianism/homosexuality as fake or a bad copy can be occupied and reworked to call into question the claims of heterosexual priority. [...]. Lesbian sexuality can be understood to redeploy its

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“derivativeness” in the service of displacing hegemonic norms. Understood in this way, the political problem is not to establish the specificity of lesbian sexuality over and against its derivativeness, but to turn the homophobic construction of the bad copy against the framework that privileges heterosexuality as origin, and so “derive” the former from the latter (124).

Butler claims that the originality of heterosexuality can be possible only as a result of repeated performative actions through which heterosexual identity is established. For Butler, something to be regarded as ‘origin’ it takes a copy that this origin can be differentiated from. This point in fact raises the questions of what kind of relationship may exist between heterosexuality and homosexuality. The homosexual, which is often presented as the ‘copy’ of the heterosexual origin turns to be a requirement for the heterosexual to exist.

In this vein, Butler affirms that the existence of the origin should be obviously prior to the existence of its copy and since it appears that in case of the heterosexual origin and its homosexual copy, the homosexual needs to be there for the heterosexual to exist in the first place. In this regard, she asserts: “[...] the entire framework of copy and origin proves radically unstable as each position inverts into the other and confounds the possibility of any stable way to locate the temporal or logical priority of either term” (128). Hence, the very necessity of performing heterosexuality exposes its contractedness by demonstrating that there is no original or gender specific to one sex over another.

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To sum up, Butler's queer theory acts as a critique of existing social frameworks and the identity categories they generate. It considers those categories to be inherently (hetero) normative and repressive, and any political agenda derived from them is destined to promote oppressive regimes, even if it pretends to stand for the exact opposite. According to queer theorists, what needs to be done is to question the basic premises on which the existing system is founded, to destabilize identities and subvert its foundational logic.

### **2.4. Masculinity and Femininity Debate**

The American Heritage Dictionary (1982) defines feminine as "of or belonging to the female sex" and femininity as "the quality or condition of being feminine; womanliness". Masculine is defined as "of or pertaining to men or boys; male" (p 496). Femininity and masculinity or one's gender identity refers to the degree to which people see themselves as masculine or feminine given what it means to be a man or woman in society.

Femininity and masculinity are mainly rooted in the social rather than the biological. This is to say that it is society that decides what means to be male or female depending on some conventional features associated with femininity and masculinity like: being dominant or passive, dynamic, brave or emotional. One's gender identity as masculine or feminine is based on the meanings individuals have internalized from their association with the role of male or female, respectively, the term "masculinity" refers to the roles, behaviors, and characteristics that are deemed appropriate for boys and men.



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Masculinity is then socially, historically, and politically produced rather than biologically determined. Generally speaking, masculinity is manhood's societal expectations and practices, which are strengthened daily by people, religion, the law and education. By the same token, the term 'femininity' refers to society's ideas about the roles, behaviours, manners and characteristics seen appropriate for women, and any reverse roles are considered as deviant.

The idea that women have intrinsic feminine traits has dominated much of human history. Because patriarchal societies have objectified women as the 'Other', distinct feminine characteristics such as nurturing, passivity, and emotionality have come to be associated with feminine qualities. Feminine connotes humanity's weaker, more unstable aspect, an essential, but regrettable collection of feelings that must be balanced by male traits. Although feminine characteristics have always been negative, they are inevitable to woman's identity as feminine heterosexual woman.

From a psychological point of view, as Bem suggests, while growing up, the child is in the process of learning the norms, regulations and meaning of being a man or a woman in his existing society. These factors have an impact on a child's growing actions and attitudes toward his/her own gender and the gender of the others. This way, the child learns to categorize the behaviors and attitudes as 'masculine' or 'feminine'. Therefore, if the child is taught and raised a culture that places a heavy emphasis on the distinction between man and woman, he/she will then grow up to be an adult who analyzes and understands the world through the lens of his gender schema.

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In a similar way, according to Witt (1997), 'Boys' and girls' early exposure to gender-role expectations comes from their caregivers. The family is the most important institution in forming children's ideas, attitudes, and values that perpetuate sex role stereotypes based on social factors. Boys are meant to be strong and emotionless, whereas girls are expected to be loving and sensitive. For example, a young boy who desires to play with dolls quickly learns that such behaviour is not considered typical for a boy by both his father and society. Boys are also trained to be strong and not to cry and encouraged to be successful, strong and independent whereas girls frequently learn to care for others.

As a result, it might be claimed that gender categories derive from biological distinctions. This means that boys and girls learn what behaviour is natural for a male and what behaviour is typical for a girl through a continuous process of gender role socialization that begins at home and is perpetuated by societal influence. As a result, history and tradition impose men and women's responsibilities in their daily lives.

### **2.4.1. Femininity**

It is noteworthy that most research on gender has not provided a detailed consideration of femininity as a concept. Femininity is largely conceptualized as the 'Other', the subordinate for males and for masculinity. Hence, to some extent, femininity becomes the counterpart of masculinity, defined completely in opposition to it. This way, man is guaranteed the dominant side while women are the weak and the subordinate. Connell solidified this idea arguing:

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Femininity consists of the characteristics defined as womanly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (94)

Since it is neither superior nor equal to masculinity, femininity denotes the weaker, an existing entity, but unfortunate and less important that requires masculine virtues to balance it out.

An inherent femininity has been the core of interest for many feminist theorists. Monique Wittig, in her essay, “One Is Not Born a Woman,” (2007) points out, that if one has to question how to be a woman, then being a woman is not a universal state of being. For her, neither biology nor psychology or economy determine what femininity is, but it is civilization that defines and produces this process of femininity. Therefore, femininity is a historical, social, and cultural happening in the space-time. Anthropologists have long argued that femininity is founded in a complex system of socio-cultural settings, rather than psychological characteristics.

So, all in all identifying femininity has always been linked to gender roles which are practices expected from people merely because of their gender. Women’s roles have long been affected by gender. Garrett (1987) has also discussed that femininity is considered a package of roles and responsibilities related to the biological sex, and concepts that form around these functions such as motherhood, marriage and childbearing (44). She also confirms that these ideas about women falsely presented

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them as weak inferior and subordinate which automatically widen the great cultural value of the conception of masculinity.

This stereotypical view has always been taken for granted, considered obvious and needs no comments. Patriarchy also emphasizes this stereotype, institutionalizes male's hegemony and adheres societal gender roles. To treat this so called femininity "burden", Feminist theorists have put a good deal of energy to fight these traditional gender ideologies through the creation of 'hegemonic femininity' which would be a revised theory of Connell's hegemonic masculinity .

Similarly, Schippers (2007) defines hegemonic femininity as an ideal dominant picture of womanhood. This is a commendable endeavor that would allow for a more extensive theoretical grounding for the concept of hegemonic femininity. It maintains the hierarchical/domination characteristics of hegemony while putting masculine and femininity on a more equal basis. In the way she views hegemonic femininity and masculinity, Schippers points out that 'new femininities,' which validate assertiveness, independence, and achievement, are not considered masculine since they preserve important marks of traditional femininity.

In the same fashion, Budgeon also believes that 'pariah femininities' are those seen to represent traditional femininity in overly emphasized ways in specific circumstances (327). She points out that in some studies; young women actively dislike those women considered to be barely assertive and overly reliant on male praise. However, at the same time, assertiveness can be regarded also as 'a threat to heterosexual norms of attraction'. Therefore, women who are more assertive may

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face the loss of approval by men and therefore undermine hierarchical gender complementarity.

In this way, these women risk becoming pariahs and embrace the status of pariah femininity. Supporters of this hegemonic femininity also welcome seeing femininity as something that can be performed by people with masculine bodies. This method of thinking about hegemonic masculinities and femininities is problematic since it appears to create hegemonic femininity leaving no room for obvious differences.

Another important concept linked to femininity that is shrouded in silence is woman's pursuit of beauty. This myth of beauty is perceived as essentially of feminine nature that is challenging women's everyday life. Recent studies, such as Wolf (2002) and (Davis 1994; Hollows 2000; Jeffreys 2005) emphasize the idea that the current myth of aesthetics of female beauty is socially constructed. Naomi Wolf in her critical work *the Myth of Beauty* (2002), which functions as a cultural ideology that holds control on women, criticizes the suggested appearance of women that is forced to adhere to standards of physical beauty.

Wolf's work is concerned with a distinct sort of societal control, which she claims might be just as confining as the old image of the homemaker and wife. It is the beauty myth, a fixation on physical perfection, that traps the modern woman in a never-ending cycle of hope, self-consciousness, and self-hatred as she attempts to live up to society's unachievable concept of a perfect femininity: beauty is the "last, best belief system that keeps male dominance intact" (2).

In her introduction, Wolf offers the following statement: "the more legal and material hindrances women have broken through, the more strictly and heavily and

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cruelly images of female beauty have come to weigh upon us” (4). Hence, this Beauty Myth which is fostered by masculine culture tools indoctrinates women to believe that their identity is defined by their appearance. The effect, Wolf argues, “will remain vulnerable to outside approval, carrying the vital sensitive organ of self esteem exposed to the air” (4).

In this regard, we can say metaphorically that patriarchy assigns a portrait of what women should look like. This portrait is ideological in nature and serves as a guideline for the discipline and normalization of women's bodies. Along the way, women learn (or should learn) that they must maintain continuous attention to their self-evaluation, always looking for ways to improve. According to Naomi Wolf, assigning value to women's bodies based on cultural beauty standards is a reflection of masculine power relations and will definitely lead to the production of normative femininity in which all women suffer in the end.

Keeping in line with femininity, feminist theorists turn also toward Foucault’s ideas to show the extent to which women are subjected to patriarchal regimes concerning feminine beauty. They elucidate the complexities of beauty standards which are the result of a social regulation. The feminists Susan Bordo and Sandra Bartky for example highlight that contemporary regimes of beauty, diet and exercise train the female body into docility and obedience to cultural demands (27). Therefore, these social and cultural demands of beauty and particularly physical improvement result in the creation of ‘normative femininity and ‘docile bodies’.

Furthermore, Bartky notes that femininity is the result of disciplinary activities producing a body with a recognizably feminine appearance. As a result, whether we

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are born male or female, patriarchy's disciplinary methods and rules shape us into masculine or feminine individuals. These disciplinary tactics, according to Bartky, are part of a process in which the ideal feminine body is produced.

Admittedly, the above point explains Foucault's idea of *biopolitics* which shows the mode of politics that is exercised on people in life. In Foucault's words, gender becomes a technology of biopower. The aim of these power practices is to optimize the body's capacities and its docility. Under this power, the body is coerced and manipulated by the strict regulations. In *The History of Sexuality* (1976), he argues: "The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it[...]thus discipline produces "docile" bodies"( Foucault 138-139). For him, the human body has been approached as an object of control. It becomes a 'docile' body that can be easily manipulated and subjected.

### **2.4.2. Masculinity**

R. W. Connell in her well known study on *Hegemonic Masculinity* (2000) claims that "'masculinity' does not exist except in contrast with 'femininity.' A culture ,which does not treat women and men as bearers of polarized character types, at least in principle, does not have a concept of masculinity in the sense of modern European/American culture" (68). Therefore masculinity is based on a relational quality: the existence of the feminine creates the masculine. A social constructionist perspective defines masculinities as "configurations of practice within gender relations, a structure that includes large-scale institutions and economic relations as well as face-to-face relationships (Connell 29). This definition alludes to the fluid and multiple faces of masculinity and therefore moves away from the problematic

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definitions that promote its innateness. The concept of hegemonic masculinity has been used in gender studies since the early-1980s to explain men's power over women.

For Connell, it is culture that defines what is meant by masculine, and since culture changes, so do perceptions of masculinity. There are various roles or modes of masculinity within the concept itself, which Connell categorizes as hegemonic, subordinated, complicit, and marginalized masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity, according to Connell, can be described as the configuration of gender practice that incorporates the currently accepted answer to the dilemma of patriarchy's legitimacy, which guarantees men's dominance and women's subordination. Hegemonic masculinity is therefore what is socially and culturally considered the most "right" or effective way of performing masculinity.

Another claim provided by Lindegger and Maxwell (2007) suggests that masculinity is not a property of men, but a socially constructed phenomenon, an everyday system of beliefs and performances that regulate behavior between men and women, as well as between men and other men. This means that masculinity is something that goes beyond the level of the individual to become defined collectively in culture and society. It is therefore what society expects from the individual.

### **2.5. A Psychoanalytic Approach to Femininity and Masculinity**

Up to now most of psychology, beginning with Freud, has focused on explaining the differences between men and women. For psychoanalytic theory, gender identity develops through identification with a same-sex parent. This identification arises



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from the oedipal stage of psychosexual development's intrinsic conflict. The *oedipal* period<sup>2</sup> was the point at which masculinity in males and *femininity* in females was established. By the age of three, the child has formed a strong sexual bond to the parent of the opposite gender. Simultaneously, unpleasant feelings of anger and jealousy grow for the same-sex parent. The psychic conflict is resolved by the kid renouncing preferences for the opposite-sex parent and identifying with the same-sex parent by the age of six. As a result, boys learn about masculinity from their fathers, while girls learn about femininity from their mothers.

Freud strongly believes in the idea that sex is the most powerful instinct in humans. This tendency later develops into an *Oedipus Complex* and an *Electra Complex*. He believed that girls have a more difficult developmental journey and are unable to develop a strong and independent superego, concluding that they are unfortunately, the inferior sex. Because women lack the visible genitals of men, they believe they are "missing" the most important component for earning narcissistic value, and as a result, they acquire a sense of gender inequity and 'penis envy', which has been linked to power struggles between the sexes in later times. When a young girl notices the difference between her father's or brother's genital organ and her mother's, she can recognize her status as the second sex, the less dominant sex, according to Freud. A female feels envious of the male role model from the moment she recognizes him and attempts to compare and identify herself with him as the power holder.

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<sup>2</sup> The Oedipal complex is a term used by Sigmund Freud in his theory of psychosexual stages of development. The Oedipal complex occurs during the Phallic stage of development (ages 3-6) in which the source of libido (life force) is concentrated in the erogenous zones of the child's body (Freud, 1905). During this stage, children experience an unconscious feeling of desire for their opposite-sex parent and jealousy and envy toward their same-sex parent.

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Freud's theory has long been criticized by feminists as being demeaning toward women. This "penis envy" is not at all a significant point for femininity and masculinity. Nevertheless, the child is modeled as feminine or masculine thanks to his/her mother. According to Chodorow, mothers are more inclined to see their sons as different and separate simply because they are not of the same sex. However, at the same time, because they are of the same sex, they feel a sense of oneness and continuation with their daughters. As a result, mothers are attached to their daughters; thereby they foster femininity in them.

Another psychological theory on gender identity formation is cognitive-developmental theory. This theory, posits that there are important events that have a long-term impact on gender identity development, but these events are cognitive rather than psychosexual in nature. Children's concepts of themselves as male or female play a critical role in encouraging them to identify and endorse gender roles. Lawrence Kohlberg shows through this theory how children come to understand and enact gender roles. This theory "assumes that basic sexual attitudes are not patterned directly by either biological instincts or arbitrary cultural norms, but by the child's cognitive organization of his social world along sex-role dimensions" ( qtd. In. McLeod, 2013. 82).

Unlike psychoanalytic theory, gender identity development occurs before, rather than after identification with a same-sex parent. Long before same-sex modeling takes hold, a child's gender identity is established, and the self is then compelled to demonstrate gender harmonious attitudes and behaviors. His focus is on gender role development as a self-socialization process; while there is plenty of information about gender roles in the social environment, it is the child who actively seeks for,

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organizes, and then acts in accordance with that information. This noticeably contrasts with the idea of the child as acting or behaving in a gender manner simply because he or she is rewarded or sees someone else being rewarded for it (89). Kohlberg linked this progression to the establishment of children's gender identities.

Furthermore, there are three stages in the Kohlbergian sequence of gender identity formation: *Gender labelling*, *Gender stability* and *Gender consistency*. In gender labeling, by the age of three, children identify and label themselves as boys or girls as well as they can distinguish the difference between mothers and fathers accurately. Gender at this level is seen as a non stable stage due to the physical changes that occur in the child. However, in the gender stability level, which occurs at around four and continues till seven, the child recognizes that gender is stable over time: boys will grow up to be fathers, and girls will grow up to be mothers.

Nevertheless, they still do not know that gender cannot be changed by the upheavals in choice of activities or appearance. But only in the final gender consistency stage which is about seven, the child begins to understand that sex is permanent over time. Therefore, he/she judged to have an understanding of sex constancy regardless of the passage of time, changes in context, or bodily changes. One he/she develop this understanding, he/she begin to act as members of his/her sex.

As a result, Kohlberg believes that the most significant part of gender development is a child's cognitive grasp of the social world around them, rather than biological inclinations or cultural conventions. In other words, it is not about the child being motivated to perform in a certain way because of the expectations placed

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on them as a male or a female. Instead, their gender development is determined by their perception of being male or female, which develops in stages that correspond to their cognitive growth. These stages closely resemble Piaget's theory of cognitive development in children.

### **2.6. Michel Foucault and the Meaning of Sexuality**

Sexuality is a central aspect in human life; it is expressed in thoughts, desires, values, beliefs, behaviours and relationships. Similarly to the term gender, studies about sexuality emphasize the fact that it is also a social construction. This construction presents a set of behaviours considered either as acceptable (heterosexuality) or unacceptable (homosexuality or bisexuality). As mentioned previously in relation to Butler's notion of gender, the regime of heterosexuality has the role of the banishment of alternative sexual practices and the violation of bearers of non-heterosexual gender identities (Rivkin and Ryan 675). A person's assumption of his/her sexuality relates to sexual identity which Humm in *Modern Feminism* defines as a sense of one's own sexuality which is culturally rather than biologically determined

Foucault argues that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries discourses about sex and sexuality moved from discussions of married couples to sex outside the institution of marriage and the emergence of various forms of "perversion" (or sexuality that deviates from the norms). Along with this came the categorization of people as "perverts". Earlier generations for example would have seen a man engaging in a same-sex relationship as committing a sin, however, he is categorized

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now as a particular type of pervert and therefore giving birth to homosexual as a new category of identity.

Over the past few years, the work of Michel Foucault (1926-1984) has stimulated extensive feminist interests. One of his major influential ideas is that sexuality is not a natural phenomenon (not an innate quality of the body), but rather a social construct. This theory helps in making a great contribution in the feminist critique of essentialism. In *The History of Sexuality* (1976), Foucault analyzes the evolution of sexuality over time, dispelling the myth that Western civilization has always suppressed sexuality and forbidden its mention. He claims that on the subject of sex, silence became the rule during the Victorian era.

In his retroactive investigation, Foucault deciphers the widely held assumption that Victorian society avoided discussing sex and attempted to quiet it by constructing a taboo around it. A single locus of sexuality was acknowledged in social space as well as at the heart of every household, but it was a utilitarian and fertile one: the parents' bedroom ( Foucault 3). However, Foucault uncovers the reality about the functioning processes of the period, dispels this myth, and concludes that modern civilizations do not restrict or repress sexuality. He further argues how sexual discourses have always been an integral aspect of society and any form of sexuality that falls outside the boundaries of sexual discourses is intended to be eradicated:

How has sexuality come to be considered the privileged place where our deepest "truth" is read and expressed? For that is the essential fact: Since Christianity, the Western world has never ceased saying: "To

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know who you are, know what your sexuality is". Sex has always been the forum where both the future of our species and our "truth" as human subjects is decided. Confession, the examination of the conscience, all the insistence on the important secrets of the flesh, has not been simply a means of prohibiting sex or of repressing it as far as possible from consciousness, but was a means of placing sexuality at the heart of existence and of connecting salvation with the mastery of these obscure movements. In Christian societies, sex has been the central object of examination, surveillance, avowal and transformation into discourse. ( 111).

Moreover, According to Foucault, a "reverse discourse" has evolved, resulting in sexualities that are unnatural, deviant, unproductive, and useless. These categories, which were formed by a dominant discourse, demand the right to speak and be spoken about. They also request acknowledgement using the same vocabulary as the mainstream discourse. Western civilization, in a sense, "developed a sex code for its own self-assertion." As a result, "every other kind of sex came to be considered as antithetical to nature and detrimental to society" as a result of "it raised the heterosexual monogamous marriage into the standard of morality and cornerstone of society." (Merquior123).

In his opening chapter of the book entitled "We Other Victorians", Foucault asserts that 'the repressive hypothesis' is the most prominent idea we learnt in the context of sexuality from the Victorian period that is situated in a particular historical context: "we supported a Victorian regime, and we continue to be dominated by it even today'. (3).

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According to Foucault, this hypothesis did not exist earlier. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the topic of sexuality had some autonomy, and sexual practices had little need of secrecy: “It was a time of direct gestures, shameless discourse, and open transgressions... it was a period when bodies made a display of themselves”(3).. Therefore, there was still a lot of freedom while talking about sexuality. However, with the emergence of the Victorian conservative bourgeoisie and the rise of capitalism, sexuality was carefully confined:

But twilight soon fell upon this bright day, followed by the monotonous nights of the Victorian bourgeoisie. Sexuality was carefully confined; it moved into the home. The conjugal family took custody of it and absorbed it into the serious function of reproduction (3).

Thus, the conception of sexuality changed and became a procreative practice in a private parents’ bedroom.

As a result, sexuality was viewed as an exclusive activity that only the real couple could partake in. Children were not allowed to talk about sex, according to Foucault, that is why they ‘closed their eyes and silenced their ears whenever they came into contact with the contrary’ (4). Another sexual repression he discusses is a ‘non existence’ which means the denial of other sexualities existed in the Victorian society hence, abnormal sexualities were endured only within 'brothels' and 'mental institutions’(4).

In a similar vein, one of the central threads of Foucault’s ideas is the examination of the nature of power which marks today’s modern society. The Foucauldian

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conception of modern power challenges the commonly traditional assumption that power is a repressive force that functions solely through the systems of law and taboo. This ‘juridico- discursive’<sup>3</sup> idea of power, according to Foucault, has its origins in the pre-modern societies’ power practices. In Foucault’s words, if sex is repressed, that is, restricted to prohibition, nonexistence, and silence, the very act of talking about it appears to be an intentional infraction. A person who speaks in this manner is transgressing the power to some extent; he goes beyond the existing law.

Power was consolidated and managed by a supreme authority who exercises ultimate control over the population. In *the History of Sexuality* (1976), Foucault discusses the effects of power in determining the sexual self. He claims that since the seventeenth century, theoretical debate has favored a repressive view of power, and as a result, modern people have learned to perceive their sexuality as constrained. Foucault refutes this hypothesis claiming that power is what gives rise to different sexualities such as the heterosexual, homosexual and hermaphrodite.

For him, “Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everything” (93). This power feeds off human physical/sexual needs, he claims: “Pleasure and power do not cancel or turn back against one another; they seek out, overlap, and reinforce one another. They are linked together by complex mechanisms and devices of excitation and incitement.” (48).

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<sup>3</sup> Foucault identifies five characteristics of the juridico- discursive conception of power: 1- it establishes a negative relation between sex and power: sex is always something that power constrains. (2) Power acts as a law that determines how sex should be treated and understood. (3) Power acts only to prohibit and suppress sex. (4) Power says sex is not permitted, that is not to be spoken of, and ultimately, that it doesn’t exist. (5) Power is seen as working in the same manner at all levels: everywhere, there is a uniform repression.



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Foucault insightfully explains that sexuality was very important and it was controlled by means of repression which controls the discourse of sexuality. For example; the form of confession in the Church is a power relationship. Sexuality was a privileged theme of confession which requires an authority who judges, punishes or forgives.

Foucault obviously wishes to correct the understanding of power by emphasizing its creative implications. For him, power should find multiple ways in which sex could be spoken about with more frequency and in greater detail.

More to the point, Foucault associates a person's merely physical and sexual instincts as a "daily pleasure" as he maintains that pleasure is the means of establishing power:

This is the way things worked in the case of the family, or rather the household...it was...a network of pleasures and powers linked together at multiple points and according to transformable relationships...to reduce them to the conjugal relationship, and then to project the latter, in the form of a forbidden desire (46).

In Foucault's words, there are outside power sources that claim for the preservation of sex for marriage while condemning "underage" sexual activity just to maintain sexual obsession and therefore control society. Hence, this interpretation of the family ignores any natural desire to have children and found a family with the person you love. For him, people are heavily influenced by power structures and societal constructs.

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### **2.6.1. Foucault and the Female Body**

For Foucault as well as for many other feminists, the body is an over-determined locus of power. Feminism, according to Susan Bordo, was the first to invert the old metaphor of the "bodypolitics" to talk about the politics of the body: "the human body is itself a politically inscribed entity, its physiology and morphology shaped by histories and practices of containment and control." (Bordo21). Feminists describe how women have been treated differently from men, how they have been subjugated through their biological (body) differences.

Man, the primary human subject, has been compared and judged against woman, being the "active, powerful, and moral half of a human whole" (Bailey 99). Women are labeled as biologically (and so 'naturally') inferior when they deviate from the male standard; they are labeled as "victims of a sick physiology" (Balsamo 42). Females were historically and metaphorically seen as: 'imperfect man', 'the other' and "misbegotten male.

Therefore, this binary idea of man and woman as opposites is advocated by biological essentialists who categorize woman and man into mind and body dualism. In this idea of polarity, body and mind are considered as two separate things. Man is represented as 'mind' and this automatically represents culture, rationality reasoning, woman, on the other hand is 'body' and refers itself to instincts, irrationality, emotions desires and sexuality. While men stereotypically have been thought to be able of transcending biological differences through the use of their rational faculties, women have tried to be defined in terms of their physical capabilities of motherhood

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and reproduction. Being defined by their innate reproductive physiology, women are therefore, regarded as passive, delicate and controlled by emotions and desires.

Foucault's thoughts about this issue have been valuable and very useful to feminism in challenging the previously established stereotypical ideologies about women. He criticizes traditional views of the subject (man) as being a logical, unified creature, arguing that: "Nothing in man - not even his body - is sufficiently stable to serve as a basis for self recognition or for understanding other men" (87). There is no 'natural' body; rather the individual is carefully fabricated in our social order (200). Foucault in his turn rejects biological determinism about sexuality. His non-essentialist conception of the female body challenges the portrait of women as passive creatures fettered by a patriarchal power structure.

In *The History of Sexuality (1976)*, Foucault develops an anti-essentialist account of the sexual body, which does not deny its importance. He offers an analysis of how the category of sex is produced. For him, the creation of a seemingly "natural" sex, serves to conceal the productive action of power in regard to sexuality. He comes extensively with an emphasis on the culturally constructed sexuality rather than a naturally dictated one. For him, cultural practices are inscribed in the human body:

The notion of sex brought about a fundamental reversal; it made it possible to invert the representation of the relationships of power to sexuality, causing the latter to appear, not in its essential and positive relation to power, but as being rooted in a specific and

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irreducible urgency which power tries as best it can to dominate  
(155).

Foucault's point of view in the above passage proves that sexuality should not be seen as a natural force; rather it should be understood as a constructed phenomenon. Relying on Foucault's perspective of the construction of the sexual body, feminist have been able to reconsider the evaluation of gender as the cultural meaning related to a given sex, but "the cultural means by which "sexed nature" or "a natural sex" is produced and established as...prior to culture" (Butler 7) as Judith Butler puts it.

In common with Foucault, Butler insists that this notion of 'natural or innate sexed body' is involved purposely by gender power relations in order to legitimize and naturalize the idea of heterosexuality and therefore, strengthens the process of reproduction on sexuality. This anti-essentialist view of the body and sexuality has been an illuminating concern to see the female body transformed into a feminine body. Thus, in claiming that the body is directly constructed by external power (the body is directly molded by social and historical forces), Foucault avoids the traditional gendered opposition between the body and culture.

In support of this claim, Lois McNay insists that Foucault's *History of Sexuality* (1976) 'exposes the contingent and socially determined nature of sexuality and, thereby, frees the body from the regulatory fiction of heterosexuality and opens up new realms in which bodily pleasures can be explored' (McNay 30).

McNay supports Foucault's constructivism proclaiming that this action of liberating sexuality leaves room for a possible transformation of the existing forms of sexuality. She believes the differences that may exist between the two genders are

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‘over determined in order to produce systematic effect of sexual division’ (22). Male and female should not be confused with femininity and masculinity. They are created identities carrying some characteristics that invest the body. They are in fact disciplines of the body that require work.

Keeping in line with the idea of the body, Foucault extends his comments and sees it as the ramification and actual result of power relations. Furthermore, he sees that the concept of discursively shaped body comes into being through regulatory standards and normalizing practices. As a result, Foucault believes that the body is a prerequisite for subjectivity and emphasizes the power mechanisms that shape subjectivity, mind, and psyche.

Furthermore, to demonstrate the effect of power relations on the body, Foucault uses the example of Herculine Barbin, a nineteenth-century French hermaphrodite who was forced to change her/his sex to male after an affair despite being assigned a female sexual identity at birth. Foucault discusses how the dominant discourse determines Barbin's so-called true sex using legal documents and medical reports:

Herculine Barbin, who was called Alexina by her familiars, was finally recognized as being "truly" a young man. Obligated to make a legal change of sex after judicial proceedings and a modification of his civil status, he was incapable of adapting himself to a new identity and ultimately committed suicide (125)

Nonetheless, following her confession to legislators of the medical center and then to the religious institution—to a doctor and a priest—Herculine was legally forced to change her name and act like a man.

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Hence, Fettered by the repressive discourse that requires accepting only one sex and gender rather than embracing multiplicity, Herculine couldn't find her true identity. Barbin couldn't manage the depression and anxiety she was experiencing after submitting to the regulatory practice of power on her body and being unable to shift from female to male. She eventually committed suicide. In his account of human sexuality and the female body, Foucault reaches the conclusion that the body is completely inscribed and marked by history and the process of its destruction of the body.

Although *The History of Sexuality* (1976) has received much support, there are several critics who describe his sexual theory as 'covert androcentricity'<sup>4</sup> and "insensitive to feminist concerns. However, this theory can go beyond androcentrism, it rather privileges the free expression of sexual desires at the expense of other persons' freedom.

As a result, he builds a sexual culture that is primarily focused on sexual desire rather than gender. Another critical feminist engagement on Foucault's theory is his neglect of the innate nature of sexuality. He undermines the innate desire for love and family. From a feminist perspective, Kate Soper interprets her argument stating:

To dismiss the idea of 'spontaneous' feeling is to undermine the feminist demand for a 'reclamation' of the body and the expression of an 'authentic' desire. Foucault's radical anti-essentialism can even be seen to lend itself to the forces of

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<sup>4</sup> Androcentric/androcentricity : dominated by or emphasizing masculine interests or a masculine point of view, as an androcentric society.  
English encyclopedia  
<https://www.encyclo.co.uk/meaning-of-androcentricity>

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reaction in so far as it offers itself as a preemptive warning against any politics which aims at the removal of the constraining and distorting effects of cultural stereotyping (Soper 34).

The Foucaultian thinking of the cultural construction of women in their sexual and bodily being is for sure not without weakness. It may risk enjoying the obsession with female corporeality. Sandra Bartky for example argues that Foucault's theory may provide the possibility of the subjugation of the female body to some disciplinary practices such as: beauty regimens, exercise and dieting which subjugate by developing competencies that depend on taking care of the 'stereotypical' form of the feminine identity.

Women's apparent willingness to accept various norms and practices that promote their overall disempowerment, according to Bartky, is due to the fact that challenging "the patriarchal construction of the female body... may call into question that aspect of personal identity that is tied to the development of a sense of competence." (Bartky 293).

By the same token, Susan Bordo sheds light on some female eating disorders like anorexia. Bringing Foucaultian insights, she believes that the anorexic woman subjects herself to the extreme in an effort to be in conformity with cultural norms of the perfect and ideal form of the feminine body. She views that this disorder of anorexia can be understood as disciplinary technologies for the body (Bordo 1988).

In their turn, these technologies are specifically potent forms of social control because they control the individuals' gestures, bodies and desires. These disciplinary

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powers create individuals who willingly monitor and subject themselves. As a result, Foucault's theory reduces individuals to submissive bodies, victims of disciplinary technologies, or objects of power, rather than beings capable of resisting.

In the same fashion, another criticism we may offer for Foucault's sexual theory is his rejection of reproduction and the way it affects the female sexual experience arguing that biology alone does not explain or define the female experience. That is to say instead of identifying women by their reproductive abilities, he tries to identify them by sexual appeal.

However, his theory encounters weaknesses here in the sense that it contradicts the reality of scientific advances. Since Woman's reproductive physiology does not matter how one can explain the reproductive technology process used for fertility treatment such as in vitro fertilization (IVF) and artificial insemination (AI). To make it short, it is impossible to dismiss reproduction from the female experience simply because it is a biological fact.

Hence, Foucault's contribution to modern philosophy has stimulated feminist interests. His emphasis on the culturally constructed sexuality rather than naturally dictated one provides a compelling and challenging way of thinking about sexuality that according to him goes beyond traditional theories and practices.

The essentialist view sees sexuality as congenital and natural; they claim that the body is an absolute space that lacks any social and historical effects. The body for them occupies a pore, pre-social, pre-discursive space; it is always there and directly interpretable through the senses.



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However, Foucault in common with many constructivists claims that sexuality is a practice of self formation. His work has been considered influential for feminists in the sense that he takes aspects of the self (which used to be taken as fixed) and analyses them as historical effects constituted by social power. Since subjects are not autonomous beings, they are caught up in a social network in which social institutions and powerful discourses constitute them.

Additionally, Michel Foucault stresses the idea that sexuality is an apparatus of individual power explaining its development throughout history. He argues that the term emerged at the beginning of the nineteenth century. When describing the discourses of the history of sexuality, Foucault opposes the prevailing notion that society worked always to repress and silence it, suggesting instead that sexuality is itself a historical product provided by society.

In this context, he asserts that the deployment of sexuality has its reason for being not “in reproducing itself, but in proliferating, innovating, annexing, creating and penetrating bodies in an increasingly detailed way, and in controlling populations in an increasingly comprehensive way” (*The History of Sexuality* 107). This is to say that sexuality is not governed by reproduction, but it is determined by some discourses that attempt to examine the sexualized body.

### **2.9. Conclusion**

The disposition of gender and sex has distracted human mind since antiquity as a dominant discourse which has struggled incessantly to find a space in feminist and gender studies. However, the real emergence of gender as a concept on its own is

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largely associated with second wave feminism which drew attention to sexual divisions in society and the patterns of social difference and inequality that arose. Feminist scholars began to develop different theories of how “woman” is seen as a female and began to use “gender” rather than sex to discuss the relationship that exists between man and woman. Although it is mainly associated with feminism and feminist theories, gender could successfully be analyzed by other disciplines like sociology, psychology and literature.

As a matter of fact, gender has been a central concern to feminist theory which has put a good deal of energy to combat traditional gender ideologies and overcome naturalizing claims about women’s innate inferiority to men. With strong emphasis on gender interpretation, views differ between essentialists and constructivists.

Gender essentialism suggests that a person has either a male or a female essence that is determined by biology and sex is definitely assigned at birth. However, Gender constructivism proposes that there is no inherent truth to gender. It is constructed by social norms and performances. For the essentialists, the body is an absolute and abiding space devoid of historical and social effects. It occupies a pure, pre-social, pre-discursive space. The body is real, it is always there and directly interpretable through the senses. However, the constructivist view moves beyond the essentialist perspective as it underlines the construction of categories since it emphasizes that all labels and categories in society and the meaning attached to them are socially defined

As a constructivist, the feminist philosopher, Judith Butler argues that gender is not something one is born with, but something which is created through one’s social

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life and learning. Already in *Gender Trouble*, she comes out with a radical notion of gender and sex as she shows the relationship between them which she develops in most of her work. She clarifies the notion of gender performance (gender is performative) to claim that sex and gender are created and regulated by social norms and thus they are simultaneously engendered in society. Gender and sex are something that one continually “does” rather than “has”.

In addition, there has been a considerable investigation on how masculinity and femininity come to be defined in a time when the idea that there are more than two genders is becoming widespread. Femininity and masculinity are primarily social rather than biological in nature. This means that society determines what it means to be male or female based on traditional characteristics of femininity and masculinity such as being dominating or submissive, dynamic, brave, or emotional.

More particularly, the chapter has devoted a part to the study femininity and masculinity in Psychology .From a psychoanalytical perspective, gender identity is formed through affiliation with a same sex parent. As it has been explained previously, it is at the oedipal phase that masculinity in males and femininity in females begin. As emphasized by Freud, it is at this stage that the child has created a strong sexual attachment with the parent of the opposite gender. Simultaneously, by the age of six, the child has given up his or her preferences for the opposite-sex parent and has identified with the same-sex parent, resolving the mental struggle. As a result, boys pick up on masculinity from their fathers and girls from their mothers.

The last section of the chapter gives voice to Michel Foucault and his fruitful engagement with his well known work: *The History of Sexuality* (1976). As a

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poststructuralist, Foucault comes with an emphasis on the culturally constructed sexuality rather a naturally dictated one. He asserts through this work that sexuality is constructive and it is a practice of self formation.

Keeping in line with Butler, Foucault reinforces his points on sexuality construction arguing that cultural practices are already and always inscribes in our bodies which no less than anything else that is human are totally constituted by cultural norms. Therefore, Foucault's idea that the body and sexuality are cultural constructs rather than natural phenomena has made a significant contribution to the feminist critique of essentialism.

To sum up, in this chapter the attempt was to give an account to philosophical discussions to the concepts of gender and sexuality which prove to be controversial over the representation of woman and femininity in particular. Over the course of time, women's expectations have changed and their lives and roles have broadened. In literature for example, the issue of gender representation has been a recurrent theme in postmodern literary texts. Jeanette Winterson in many of her works subverts conventional gender representations and often seeks an alternative to escape the stereotypical image of womanhood. Therefore, the coming chapters will be devoted to the literary analysis of the selected texts to consider the problematic femininity that is repeatedly put under trial as well redefined throughout her novels.

## ***Chapter Three: Transgressive Femininity in Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit (1985)***

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### **3.1. Introduction**

Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges are not the Only Fruit* (1985) has been classified as a bildungsroman and interpreted as autobiographical. It traces the development of an adopted young girl "Jeanette" who is in the process to come to terms with her own femininity. The protagonist retells her life story from the time when she was seven years old who is forced by the church and her mother to stick to the oppressive rules imposed on her. Jeanette's mother is the key character that has a particular influence on the protagonist with her authoritative and patriarchal mind. With the aim of making Jeanette a 'missionary', the mother, a stern representative of Christian religious discourse, becomes the first obstacle Jeanette aims to subvert.

Winterson criticizes religious authorities as the controlling elements in the narrative. She questions the roots of patriarchy and the idea of keeping everything under control. Being immersed in the life of the Church, and her mother's religious obsession, Jeanette spends her earlier years studying the Bible so that she would become a missionary. Yet, her mother interprets the Bible according to her restrictive perception and offers Jeanette a mechanical reading of it.

As time goes by, Jeanette discovers distinctions between her own opinions and those imposed by the Church. She discovers that everything has been imposed on her can be questioned. Throughout the novel, Jeanette's mother believes that "oranges" are the only fruit. Whenever Jeanette is unsure or feels uncertain, she is offered oranges by her mother. In fact, these 'oranges' appear to reflect the actual restrictive system or patriarchal ideology that restrains Jeanette from discovering her true self.

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Nevertheless, Jeanette succeeds to be a non conformist woman through her rebellious attitude against her mother and her refusal to adhere to society's expectations. Therefore, Winterson's protagonist is determined enough to cross boundaries and transgress the sacred to embark on her journey of self discovery.

Through the postmodern use of story frame, Winterson builds her narrative. The text employs intertextuality and parody with an intense reference to biblical and mythical stories. *Oranges'* chapters are chronologically named after the first eight books of the Bible. Dreams and fairy tales are supplemental supporting materials that aid Winterson in making a connection between her life and the fairy stories in her narrative.

Jeanette drives the narrative and supports her decision to leave home by using her own created fairytales as well as stories she was told as a child. These tales offer Jeanette the courage to follow her heart and to take a stand to her mother and society. Winterson portrays the fairytale women or heroines in *Oranges* as smart, innovative, daring in their choices rather than staying home, sweeping, and waiting for a charming prince.

On the whole, with *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, Winterson subverts traditional gender roles and consolidates that they are not the markers of innate, congenital and natural identities, but they are the outcome of specific gender acts which corresponds to Butler's claim that gender is performative. Instead of a young girl accommodating to femininity traditional norms, Winterson depicts Janette as a rebellious character who transforms herself from the puppet woman to a transgressive new woman.

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### **3.2. Jeanette Winterson: The Writer in Context**

As one of the '20 Best of Young Contemporary British Writers' coined by the famous magazine "*Grant*", Jeanette Winterson has already established herself as one of the most influential and innovative novelists in contemporary Britain. Her works primarily deal with gender polarities and sexual identity, exploring female experience within a postmodern feminism framework.

Jeanette Winterson (b. 1959) is an English writer whose fame came with her first novel *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit* (1985). She was born in Manchester and adopted and raised by Evangelist parents to become a Pentecostal<sup>1</sup> Christian missionary. Winterson lived a sheltered early life, reading the very few books found in her house, like the Bible, *Jane Eyre*, and Malory's *La Morte d'Arthur*. Her adolescence was a constant struggle between her relationship to God and divinity and her feminine identity. Soon after she realized her preference for members of her own sex, Winterson broke off her tie to her family and her church. By the age of 16, she had come out as a lesbian and left home. Since then she supported herself by evening and weekend work.

Winterson is inspired by modernist narrative techniques as she appreciates experimenting with fictional forms and believes that art is a necessary part of human existence. In 1995, she published *Art & Objects*, a collection of essays in which she emphasizes the importance of art in one's life. She asserts:

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<sup>1</sup>The beliefs and practices of certain Christian groups, often fundamentalist, that emphasize the activity of the Holy Spirit, stress a strict morality, and seek emotional spiritual experiences in worship rituals. <https://www.thefreedictionary.com/pentecostalism>

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“I really believe in the redemptive, persuasive, healing power of art. We all need it. Most of us don't get close to it - either because we think art's not for us, or because the media circus is off-putting. I wanted to cut through the doubts and the objections”(  
www.jeanettewinterson.com. January 21, 2012)

Winterson also suggests that for her, art has replaced the evangelical religion she encountered as a child.

Among the essential themes that occur in Winterson's works frequently is the theme of “love” which plays an indispensable part throughout her works. All her novels explore love in various ways: the risk of falling in love with another person, breaking up, sexual desire...etc. It is through love that she is able to doubt and struggle the truth, allowing her to become her true self. Love incorporates her reflections of the world and her personal life. When it comes to love, women have traditionally been kept in a passive position. Unlike stereotypical obedient women who become numb and accept the intrusion of other male characters into their lives, Winterson's brave and rebellious love reveals her strong feminist beliefs.

### **3.3. Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit (1985): A Space of Female Subject**

Like most people I lived for a long time with my mother and father. My father liked to watch the wrestling, my mother liked to wrestle; it didn't matter what. She had never heard of mixed feelings. There were friends and there were enemies.

Enemies were: The Devil (in his many forms)  
Next Door  
Sex (in its many forms)  
Slugs.

Friends were: Our dog



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Auntie Madge

The Novels of Charlotte Brontë

Slug pellets and me, at first, I

had been brought in to join her

in match against the Rest of the World

(Oranges 1)

Winterson's first novel "*Oranges are not the Only Fruit*" (1985), embedded in her autobiography acquired a tremendous fame and success as many of her literary works have later. This 'portrait of a woman as a young artist', as critics frequently have labeled it, portrays reversed roles of femininity and masculinity. It explores the sophisticated interplay of masculine and feminine voices, as it transgresses the binary system of active versus passive, power versus weakness and superior versus inferior. Her first and most controversial novel was published in 1985.

It is a coming-of-age story about a sensitive girl who was adopted and grew up in an English Pentecostal community. She changed from being a quiet obedient and submissive child heavily influenced by religion and her mother to a brave independent new woman daring to challenge authority by remaining true to herself. Through this novel, Winterson attempts to destabilize and transcend the binary frame that introduces the multiplicity and fluidity of sexuality and gender. The conventional understanding of gender and sex, as well as the perception of the derogative binaries male/female, man/woman, and masculinity/femininity, are dissolved in her work.

Winterson presents her strong feminist thoughts through the exploration of gender problems. In addressing this issue, the novel presents the body as the object, content,

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and medium of narration, and investigates body narratives in the construction of alternative perspectives on love and gender.

Moreover, she sets up her own language “which defies the conventional, preexisting discourse, transcending language as a manifestation of social convention, thus allowing for an exploration of individual description and experience of the different perspectives which can be put on reality” (Jorgensen 13). Winterson, like Butler, believes that the body is a site where cultural inscriptions and patriarchal prescriptive restrictions are stuck. She claims:

I think that sexuality or the versions of sexuality that we are served up from the earliest moments are prescriptive and in many ways debilitating, people don't get a chance to find about themselves. They are told who they are, that they fit in to certain patterns. How many people can honestly say that they have made their own choices? But that's largely because of the picture book world that we're offered the story that we are told about ourselves rather than being encouraged to tell our own stories. ( Qtd. In Asensio 270-271)

Aiming to evade gender binary organization, Winterson conceives the body as a free and empty space on which cultural inscriptions can be imprinted.

*Oranges* has elicited a range of reactions from literary critics and ardent readers, ranging from outrage and scorn to acknowledgement and admiration. As a result, those who have read the novel have given it various labels: some have called it an

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autobiography, others a Bildungsroman, and still others name it as a lesbian story. Using a typical version of the Bildungsroman, the novel delivers a scrutiny of religious discourses and their harsh manipulation methods which exerted a repressive grip over Winterson. The novel adopts a “bildung genre”; it is a novel of a protagonist’s artistic development.

For Lynn Pykett, *Oranges* has apparent links with James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a young Man* (1916). Just like Stephen Daedalus, Jeanette faces a series of constraints and oppressive authorities including the Church, society and her mother. The common elements can also be seen in the end of both novels. Like Stephen, Jeanette prefers exile and independence leaving behind her family, religion and all authoritative discourses. Both protagonists aim to forge their artistic identity and be priests of art instead of being ordinary priests. Winterson shows that “art not only springs from experience, it also springs from other art” (7).

Brought up to be a Pentecostal Church missionary, the novel's first-person narrator and protagonist rebels against the religious and the patriarchal beliefs that aim to restrict her subjectivity and repress her sexuality. Even though *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* was published in 1985, the events of the story take place between the 1950’s and the 1970’s, a time in which England, who used to be one of the largest and powerful countries in the world, saw the breakdown of its imperial status after the Suez Canal conflict in 1956<sup>2</sup> which marked Britain’s end of Empire in the Middle East.

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<sup>2</sup> An international crisis in the Middle East, precipitated on July 26, 1956, when the Egyptian president, Gamal Abdel Nasser, nationalized the Suez Canal. The canal had been owned by the Suez Canal Company, which was controlled by French and British interests. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Suez-Crisis>

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At the same time, it was a period when a radical change appeared at the level of society. The collapse of the Empire contributed to a growing anxiety in the consciousness of people about the extensive arrival of immigrant populations from the former colonies. These events hotly affected the British social structure, and the British society changed to be a multicultural environment.

Similarly, it was also a time when the late 1960s and early 1970s saw the emergence and the enthusiasm for the social and sexual revolutions. The rise of the women's liberation movement, along with the civil rights and gay and lesbian movements, resulted in a political power that provided significant impetus to broad social change. Writing on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the novel's publication, Winterson stated:

*Oranges* would not be in print across the world, much less read and taught, 25 years later if it were just about me. I never wanted it to be just about me, and maybe that's the point. I wanted, through language and through storytelling, to reach something wider than my own circumstances. ..The opening words, "Like most people..." are the clue. Most people have not grown up the way I did, but the struggle to become who you are is for everyone. (Times 4)

### **3.4. *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985): A Synopsis**

*Oranges* is primarily the story of an adopted seven year old girl, Jeanette, who begins her life under the influence of her Christian fundamentalist mother, Louise who dominates Jeanette's life and the life of the absent father. Up until the age of seven Jeanette's mother had educated her at home, mostly by reading the Bible and

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following its instructions. The reason behind adopting Jeanette is that Louise wished to have a child in a sexless way whom she could instruct and educate to be a servant of God. Jeanette's mother has instilled in her the belief that she is one-of-a-kind (unique) and that she will one day become a missionary to the rest of the world. Jeanette knows no one from the outside except members of the Church she used to spend a lot of time with reading books and learning poetry. In the absence of friends other than church members and necessary education other than the Bible doctrines and dogmas, Jeanette is exiled from the outer world and enslaved in the world of her excessive religious mother.

As a child and at school, Jeanette feels castaway because of her harsh religious beliefs and her essays and projects that were full of biblical references and citations. Mrs. Vole, one of the teachers, eventually informs Jeanette that she is obsessed with God and has been frightening the other students with her talk of Hell. Mrs. Vole writes to Jeanette's mother about the situation, but the latter responds with joy rather than anger. Jeanette finds herself stuck in realities of the real world and realities created by her mother. This in betweenness makes her consequently feel like an outcast.

While growing up, Jeanette realizes that there are things in the Bible she disagrees with and begins to acquire some ideas which are different from those of the church. What becomes clear to her as she grows, however, is that the church, like many other patriarchal systems, often misleads people and recognizes that much of the church's rhetoric is false. Hypocrisy is even present among the followers of God. She often observes that religious people broadly preach guidelines, but do not follow them sincerely in their hearts.

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As time goes by, Jeanette starts to think about romance. She questions whether or not men are beasts listening to other women's assumptions about their husbands. One day, Jeanette and her mother go downtown where she encounters a girl named "Melanie" with whom Jeanette becomes a friend. Jeanette starts visiting Melanie frequently for Bible study.

As the two spend a long time together, shortly after, they indulge in a love affair. Jeanette feels happy about this relationship and eventually shares her happiness with her mother. The following Sunday, both girls are ordered to the Church to confess their sin and repent publicly. Though Melanie repents and regrets immediately, Jeanette rebels and takes refuge at Miss Jewsbury's house who is a lesbian too.

After the departure of Melanie, Jeanette participates again in the church affairs particularly teaching Sunday schools. However, her intervention is quickly interrupted with the appearance of Katy, a newly convert girl with whom Jeanette starts a new affair.

Louie realizes that the evilness in Jeanette will cause the family's downfall. Therefore, she forces Jeanette to leave home being afraid that the devil in Jeanette will destroy the family principles. Deprived from home, money, friends and family, Jeanette tries to take up various jobs for herself. At the end, sometime later, Jeanette goes back home to find out that her mother still strongly believes in her strict religious dogmas. Yet, her behaviour has softened a bit and tries to listen to a radio channel broadcasting religious reports.

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### **3.5. Mother/Daughter Relationship and its Influence on Jeanette**

In *Oranges* Jeanette tells the story of her upbringing until she leaves her hometown to attend university. Its chapters are named after the first eight books of the Old Testament in a chronological order. Dreams and fairy tales are supplementary narrative supports that enhance Jeanette's heroism as she describes her story and leaves home. Jeanette propels the narrative forward with her own invented fairy tales as well as stories she was told as a child. . The influences of her early life are acknowledged; the adult Jeanette does not accept these influences as voluntarily as her younger self does, but their presence shows a continued connection with her past.

The first beloved of Jeanette, the narrator, is her mother. The connection between them is a constructed tie that symbolizes a manufactured rather than a biologically essential love. The influence of her mother and the strength of her love are highly present in the story. When Jeanette finally arrives at university, one of the fellows asks her: "When did you last see your mother?" (155), Jeanette reacts in a way she wants to forget about her past memories: "I didn't want to tell her; I thought in this city, a past was precisely that Past" (155). After a few sentences, Jeanette confesses how she feels about coming back home: "There are threads that help you find your way back, and there are threads that intend to bring you back. Mind turns to the pull, it's hard to pull away" (155).

In its frequent occurrence, the thread symbolizes the tie of love between the mother and the daughter, between Jeanette's present and past. Therefore, the Evangelical mother has the greatest influence on molding the character, attitudes and beliefs of young Jeanette. Additionally, the abandonment of Jeanette's biological mother results in a feeling of guilt and rejection. With the absence of biological

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parents, the protagonist becomes cut off from her origins, truth and history and consequently she loses the part of her identity. Similarly, Jeanette has to face exaggerated expectations and religious devotion of her adoptive mother from whom she cannot get any support to express her femininity. Consequently, she turns to fairytales to find their existential truth. In this context, Makinen states:

The mother is the child's defining experience of culture, one the child often needs to challenge, though mothers can be either oppressive or liberatory. The [adoptive] mother in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* is the former, as the intertextual references cast her as first Abraham, dedicating the child to God ... The search for the self is elaborated by creating one's own variant narratives via fairy tales, Arthurian myth the fantasy orange demon. The fairy tale of the prince's search for an ideal woman, in 'Leviticus', dramatises Jeanette's own crisis in being unable to live up to her Evangelical community's expectations and the need to find her own answer to the balance between external and internal, within her own hands (47-48).

Louie imposes on Jeanette some gender roles she is supposed to perform by relying on religion as her unique guide.

Therefore, through fairytales, Winterson gets the opportunity to challenge reality and look for the balance between the external and the internal as well as reflects her secrets and desires, which are hidden in unconsciousness. In the same vein, the use



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of fairytales shows Jeanette's echo to her anxieties and a revelation of her incongruence between herself and her repressive mother.

One of the most important fairytales in the novel is the tale of Winnet Stonejar. As a matter of influence, this imaginary story helps Jeanette cope with her mother. Winnet is trapped by a sorcerer and as a result becomes his apprentice. Ellam (2010) argues that much like Winnet, Janette is her mother's apprentice to her faith, as a missionary. Further to this, the common ties which Winnet's father has on her are mainly the same like the mother daughter relationship of the narrative. Similarly to Janette, Winnet lives an ordinary happy life with her adoptive parent up to the point where she falls in love with a wrong person and causes the witch's anger and her being excluded.

When Winnet is leaving her adoptive father's castle, much as Jeanette leaves her mother's home, Winnet's father disguises himself as a mouse and ties his thread around one of her buttons (144). Winnet, the sorcerer, and the boy whom she loves, can be said to represent a copy of Janette, her mother, and Melanie. The point is that if the parent's power over the child cannot be seen, it is still present. It also signifies how, for both Jeanette and Winnet, the past cannot be erased. Even though love is constructed and not biological, it is illustrated as a real emotion for them.

Susana Onega in her *"I'm Telling You Stories, Trust Me"* expands the idea:

Like Jeanette, Winnet uses her occult knowledge to teach the villagers and, like her, leads a happy life with her adoptive parent until she falls in love with the wrong person, causing the wizard's apocalyptic rage and her expulsion from the paradisaal *hortus conclusus* where they lived.

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Yet again, as with Jeanette after her estrangement from the parental home, parent and daughter continue to be inextricably tied by an invisible thread. (143)

Hence, the imaginary characters of the fairytale are just versions of Jeanette, her mother and the strange Melanie. In this case, the sorcerer who adopts Winnet teaches her "the magic arts" so that she can "take the message to other places, where they hardly know how to draw a chalk circle" (139), just as Jeanette's mother wishes her daughter to carry God's message to the heathen.

Onega points out that both daughters are punished for loving the wrong persons; this sin in fact connects both of them. The parallel between them is furthered by the mother's and father's grip over their daughters and their abusing power. Winnet for example believes that the sorcerer is the only parent she has ever known:

She believed that she had always been in the castle, and that she was the sorcerer's daughter. He told her she was. That she had no mother, but had been specifically entrusted to his care by a powerful spirit" (141).

This indirect illusion is typical to Jeanette's manipulating mother. Furthermore, just as the sorcerer hides Winnet's past, Jeanette's mother, Louise, obscures the details of her daughter's birth. . The "Awful Occasion" of Jeanette's biological mother visiting the house is made even more awful by Jeanette's awareness that the truth regarding her origins has been dismissed to her: "The Awful Occasion was the time my natural mother had come to claim me back" (98). This quote shows clearly the effect Jeanette's mother has on her and the extent to which her words have made her

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(Jeanette) her own. Jeanette shows a considerable, nearly undeniable absence in the novel by never speaking of the Awful Occasion again. Jeanette does not attempt to re-create a new start for herself in contrast to her adoptive mother. Instead, she appears to accept the version that has been offered up to her.

Even more outstanding is the reason why, the mother, has adopted Jeanette just to fulfill a mission to "get a child and dedicate it to God". In the very beginning of the novel, Jeanette recounts:

My mother [...] would get a child, train it, build it, dedicate it to the Lord. [...] She followed a star until it came to settle above an orphanage, and in that place was a crib, and in that crib, a child. [...] She said, "This child is mine from the Lord." [...] Her flesh now, sprung from her head (110).

Thus, Jeanette's mother, a stern representative of Christian religious discourse, is an authoritative and overbearing woman who aims to prophesize her daughter to be a Christian missionary.

Equally important, Jeanette submission shows the extent to which her mother is all-powerful, and she even compares her to God and Zeus<sup>3</sup> in Greek Mythology. This figure of Zeus is linked to the concept of order and male supremacy and values. Hence, Jeanette's mother can be viewed as a supporter of patriarchal supremacy and authoritative society. Therefore, Mothering for Jeanette is linked to manipulation

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<sup>3</sup> The greatest of the gods. *Zeus* is the sky and thunder god in ancient Greek religion, who rules as king of the gods of Mount Olympus.  
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/zeus>

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and power. However, in spite of this authority over her, Jeanette could succeed to create her own story and life. She in fact manages to squeeze some freedom through inventing stories from her own.

The imaginary story of Winnet is a clear example to escape her reality and render its pain bearable. Her mother's biblical teachings and storytelling skills were so powerful that Winterson risked becoming entrapped in them, just as the characters Jeanette and Winnet. As she wrote recently in *the Times*: "To avoid the narrow mesh of her story about me, I needed a story of my own, and that is how and why I am a writer" (Times 4).

In the same vein, Jeanette's conflicting relationship with her mother is damaged and indicates it as 'treachery'. After discovering her affair with Melanie, the mother steals all of Jeanette's letters and cards and burns them. Jeanette's reaction is unambiguously unforgiving:

There are different sorts of treachery, but betrayal is betrayal wherever you find it. She burnt a lot more than the letters that night in the backyard. I don't think she knew. In her head she was still a queen, but not my queen any more, not the White Queen any more. (110).

Winterson compares this relationship to a master/slave connection in which freedom is totally absent and can never transcend the barriers made by her patriarchal community.

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### **3.6. The Absent Father**

In Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges*, the male gender is essentially nonexistent. Males are ghostly characters in the narrative while women are given more power to be assertive and create their own space. Hence, men are removed from their conventional gender positions. Andermahr asserts that "much of the novel's humor involves the depiction of a family life in which conventional gender expectations and roles are reversed" (52). Notably, the reader receives nearly no details about the father; though he lives with Jeanette in the same house. In a stark contradiction to the strong mother who is representative of the male mind, Jack, the father is an invisible figure in Jeanette's life and almost lacking the power to counteract his assertive wife. The father figure is presented as emasculated from his patriarchal role:

Her husband was an easy going man, but I knew it depressed him...She was wrong as far as we were concerned, but right as far as she was concerned and that's really what mattered (Winterson 5)

The household is transformed into a matriarchal one where the father has no power and control over the family. He is, therefore, not a "father" at all, but "her husband" since he is deprived of his mighty patriarchal status.

Actually, in *Oranges* men act as weak, non dynamic and passive characters; the women of the church appear to have the same, if not more, influence than men. Jeanette's father is no exception. In many occasions, her mother always labels him: "disappointing". Here Winterson subverts gender paradigm giving more power and freedom to women. Jeanette refers to her parents:

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Like most people I lived for a long time with my mother and father.

My father liked to watch the wrestling, my mother liked to wrestle; it didn't matter what. She was in the white corner and that was that (3).

Jeanette's mother subverts conventional gender standard as she is powerful and dominant. Instead of her father who is supposed to wrestle, an action of strength and physical power associated with man, Louie acts Jack's part and wrestles, which proves that man (the father) is in a subordinate position. The father's presence in the novel is not of importance, rather it is nominal. On that account, Jeanette refers to him as "her husband" instead of "my father". In many ways, Winterson is empowering women and objectifying men leading to a reversal of gender roles. Jeanette expresses: "As far as I was concerned, men were something you had around the place, not particularly interesting, but quite harmless" (129).

Equally important, this neglected and forsaken father is constantly negated by the rigid mother figure in the sense that she does not sacrifice anything for him. As revealed by Jeanette's memories, her adoption was not because of her mother's impotence to have children, but because of refusal of copulating. In the very first part of the narrative, Jeanette explains the problem her mother has with begetting a child:

She had a mysterious attitude towards the begetting of children; it wasn't she couldn't do it, more she didn't want to do it. She was bitter about the Virgin Mary getting there first. So she did the next best thing and arranged for a foundling. That was me (3).

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The mother compares herself with Virgin Mary in the sense that she does not desire to have a husband or have children, so she seeks out to adopt Jeanette as an alternative for Christ. When Jeanette and Melanie are discussing their fathers, Jeanette wonders why she has no father like Melanie:

She [Melanie] talked about the weather and her mother, that she had no father. ‘I haven’t either,’ I said, to make her feel better. ‘Well, not much.’ Then, I had to explain about our church and my mother and me and me being dedicated to the Lord” (Oranges 83).

Though her father is alive, Jeanette feels herself fatherless because she never felt being under the control of the law of the father. This is why Jeanette identifies with her mother whose role trespasses that of the father which results automatically to Jeanette being attracted to the same sex. Hence, love and passing are always absent in Louie’s and Jack’s relationship. It is similar to working shifts where one goes to bed in the night as the other gets up in the morning.

### **3.7. “Oranges” (1985) As a Postmodern Text**

‘Oranges’ has proved to be Winterson’s tremendous success not only because it has been seen to present homosexual viewpoints, postmodern issues of intertextuality, metafiction and parody, but also because it is written in an autobiographical manner (Antakyalioglu 5). The story that she tells, a Bildung narrative, reveals the struggle of a young girl in a process to assert her sense of difference against the stern morally oppressive society. Based on Winterson’s own life of growing up as a working class woman in a strict religious community in the North of England, the novel is a groundbreaking examination of a homosexual life.

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Recurrently, Winterson portrays life as series of narratives; each one is different from the other. Susana Onega states that “*Oranges* is both linear and realistic and anti-linear and experimental” (19). This is because it deals with an autobiographical narrative set in the 1960’s intertwined with a series of mythical tales<sup>4</sup>

As a Bildungsroman or ‘novel of development’, ‘*Oranges*’ reveals the growth of a young girl to maturity. Winterson uses herself to write both fact and fiction. The story begins with an autobiographical opening: ‘Like most people I lived for a long time with my mother and father’ (*Oranges* 3). This opening grounds the texts an identification of a personal story from the start. Winterson has already compared the novel to Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando* (1928) in terms of its experimentalism, its blurring of genres, and its radical treatment of sexuality (*Winterson Art* 53).

Through the postmodern use of story frames, Winterson creates a maze of unexpected events in her novel which is full of religious symbolism. Hence, in addition to fairytales, the novel includes literary allusions to a variety of other texts, all of which have a simultaneous existence. The text employs structural intertextuality, with the realistic linear narrative juxtaposed with biblical and mythical stories.

Winterson has already asserted that when she was a child, her house contained only six books: two Bibles, a concordance, two children's books, and Malory's *la Morte D'Arthur* (*Winterson, Art* 153). She also demonstrated that *Jane Eyre* was her mother's favorite book. With the exception of the concordance, Winterson heavily

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<sup>4</sup> On Winterson's official website, [www.jeanettewinterson.com/pages/books/oranges\\_are\\_not.html](http://www.jeanettewinterson.com/pages/books/oranges_are_not.html), she discusses the issue of an autobiographical narrative I gender terms: "I have noticed that when women writers put themselves into their fiction, it's called autobiography. When men do it... it's metafiction".



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relies on these works as well as on some biblical illusions to provide the novel's mythical and narrative framework.

Moreover, Winterson's own conception of intertextuality shows her idea that it is both a process and a dialogue. It is: "books speak to other books; they are always in dialogue. Books that we have now affect the way we read books that were written earlier, at any other period" (Onega 2). Hence, Winterson's excessive playfulness with stories, books and poems as well as her excessive use of intertextuality can be seen too as her way of honoring some of her favorite writers and stories.

Structurally, *Oranges* is divided into eight chapters and most obviously, each chapter bears the name of the chapters of the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges and Ruth. Winterson undertakes satirical references to the Bible giving her life a biblical armature. In 'Genesis,' for example, the mother's adoption of Jeanette is compared to the birth of Christ and to God's creation of the universe. Louie chooses Jeanette just the same as God chooses his prophets and messengers: "...followed a star until it came to settle above an orphanage [...] she took the child away for seven days and seven nights (10). This quotation echoes the passage from the Bible: "so they sat down with [Job] upon the ground of seven days and seven nights (job2:13) (Qtd. In Ferguson 154)

In this sense, Louie demonstrates masculine powers of creation, giving birth metaphorically to a 'holy child'. Moreover, Genesis also narrates the story of Abram who is supposed to be the father of great nation, and who is ordered to leave his home and family to go to a destined land by God. In an ironic way, Winterson reverses the roles. She centers her narrative on a matriarchal origin society in which

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the father/patriarch is emasculated from his role. As opposed to the Biblical Genesis which states: “one tribe, one family, then finally one patriarch: Abraham,” *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* presents a matriarchal origin story where father and son do not exist.

In *Leviticus*, which concerns purity laws of governing and reveals absolute holiness of God, Jeanette shows her disapproval with the church and its instructions as well as her great consciousness of sexuality. In ‘*Numbers*’ Jeanette shows her passion and love to Melanie which she fears will upset her Catholic environment. ‘*Deuteronomy*’ represents a reflexive questioning of history and law. The Biblical book of Deuteronomy deals with the history of the Hebrews, Moses and the Promised Land. The Biblical Deuteronomy establishes Judaism's laws as the enduring rules for humanity; however, the novel's chapter mocks this approach by rejecting fixed interpretations:

Perhaps the event has an unassailable truth. God saw it. God knows.  
But I am not God. And so when someone tells what they heard or saw,  
I believe them, and I believe their friends who also saw, but not in the  
same way (84).

The general idea that this chapter attempts to convey is that everything we understand as truths is the result of various interpretations that are determined by various ideologies and contexts. Through irony, Winterson forces her readers to doubt stories found in the Bible since most of them have been made for political aims arguing that storytelling is “a way of explaining the universe while leaving the universe unexplained” (91). She goes on to say that everyone who tells a story does

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it differently, just to emphasize that everyone sees things differently. People like to distinguish between storytelling, which is not true, and history, which is true.

In *Joshua* (the Book of Joshua is about the conquest of Canaan by Israelites), Jeanette parodies the way the priest forces her to get rid of her demon after falling under Satan's spell (after having a sexual intercourse with Melanie): "renounce he, renounce her," the pastor kept saying, "it's only the demon" (105). More to the point, In *Joshua*, Jeanette has a dream wherein she arrives in the city of Lost Chances and is informed that she has already committed the Fundamental Mistake (109).

For Onega, this dream metaphorically suggests the judgment day, in which Jeanette's sin has already determined her fate, and which bears a resemblance to how Jeanette has been deemed by her community as a result of her relationship with Melanie. Therefore, the aspect of the exorcism performed on her is heightened by the dream.

In '*Judges*' Jeanette is ordered by her mother to leave home after being accused by the Church priests guilty, as she shows their cruel way in treating women as biologically inferior to men (125). The final chapter, '*Ruth*' is significantly related to Jeanette. Ruth is concerned with the story of a foreigner who remains loyal to her widowed mother-in-law, Naomi. Ruth leaves her own people and religion to stay with Naomi after the death of her husband (Dyas 79).

Similar to Jeanette, Ruth has to abandon her past life because of her bond with Naomi. The Book of Ruth also reveals the exile of Naomi and her coming back to her homeland. Likewise, Jeannette is exiled from her home because of her lesbian

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affairs, but finally returns to her mother despite all the disputes that they had. It is the chapter in which Jeanette returns home after being cast away and exiled. Though she is living on her own, she feels as if she is still connected to her mother: “There are threads that help you find your way back, and there are treads that intend to bring you back. (..) It is in this chapter that Jeanette reaches her own true self, her identity as an author. Bollinger explains that “Jeanette’s action thus reproduces the theology of the Ruth text; she opts to express to her mother the same hesed (loyalty, duty, mercy, goodness and kindness) Ruth showed Naomi” (.370).

Intertextuality is therefore, well utilized in the novel. In addition to the Bible, *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Bronte is the novel’s second intertext. Pyrhonen comments of the novel’s two sacred sources: “They seduce Winterson, kindling her desire to write. What are they, if not her literary father and mother?” (66). As a child, Jeanette read *Jane Eyre* again and again, but her mother always changes the novel’s ending and rewrites the end of the story to suit her own worldview. Instead of marrying her lover Mr. Rochester, Louie, made Jane marry the missionary St. John Rivers.<sup>5</sup>

From the mother’s perspective, St John Rivers represents the Christian duties whereas Mr. Rochester represents the inconvenient passions. When in hospital after feeling depressed, Jeanette frequently thinks and relates herself to the orphan Jane and her struggle to survive: “so I was alone. I thought of Jane Eyre, who faced many trials and was always brave’ (*Oranges* 27). Hence, by revising the ending, the mother aims at imposing her own choice on Jeannette.

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<sup>5</sup> *Jane Eyre* is an orphan who goes on to become a governess. She falls in love with her employer, Mr. Rochester, while working as a governess. On their wedding day, however, it is noted that Mr. Rochester is already married and that his insane wife has been residing in the attic. The wedding is called off, and Jane’s cousin St John Rivers asks her to join him in his missionary work in India this time. Despite this, Jane declines the offer, claiming that they do not love each other.

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*Jane Eyre* is, therefore, adopted in *Oranges* to show the struggle between social duty and religious commitment and Jane's passionate desire for identity and selfhood. While both texts highlight 'the religious and spiritual dimensions of love' (Pyrhonen 50), Winterson employs a lesbian romance for the normal or heterosexual romance of *Jane Eyre*.

On the whole, In *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, Winterson reworks various texts. First and foremost, she shapes her story with Biblical chapters. Though not directly mentioned, the Biblical stories are similar to Jeanette's life. Although she mostly mocks her target text, but at the same time she shows a serious scrutiny by parodying the Biblical stories and questioning their value and patriarchal principles. Moreover, by rearranging other literary texts, Winterson creates a mosaic of complex intertexts which makes her novel unique and a distinguished postmodern piece of art rather than a conventional narrative.

### **3.8. Femininity as 'Performative' in *Oranges* (1985)**

Individuals are expected to play specific roles based on their genders as a result of conformism to social tradition. As a result of patriarchal gendering, women are associated with female roles and men with male roles. That is, gender appears as socially constructed that is simply defined by people's biological sexes. This is the point at which people's perceptions of sexuality coincide with gender roles.

In their actions and decisions, women are subjected to social oppression as a result of gender phenomenon. They are expected, and even obligated to play all of the subordinate roles to male authority, such as mother and wife. In society, women are unrecognized; they are the suffocated being.

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### **3.8.1. Jeanette as a Non Conformist Woman**

From an early age, the protagonist Jeanette resists the prevailing codes of femininity that society tries to impose on her. Jeanette's sexuality offers another challenge to the traditional codes of masculinity and femininity in many of her works, Winterson prefers to reflect women's position as opposed to men's authority and to patriarchy in society. From childhood, the protagonist is exposed to social authorities as she is under pressure to conform to social prescriptions. Contrary to the stereotypical image of women, Jeanette succeeds to be a non conformist and offers alternative ways of gendering.

The title "*Oranges*" is thus, a metaphor to show the sexual choices accepted by society. These 'oranges' represent the dominant ideology that pervades the environment of Jeanette. Whenever Jeanette feels uncertain or in a trouble, her mother offers her oranges to be the only fruit to take in this case. They in fact, represent the whole authoritative system her mother reinforces. However, Jeanette is aware that there are other fruits and therefore there are other alternatives to represent femininity.

Winterson presents a new kind of character "Jeanette" who accepts her sexual preference through transgressing the sacred. Winterson raises her voice against the idea that men and women have set biological roles, or that they exist in a biological binary. Although the text is "woman centered" (Watkins, 81), the female characters are ironically representatives of patriarchy. All women who are religious in the story are also deeply supporters of the idea of oppression: "The women in our church were strong and organized. If you want to talk in terms of power... I had enough to keep

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Mussolini happy” (*Oranges*, 124). Jeanette’s comments here give a clear interpretation of Winterson’s female characters. The whole environment becomes an oppressive source to Jeanette.

With an authoritative mother presented in a female patriarch, Jeanette is aimed to perform some gender roles by taking religion as her guide in life. However, religion has a specific belief of sexual ethics that mandates that there should be only one type of sexuality, which is heterosexuality or religious, which denies any fluidity or plurality of sexual domains. Religious instructions assert that gender follow from sex and therefore, gender roles are derived from biological sex. This heterosexual system of sexuality rejects any possibility of other sexualities.

Her mother, in fact, is one of those mothers who raise their daughters to be the women society expects. Rachel Wingfield states:

Oranges charts the territory of women in patriarchal society whose history is fraught with contradictions as mothers are pressurized into colluding with women’s oppression and prepare their daughters to be “good women” (qtd. In Onega,2006, 110)

In the beginning of the novel, Jeanette becomes a submissive girl on which specific cultural acts are inscribed by her mother. Jeanette’s awareness of her non conformist attitude comes quite early in the novel. As a child she frequently listened to neighbors' conversations as she hears a lot about men and marriage, particularly from the ladies who run the paper shop: “If they're not careful folk will think they're like them two at the paper shop”(74). These two women live together and they even share

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the same bed. Her mother never approves of the women and will not allow her daughter to accompany them to the beach.

She soon discovers, however, why her mother dislikes the women. She just believes these women are dealing with "unnatural passions" (74), something that Jeanette initially does not understand. Although Jeanette does not understand the neighbors' concern about the women, but she notices that they do something socially undesirable. Her observations are what drive Jeanette to keep her lesbian affair hidden later in the novel.

The young girl, who is unaware of her sexual preferences, is attracted to her girl friend. Jeanette realizes she has a sexual tendency after meeting her first lover, Melanie. In some ways, she realizes how unaware she has been of her sexual inclination. She, on the other hand, has no idea how or why she is attracted to a girl. Jeanette is completely unaware of what is going on.

Her faith in the naivety of what she experiences with Melanie is so solid that she cannot shake it. It is no surprise that she rejects repentance, unlike her partner Melanie. She tries to persuade the Church members that they did nothing wrong. Jeanette's ignorance of socially acceptable behaviors is clear, even after having a sexual affair. On this complicated situation Keryn Carter comments:

The church's strong women- her mother included- have offered Jeanette role models that have led her to have faith in her own femaleness. Those models, however, are defined and sustained by patriarchal law, and the young Jeanette has not understood the significance of their limitations. (23)



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Janette's sexual tendency is totally in opposition to her social environment. She is more in touch with her femininity, but she is blind to the limitations of her sex.

She is then alienated by her homosexual identity, which she refuses to acknowledge. Jeanette is aware of her oppressive society, but she refuses to acknowledge that her desire is inappropriate for her gender. She is woman guided by her desires, so her lesbian tendencies do not bother her. She is a woman whose femininity is transgressive and rebellious apparent in her refusal to conform to societal expectations to the point that she cannot categorize the social and romantic heterosexual relationships around her.

In her recurrent dream ( which appears at the beginning of *Numbers*), she saw herself getting married in a white dress with a golden crown and when she reaches her future husband, she finds that he either has become blind or a pig. This wedding day is like:

Finally we came to the moment, "You may kiss the bride". My new husband turned to me, and here were a number of possibilities. Sometimes he was blind, sometimes a pig, sometimes my mother, sometimes the man from the post office, and once, just a suit of clothes with nothing inside. I told my mother about it, and she said it was because I ate sardines for supper. The next night I ate sausages, but I still had the dream. (71)

Jeanette's dream reflects her fears about marriage and urges her to think about relationships between men and women.

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Additionally, throughout the novel Jeanette is in a theoretical wandering about love and marriage till she arrives to the discovery of her true identity. Though marriage or the widespread conventional expression ‘the right person’ was of paramount importance for women in Jeanette’s society, it was however a pointless idea for Jeanette since all women she knows are disappointed from this social institution: “everyone always said you found the right man. My mother said it, which was confusing. My aunt said it, which was even more confusing (72). Marriage turns out to be tremendously disappointing and deceiving. In this regard, her aunt once tells her: “I laughed for a week, cried for a month, and settled down for life” (73). Jeanette realizes that the deception of women is the result of the wrong representations of marriage as the source of happiness.

As far as sexuality is concerned, Johnston’s comments in *Lesbian Criticism*, shows Winterson’s point in depicting Jeanette and her homosexuality. He suggests: “heterosexual intercourse violated women’s bodies because it represented the structural inequality between the sexes”. In plain words, Winterson’s point is that sexual identity cannot be a social enforcement. She stresses the freedom of sexual preferences and hence emphasizes her suggestion of other sexes in this way.

Again Jeanette’s mother is the responsible of her being a non conformist girl. Jeanette gradually becomes aware of her mother’s extensive endeavor to fix her sexuality into a patriarchal heterosexual frame based on her stern religious principles. Louie imposes on Jeanette the conception that in this world there are only binaries, and she has to make a choice between these binaries which should not be transcend. She always preaches Jeanette to follow these binaries and shape her life upon them.

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Her mother “had never heard of mixed feeling”; she perceives the world in a binary way: enemies or friends, good or evils and males or females (3).

Ironically, Louie’s project to make Jeanette a missionary, shifts into the opposite result. In fact, this situation was foretold to Jeanette by a fortune teller a long time ago when she was out collecting black peas. She run to an old woman to predict to her future sexual orientation. The woman replied: “you’ll never marry,’ she said, ‘not you, and you’ll never be still” (*Oranges* 7). As a result, the woman’s words become true and Jeanette refuses to conform to the restrictive doctrines of patriarchy and heterosexuality.

Accordingly, Jeanette’s self discovery is accomplished through transgression. She crosses the boundaries on the way to pursue her femininity as a lesbian. Transgression also occurs when Jeanette rebels against the fruit ‘orange’ which is considered by Louie as the only fruit. In some circumstances, by taking orange as the only fruit, the mother tries to repress Jeanette’s desire from flipping out of the heterosexual route and to crush Jeanette’ aspiration to discover her true self. However, for Jeanette, ‘oranges are not the only fruit’.

### **3.9. Sexuality as a Means of Empowerment**

Comparable to her postmodern feminist views, Winterson reverses all gender roles in her work. In many ways, *Oranges* is empowering to women. Ironically, she depicts a women-centered oppressive society through which she employs a different interpretation of gender roles. She conflates all male power with religious authority. All of the others who are subject to the church are assigned female roles. Jeanette, on the other hand, appears to be the dominant male in her lesbian affairs.

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It should be noted that Winterson, as a feminist lesbian author, endorses sexual differences. Winterson's thoughts on sexual difference, like those of Virginia Woolf, recommend alternative sexes as the latter claims:

It would be a thousand pities of women like men, or lived like men, or looked like men, for if two sexes are quite inadequate, considering the vastness and variety of the world, how should we manage with one only? Ought not education to bring out and fortify the differences rather than the similarities? For we have too much likeness as it is, and if an explorer should come back and bring word of other sexes [my emphasis] looking through the branches of other trees at other skies, nothing would be of greater service to humanity (23).

Both authors appear to agree that there must be other sexes. They oppose the traditional view of male. That is why, in her work, Winterson presents unconventional female and male characters. In this way, she is attempting to subvert stereotypes; she reverses the power structure within the family. That is to say, she presents an authoritative mother and a passive father as opposed to the prevailing patriarchal system. She pictures the female with power and oppression in the house.

Sexuality appears to be a tool of empowerment for Jeanette. She rebels against the dominant codes of femininity that society seeks to enforce on her from a young age. Jeanette's sexuality presents yet another challenge to traditional masculine and feminine codes. When she falls in love for the first time with Melanie, she feels happy and feels no harm in her attraction to the same sex as she tries to find out her sexual identity.

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Therefore, Jeanette's sexual encounters appear natural to her, and she and Melanie reject the priest's interpretation of them as unnatural passion or a demon possession. Attempts were made to make them feel sinful, but they were all unsuccessful. This shows that sexual perception is something that comes and evolves naturally, i.e. it is a natural process. Even after Jeanette regrets her sin, she goes on her homosexual relationship secretly with another girl.

Furthermore, When Pastor Finch tries to explain Jeanette's relationship with Melanie, he claims that it is due to Jeanette subverting the traditional conventional roles of men and women. He even defines this lesbian relation as Jeanette unnaturally playing the male role in her partnership with Melanie and that she is acting beyond her gender's barriers or limitations. This belief in fact stems from a heterosexist ideology that women are biologically inferior to men and that heterosexuality is the norm. In this regard, Butler asserts:

Compulsory heterosexuality sets itself up as the original, the true, the authentic; the norm that determines the real implies that being lesbian is always a kind of miming, a vain effort to participate in the phantasmatic plenitude of naturalized heterosexuality which will always and only fail” (Butler 722)

Moreover, Winterson also speaks out against the notion that men and women have fixed biological roles. Gender, she believes, is a socially constructed concept. She believes that men and women do not have a clear biological role, but rather act as society dictates.

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Winterson comes up with the idea that sexuality is becoming a means of empowerment; it is variable and indeterminate. She perceives sexuality as an alternative way to exist in a society dominated by a heterosexual culture. As a result, Winterson proves through her protagonist 'Jeanette' that gender as Butler claims is constructed and performative.

Inhabiting the world of women where men figures are absent, Jeanette develops negative feeling about men and heterosexual marriages in general. When her aunt once states: "there's time enough for you to get a boy", she replies: "I don't think I want one"(73). This response shows clearly Jeanette's attitude toward the notion of marriage and her refusal of it. Therefore, as Rubinson claims, Winterson's fiction focuses on

refusing lies related to sex and gender roles; she attacks various artificial sources of sexism which disseminate and perpetuate lies about what is 'natural' behavior for men and women, religion and scripture, androcentric political, economic, familial hegemony, romance novels; and scientific discourses about bodies (115)

In spite of the lies set by the repressive patriarchal discourse, Jeanette sees that are truths that need to be revealed about those dominant discourses. So, in her confrontation with her queer relation, Jeanette cherishes the fluidity of gender and negates the singularity of heterosexuality.

Jeanette's insistence on her sexual orientation indicates that sexuality is a natural process involving one's own feelings and desires. Winterson's conclusion to her story strengthens her point. She portrays Jeanette, who is granted the right to further her

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education and is free of her reliance on others in all senses. The novel's conclusion opens the door to the possibility of other genders. In this way, Winterson challenges the traditional female model that leads to women's alienation and suggests an alternative way of femininity which exists within an apparently dominant heterosexual culture.

### **3.10. Conclusion**

In *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, Winterson presents the story of her own life which is cleverly obscured behind the imagined world and fairytales. She sets up a protagonist who appears to be her alter ego- a girl who not only has the same name as her, but also seeks a life beyond society's standards.

At the beginning of the novel, Jeanette was trapped in a bipolar worldview. However, as time passes, Jeanette begins to recognize the facts concerning the evangelist community's dictations, and she wishes to establish her own view of religion and sexuality. Jeanette falls in love with Melanie and rejects to be molded by the governing discourse that requests her to perform the feminine gender and to be attracted to the opposite sex. By refusing the law and defying religious edicts Jeanette becomes a rupture in the prevailing discourse; she disrupt gender binaries and reveals that gender is not a closed system, rather a continuum which therefore opens up the possibility of multiplicity.

Through a postmodern parody of biblical events, Winterson ridicules religious doctrines and their authority in governing her life. In fact, she decries the patriarchy of the Bible which puts men in places of authority and pushes women into alienation. Admittedly, Winterson aims to challenge the traditional view of femininity through

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her protagonist who is not a conventional woman; she is never like the traditional female who is subject to the male gaze. Therefore, she negates the traditional female model which leads women into alienation.

Overall, in many ways, the novel is empowering to women in the sense that all women of the narrative are strong and have their free will and choice to do what they like. Women have created their own kingdom, even the heroines of the fairytales are portrayed as brave, willed, educated and live on their own.

Winterson's aim like many other feminist authors is to question traditional gender views, rewrite femininity, expose it as socially constructed and liberate it from the chains of masculine colonizing discourse. She presents her protagonist Jeanette, who is raised in a religious environment with an eye on turning her into a missionary, as a transgressive female who ventures to seek her true self and cherish her individuality as a lesbian.



## ***Chapter Four: Femininity as Camouflage in Written on the Body (1992)***

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### **4.1. Introduction**

“We live, supposedly, in a time without certainties; a time when all identities and subjectivities are suspect, unstable” (Grice and Woods 78)

*Written on the Body (1992)* is a postmodern love story narrated entirely in the first person by a genderless narrator whose name, sex and age are never revealed to the readers. Such strategy of obscuring the narrator’s gender, in fact, transforms the traditional narrative into a postmodern game of uncertainty and unreliability.

The narrator’s gender remains unconfirmed till the end of the story which subsequently raises the question of his/her ambiguous identity. Hence, the readers play a pivotal role in deciphering meanings the mysterious narrator as most, including myself, come to the variations of the same conclusion: the narrator is a woman and therefore she is a lesbian.

The ungendered narrator acts in some contexts as a man and in others as a woman due to some textual clues present in the narrative. Therefore, Winterson’s narrator can be read as a representative of Judith Butler’s theory of ‘*Gender Performativity*’. (see chapter 2). Her removal of all gender indications is a tool to challenge dominant patriarchal constructions of gender as well as transgress oppressive boundaries prevailing in society.

This chapter will try to demonstrate that *Written on the Body (1992)* can be considered as an example of how femininity (though it is not really declared) is a

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camouflage employed by Winterson to enable the reader to interrogate gender dynamics and to reconsider the categories of sex and sexuality with alteration in mind.

Using a poetic language, Winterson tells the unconventional love story of an unnamed narrator and a married woman: Louise Rosenthal, who sees no reason to hide their relationship and is ready to divorce her husband, Elgin Rosenthal, a cancer specialist. Stylistically, the novel successfully employs an unusual juxtaposition of irony, textuality, poetic as well as anatomical language after discovering the female protagonist's Leukimia.

Furthermore, love is the very important theme in the novel. Her narrator is ultimately faced with the madness of love and the desire to keep his/her lover alive. The meaning of love represents one of the clichés that he/she attempts to subvert. Love then becomes 'the clichés that cause the trouble' to show how much people find themselves falling victims to the clichés associated with love and that the words they most long to hear are also the most common ones: 'I love you', or 'love is blind'. The narrator makes it clear that he does not want to live 'in their world' of 'good manners' and 'good sense'.

Last but not least, the novel seeks to interpret the female body as a pure entity inscribed by society. The female body as a text imprinted by society's disciplinary practices is an interpretation of the Foucauldian bodies' theory. Therefore, as the narrator moves into anatomical representations of Louise's body, he/she begins to see the body as an inscriptive surface and presented in multiple ways, which sometimes intertwine and turn it into a palimpsest.

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Hence, *Written on the Body* is a significant comment on society's expectations of gender and identity. It seeks to revise the conventional clichés of gender in terms of love, passion and sexuality. Her ideas prove to be quite challenging, and employing an unidentified narrator is a way to destabilize the traditional perception of gender differences as well as a strategy for defamiliarizing gender norms. Indeed, Winterson has managed to succeed in transforming the patriarchal into a new feminine text/world with the help of a tactically imposed voice of an androgynous narrator and a palimpsest of the female body.

### **4.2. *Written on the Body* (1992): A Synopsis**

*Written On The Body* (1992) is a novel with the first person narrator whose identity remains uncovered throughout the whole novel. The author provides neither the narrator's name, nor his/her gender. This ambiguous narrator suffers permanent anxiety and distress; he/she finds relief only in temporary love affairs. After many unsuccessful love affairs, the narrator falls in love with a beautiful, red-headed married woman called Louise. Shortly after, the couple begins a perfect relationship filled with romantic passion.

Louise and the narrator move to live together for many months. When Louise decides to divorce her husband, Elgin, the truth is revealed to the narrator that Louise is suffering from blood cancer (Leukemia) and she has been hiding this secret, and Elgin, as a cancer specialist, is Louise's unique chance for receiving advanced medical treatment. The narrator is shocked, Louise swears that it is not serious and she is not having symptoms. Elgin promises that he will only grant Louise access to

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the best treatment on one condition: the narrator must leave London immediately, and renounce all ties to Louise.

As a result, the narrator gives up on his/her relationship with Louise, moving to Yorkshire to study medical textbooks aiming to learn as much as possible about his/her lover's disease. He/she spent almost one year away breaking off all communication with her in order to save her life. During this period, he/she meets another woman called 'Gail Right' and has a brief affair with her, but then he/she realizes his/her feelings for Louise and decides to find out where she is.

Eventually, he/she comes back to London, but Louise is nowhere. She did not return to Elgin, but divorced him. The narrator unsuccessfully waits for six weeks in their shared apartment for Louise's return. Finally the narrator decides to come back to the country feeling sorry about the loss of his beloved.

### ***4.3. Written on the Body (1992): A Postmodern Fabulation***

Winterson's work deliberately explores the ambivalent status of objective reality while also challenging assumptions about storyteller identity. Winterson's work has always expanded the limits of story in order to stretch language and demonstrate what it is capable of. Her concern in the transgressive obviously includes crossing the traditional and conventional narrative limits. Winterson also emphasizes the reading practices. Thus, reading is emphasized in two ways: first, the texts demand the reader's attention and interaction, and second, the texts explicitly reflect readers and reading.

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Another important factor to consider is Winterson's own reading and representation of canonical works. Her writing is rich in intertextuality and literary references and non linearity, as she reworks both traditional stories and storytelling traditions. These elements are used by Winterson to obscure the traditional distinctions between author, text and reader. In *Written on the Body*, the reader engages in the game of the text which demands him/her to be proactive and involved in it. A postmodernist reading of her work will reveal that the reader's relationship with the text varies and thus perception and interpretation remain multiple and open-ended.

*Written on the Body (1992)* features a narrator who questions gender identity through a complete lack of gender signals. Throughout the novel, there is no physical description of the narrator's body – it is rendered invisible. With this genderless narrator, Winterson avoids the result of gendering that Monique Wittig reflects in her article "*The Mark of Gender*": "Language casts sheaves of reality upon the social body, stamping it and violently shaping it." (78).

By giving an invisible body to the narrator, Winterson challenges the traditional phallogocentric narrative which may enslave bodies and succeeds in transcending it. In fact, Winterson disrupts fixed boundaries and firmly gendered identities that stigmatize the body in order to construct a fluid notion of the body that allows for changes.

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Furthermore, when it comes to the form of narration, Winterson's text demonstrates a kind of 'écriture féminine'<sup>1</sup> as a counter discourse that deviates from traditional masculine way of writing in which fragmented narration and ambiguity are prominent postmodern elements present in the novel. Winterson reveals how the novel is playing with traditional narrative's convention and how such play marks Winterson's feminine voice. With a textual ambiguity, Winterson effectively highlights the concept of gender construction through calling the reader's attention to question gender assumptions and thematically through pointing up on important topics like, love, loss, and desire.

### **4.4. Textual Ambiguity as a Postmodern Element**

If in *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* (1985), the reader encounters an exploration of the self and the quest for feminine identity of Jeanette, the novel's narrator, as well as the concept of an open-ended literature that questions the notion of a rigidly fixed meaning, in *Written on the Body* (1992), we encounter a genderless narrator who, though unnamed, may be interpreted as an adult and mature version of the protagonist of *Oranges*, this time exploring the space between love.

Winterson's novel evokes the reader himself to question whether gender is biological or a social construct aiming to show that there are so many, behaviors, roles and actions that are not related to gender, though they might be assigned a gender association in society. Consequently, Winterson through this portrayal is

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<sup>1</sup>Ecriture Feminine is a term proposed by the French literary scholar Helene Cixous in her essay "The Laugh of Medusa" (1976). The phrase refers to how a woman writes her body in the language and text as a form of resistance toward phallogocentric discourse. Cixous aims to establish a genre of literary writing that differs from the masculine traditional style. She calls women to write saying: "And why don't you write? Write! Writing is for you, you are for you: your body is yours, take it". "writing gets done by women that goes beyond the bounds of censorship, reading, the gaze, the masculine command". (Cixous, 1981:53)

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destroying the social patriarchal agenda. I see that this strategy has the effect of constructing the love in the story as being universal, and should not be fettered by gender norms.

Even Though the story is a first-person narration revealing intimate love affair of the narrator with a married woman, the readers get no details on the narrator's name age, sex and gender. In employing this narrative technique, Winterson brings the importance of gender and sex into question:

Written on the body is a secret code only visible in certain lights; the accumulations of a lifetime gather there. In places the palimpsest is so heavily worked that the letters feel like braille. I like to keep my body rolled up away from prying eyes. Never unfold too much, tell the whole story (89).

Even with the lacking information, the first person narrator wields significant power over the narrative discourse because he/she is the narrative's voice and the one who decides what ought to be revealed, how it must be revealed, and what is to be left out. What is surprising in the story is that in contrast to the narrator, the other characters in the story are described in extensive details. For example, the narrator's previous lovers are described with their names, genders and characteristics as well as how they look and behave as lovers.

As a result, it appears extremely strange to obtain as much details about characters that are not significant while the narrator, who is the main character of the story, remains in obscurity. For example: Elgin, Louise's husband, and narrator's

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antagonist who plays a minimal role in the novel, is depicted in great detail, as the narrator recounts Elgin's and his parents' life story from his young childhood to his adult years.

### **4.4.1. Ungendered Narrator**

Winterson chooses a not naming strategy. The narrator belongs to neither male nor female, but rather an androgynous, giving way to endless possibilities. The omission of information about the narrator's gender raises the question of the link readers form between the narrator and the implied author of the text. Because it features a non-gendered narrator who finds love with a married woman, a reader unfamiliar with Winterson or her previous work might assume that *Written on the Body* is a text about a male heterosexual individual. Expectations for a reader more familiar with Winterson and her works, particularly her first novel *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, would be completely different. Because this reader is fully conscious of Winterson's sexuality and has read *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* as an autobiographical text of a young lesbian woman, she will not take heterosexuality for granted.

Even though the narrator's sex is never revealed in *Written on the Body* the reader still attempts to look for gender markers through which to establish his or her sex and in some way secure the text. In her article "*The Genderization of Narrative*" (1999) Monika Fludernik states that there are two ways of constructing biological sex in narrative texts;

explicitly by graphic physical description and masculine/feminine  
gender (pro)nominal expressions (he vs. she; gendered first nouns);



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implicitly by the paraphernalia of our heavily gendered culture (handsome vs. beautiful; shirt vs. blouse) and by the heterosexual default structure (if A loves B, and A is a man, then B must be a woman) (154).

Although the narrator does not reveal any gender references about herself/himself, s/he frequently mentions her/his sexual relations with other women and men. As suggested by Moore, “the narrator’s undeclared gender makes the space of narration a ‘virtual space’ ” (108). Even though there are no clear and specific gender indicators in *Written on the Body*, implicit gender markers appear throughout the novel on a regular basis. By interrupting the traditional narrative line and integrating her narrator's gender ambiguity; and embedding different points of view, Winterson calls the readers to a fictional textual game.

Therefore, unreliability appears throughout the narration and with contradictory statements Winterson's aim is that feminine and masculine subjects co-exist in her employment of the 'I', as an unreliable narrator to engage her reader to a deeper level, forcing them to come to their own conclusion which then becomes a device to take her readers beyond those binaries of feminine and masculine. Her use of an obscurely-gendered first-person narrator could be considered as postmodern in that it ruptures the dominant discourse, and its metafictional nature fosters multiplicity and uncertainty. Hence, the text is open to many readings.

The readers are perplexed about the narrator's gender because they witness her/his affair with a woman on one page and with a man on the next. By attributing separate gender roles to her main character, Winterson appears to challenge ideological

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gender boundaries. Lindenmeyer points out that it “becomes clear that s/he is not a seamless character but constructed by the stories s/he tells, with different identities evoked by various memory flashbacks typically beginning with ‘I had a girlfriend once’ or ‘I had a boyfriend once’” (50). Therefore, the narrator’s fluid and dynamic identity marks the narrator’s aim not to be categorized according to gender criteria for this strategy “forces the reader into the text to coordinate the different masks and perspectives the narrator offers” (Kauer 42).

Contrary to the traditional understanding, which promotes enhancing the narrator's reliability so that the reader can be persuaded and attracted into the narratives quite easily, Winterson explicitly makes her narrator unreliable. The narrator wants the readers to become aware of the constraints around them and to enjoy plurality by rejecting classifications as name and gender. Similar to Kaur, Rubinson, too, notes that the narrator's concealment of his/her identity allows for multiplicity and ambiguity:

the narrator’s sexual ambiguity teaches us to become aware of how we view the world in polar and essentialized terms; the ambiguity implicitly challenges the ‘naturalized’ status of positivist- influenced biological essentialism (220)

Through this ambiguity, the narrator intentionally manifests him/herself on false suppositions concerning gender. Different implicit gender signals emerge regularly throughout the novel that help the reader presume whether the narrator is a male or a female. One example is when the narrator and Elgin start a fight over Louise, the narrator hits Elgin and Elgin kicks the narrator in the stomach (170-72).

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This fight scene may suggest that the narrator is male. Another illustration is when the narrator's beloved, Louise, refers to him/her as 'Christopher Robin' (61) or when the narrator repeatedly expresses his/her preference for married women and alludes to himself/herself as 'Lothario'<sup>2</sup> as a famous womanizer (20). Besides, he also refers to him/herself as 'unhappy Socrates' (13). This obvious sign of male gender is added to the narrator's preceding indications of love affairs with women, leading the reader to the final point that the narrator is male.

After detecting the hints, the readers falsely undertake that they have finally come upon the narrator's gender. Yet, as the story progresses, the readers encounter new assumptions about the narrator's identity which contradict the previous ones. These masculine interpretations contradict with some feminine terminology in the text like when in the beginning of the novel; the narrator identifies him /herself with Alice in Wonderland saying: "I shall call myself Alice and play golf with the flamingos. In Wonderland everyone cheats and love is Wonderland isn't it?" (10) Another example is when the genderless narrator says: "I am not beautiful" (85) instead of "I am not handsome", and also appears when after remembering past memories with one of her/his earlier boyfriends, s/he declares: "I still blush" and asks herself/himself "Why do I feel like a convent virgin?" (94).

Again, the narrator connects him/herself with another feminine figure, Lauren Bacall<sup>3</sup>, stating: "I stared at it [the phone] the way Lauren Bacall does in those films" (41). Likewise, Winterson carries on playing with gender connotations in a

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<sup>2</sup> It is a male given name that came to suggest a seducer of women as it is a character in one of the subplots of *Don Quixote Part One* (1605) which sets to seduce his friend's wife in order to test her loyalty.

<sup>3</sup> Lauren Bacall was an American actress named the 20th century female star of classic Hollywood cinema.

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more distinct fashion where she creates ambiguous gender markers. Whenever the reader makes approximate assumptions about the narrator's gender, he/she is soon forced to think again about their real interpretations.

This is exemplified when Louise tells the narrator about the very first time she saw her/him: "When I saw you two years ago I thought you were the most beautiful creature male or female I had ever seen" (84), or when the narrator lists the following expressions related with love: "Still waiting for Mr Right? Miss Right? And maybe all the little Rights?" (10) The use of these mixed expressions of both genders: Mr. Right. Miss Right, male, female is an intentional clever way to make the reader manage to deal with a narrator whose gender is unspecified. Therefore, the ungendered narrator is Winterson's deliberate attempt to erase and abolish gender distinction in the novel.

The instability and uncertainty in the narrator's gender continues when the narrator and her/his feminist and passionate girlfriend, Inge, go to destroy some chosen urinals "which were all ugly": "this urinal is a symbol of patriarchy and must be destroyed" (22). By complaining about the urinals as a symbol of patriarchy, the narrator alienates her/himself from the other men and looks at them from a feminine distance. Again Winterson plays skillfully a trick on the readers when she turns her narrator's voice out to function as a male which therefore, provides different identification:

Then (in my own voice), "My girlfriend has just wired up the Semtex, would you mind finishing off?" What would you do under the circumstances? Wouldn't impending castration followed by certain

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death be enough to cause a normal man to wipe his dick and run for it? They didn't. Over and over again they didn't, just flicked the drops contemptuously and swapped tips about the racing. I'm not a mildmannered sort but I don't like rudeness. On the job I found it helped to carry a gun. (22-23)

The narrator's genuine voice suggests that he/ she is an ordinary man carrying a weapon with him and having a girlfriend. The narrator, who alternates between being male and female, helps bridge the gap between two distinct gender paradigms imposed by patriarchal discourse. By choosing not to be molded into any gender identity and acquiring different bodies and different masks, the narrator show the fluidity of gender and sexuality. Hence, this kind of narrator, according to Moore

is a figure (or perhaps a narrative space or category) that appropriates the experiences and investments of variously gendered and sexualized beings in a structural enactment of Winterson's particular Virtual Reality. This is a figure constructed of disparate body parts, desires, identities and histories, put together in a postmodern pastiche (qtd.in Grotz 110).

Thus, the reader sways from one idea to another, led by the various allusions to find out a clear and sexed image of the narrator, and in doing so, they have to employ their cultural background to decipher its gender. In this context, Winterson's narrator can be considered as a model of Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity in the sense that it evades to be labeled and is judged upon other social and cultural

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aspects: the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence” (*Gender Trouble* 34).

As mentioned previously, the novel’s narrator is gender ambiguous; this is clearly seen in the narrator’s multiple and unstable nature. The author here plays successfully with the reversal of gender roles. She makes her narrator embody roles or traits traditionally settled for men like dominance, power and strength (Instead of obedience, weakness and passivity). Hence, this contradictory nature troubles the readers to assume specific or permanent gender labels.

Hence, one can say that the most striking theme the novel deals with is gender construction; it brings the reader to question if gender is biological or a social construction. The mysterious narrator’s gender might tell the extent to which gender is constructed since an easy categorization is not possible. Winterson employs an -I- narrator who does not reveal his/her sex, and this pushes the reader to shift away from attaching identity with biological sex. With a deep understanding of the narrator’s thought, and in a process of interaction with the text itself, the reader finds themselves facing gender clichés of both sexes

All in all, directing the reader to different interpretations the way Winterson does in *Written on the Body* is meant to delete fixed boundaries and rigidly gendered identities in the aim of building up an assumption that the body is fluid. As a matter of fact, the writer wants to show that gender does not matter since she aims to go beyond this difference as mentioned above. Though gender is the most prominent aspect people need to know about someone, yet, Winterson affirms that gender does not matter because it changes throughout the novel. The narrator, with his/her fluid

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and unstable identity joining both masculine and feminine characteristics is, thus, a new type of individual who challenges gender binary conception. Therefore, this refutation opens the door to different possibilities of gender construction.

This intentional use of gender ambiguity not only brings the reader to deconstruct gender stereotypes, but also constructs a narrator who is bisexual. The bisexual narrator is tying male scientific language and female poetic language; as well as feminine crying scenes is juxtaposed with male powerful and dominant fighting scenes. The idea that sex is the basis of a person's identity is removed away in this context; the narrator's mind and what he thinks about build the ground on discovering his personality. This leads to the conclusion that identity is not based on bodily traits or functions. From this point, we can argue that Winterson's narrator can be considered as a model of Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity in the sense that it evades to be labeled and is judged upon other social aspects.

Though the identity of the narrator is not revealed in the text explicitly, readers still attempt find some implicit signals to help them establish his or her gender. Monika Fludernik in her article: "The Genderization of Narrative" (1999), asserts that the biological sex can be constructed in narrative texts through two main ways: an explicit way and an implicit way

### **4.5. Femininity as Camouflage in *Written on the Body***

Throughout the novel, the narrator's identity remains uncovered; and the readers are entirely confused regarding the gender of the narrator. Reading this novel seems to be a muddled experience because the socially gendered reader views sex as a substantial hint for literary text analysis. More particularly, it is during the reading

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process and interpretation that the reader reveals his predictions on literary figures based on dominant opinions, social beliefs and values. Accordingly, in his work: *The Fiction of Rushdie, Barnes, Winterson and Carter* (2005), Rubinson suggests that the reader's desire to determine the narrator's sex should indeed rely on assumptions based on deceptive gender stereotypes or stereotyped readings of gender (129).

Most critics and reviewers identify the narrator as a woman in order to display the key piece of the narrative mystery, mostly not only because of their interpretation of clues brought to light in the novel, but also because of their connection of the narrator with Winterson's own self-avowed identity as a lesbian. Winterson's sexual orientation could be viewed as a primary motivation for reading the narrator's gender as female. She is then widely regarded as a representative for lesbian fiction due to her first autobiographical novel, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985) which discusses a lesbian story of a protagonist named Jeanette.

The narrator is frequently described by Louise as "beautiful," which seems to suggest a female. She tells him/her that "you were the most beautiful creature I had ever seen" (84). Moreover, in many instances, the narrator is complaining about men's habits and always takes a stand against them. To illustrate, the narrator once comments on a scene when entering men's toilet: typical occasion would be to find five of them, staring at the brown-streaked porcelain as though it were the Holy Grail. Why do men like doing everything together?" (22) In this example, the narrator detaches herself/himself from the other men and looks at them from a feminine distance.



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Additionally, not only does the narrator compare himself/herself to Alice in Wonderland, but also the way other women are portrayed in the narrative is another key point which emphasizes the narrator being a female. Obviously, the narrator sympathizes with women rather than with men, particularly in the following scene when he/she is in the hospital's waiting room: "At the Clap Clinic the following day, I looked at my fellow sufferers. Shifty Jack-the-lads, fat business men in suits to hide the bulge. A few women, tarts yes, and other women too. Women with eyes full of pain and fear" (46). In this instance, women are looked with a passionate gaze and seen as victims while men are described physically only and even this description leads to negative connotation.

Similarly, in another example we find Louise while confessing her love to the narrator, she declares: "You are my blood. When I look in the mirror it's not my own face I see. Your body is twice. Once you once me. Can I be sure which is which? (46) Winterson is therefore, emphasizing biological similarity of Louise and the narrator who is supposed to be a female. When saying "your body is twice", we can deduce that their bodies look the same and so do their faces and their bloods. Hence, through this language, we notice that both Louise and the narrator have the same physical appearance.

In this context, Ute Kauer in her work "*Narration and Gender: The Role of the First Person Narrator in Jeanette Winterson's Written on the Body*" suggests that the narrator is a female claiming that she feels a great deal of solidarity with women. Kauer argues that this compassion for the "emotional status of woman" reveals that the narrator firmly joins and sympathizes himself/herself with women rather than with men (49). In common with Kauer, Andrea Harris comes to the conclusion in her work "*A Feminist Ethics of Love*" in *Other Sexes: Rewriting Difference from Woolf*

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to Winterson, that Winterson's gender free narrator must be a woman and novel can be read as maintaining "universality for a feminine and lesbian subject position" (130).

Consequently, through camouflage and hiding the narrator's femininity, Winterson is deliberately playing with notions of identity and the stereotypes about masculinity and femininity. Pointing the readers to different directions the way Winterson does is a process to challenge the traditional prescribed discourse about gender. This narrative strategy is then employed to cross boundaries which are socially constructed and question what we generally assume to be normal and natural for man and woman.

Nevertheless, viewing the narrator of *Written on the Body* as either female or male, or as fashioned toward genderless upcoming years, ignores the complication of Winterson's novel and the potential of the narrator occurring between these two dominant presumptions. The novel's ambivalently gendered narrator turns out to be a force that permits Winterson to excavate the tensions and dilemmas in the politics of desire and the multi-faceted identity constructions. As a result, Winterson aims to undermine gender and sexual norms not by erasing gender from the narrator, but by revealing the limits and artifices of such constructions through the constant possibilities for identity and desire

### **4.6. The Cliché of Love as a Postmodern Irony**

The novel opens with the question: 'Why is the measure of love loss? (9). This question shows the narrator's mood at the time of writing which was in total pain, despair and suffering following the loss of Louise. This question is the one that the

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narrator attempts to answer by writing his or her fictional remembrances and the sentence upon which the entire novel is evolving. The narrator's reminiscences of the past are triggered when this question is raised. The development of the narrator and Louise's romantic relationship is structured chronologically in the novel, in the form of diaries, and follows the regular flow of the seasons throughout the year: it actually starts with a fond memory of a certain September when Louise announced for the first time her love; attains a climax of love in August(98); and is disrupted by the heartbreaking news of Louise's leukemia on Christmas Eve (100), and comes to the conclusion in October with the lovers' meeting..

“It is the clichés that cause trouble”(10), says the genderless narrator of *Written on the body*. While reading the novel, one can notice that Winterson frequently uses one particular sentence and repeats it again and again: “It’s the clichés that cause the trouble” (p10, p 21, p 26, p 71, p155, p180). Throughout the story, she often questions different clichés concerning love, feelings and desire as she presents her attitude towards them. In the early pages of the novel, the narrator struggles for the right word to describe love.

For him/her, it is not easy to express love adequately, since “I love you” is always a quotation (9) and there are too many clichés surrounding the notion of love simply because it is unoriginal and too empty and hollow to be used. Although the narrator tries to express his/her love for Louise in various ways that trespass the conventional ones, he/she continually finds him/herself enslaved by clichés. He/she describes tellingly:

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Love makes the world go round. Love is blind. All you need is love.

Nobody ever died of a broken heart. You'll get over it. It'll be different when we're married. Think of the children. Time's a great healer. Still waiting for Mr Right? Miss Right? And maybe all the little Rights?

It's the clichés that cause the trouble. (10)

Clichés cause trouble not only because they trivialize all that is profound, but also they banalize its significance. The phrase deployed to delineate romantic relationships become clichés a result of cultural repetition. They cause trouble since social expectations demand that one follows them. Love or saying: “I love you” for the narrator is just a simple quotation and a stereotype.

As mentioned in the above quotation, Winterson then goes on to parody some discourses on love, such as comparing it to a "big game hunter," which gives rise to popular slogans as: “love is blind, all you need is love, and love makes the world go round” (10). Another well known love discourse to be stated is that of fairytales: “and they all lived happily ever after” (10). The narrator scrutinizes the way love is defined and expressed in words.

Even though it is unclear whether the narrator is a man or a woman, he/she finds love with Louise and feels compelled to express his emotions for her. Regardless of whether the love is homosexual or heterosexual, he or she is looking for a unique, unconventional way to express it.

The narrator's countless relationships are depicted in terms of experiencing a “genuine love”. He/she expresses this love through lyrical poetic language. For example, he/she quotes one of Shakespeare's sonnets as a textual reminder to expand

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upon the narrator's yearning for true, unconditional love. Moreover, the narrator's aptitude for having affairs with married women is also considered a cliché. He/se considers these affairs an escape from ordinariness and routine. He/she comes to realize, however, that he/she is caught in a cliché which is redundant just like "my parent's roses round the door, the candles, the champagne, the dawn breakfast, the transatlantic telephone calls" are all "romantic follies" designed as "ways out of real situations" (21); romantic and belong to the clichés that the narrator tries his/her best to escape.

The narrator's fondness for having affairs with married women manifests itself as boredom and appears as a redundancy of the same melodramatic script: the same story every time. They are undertaken in fact because of desire and excitement. Again Winerson parodies the value of love and relationships. Again, he/she mocks the way the married women frequently give excuses to their relationships. They usually explain their sexual affairs with exceptional circumstances:

I wanted to tell you that I don't usually do this...I've never done it before. I don't think I could do it again... I love my husband you know. I do love him. He's not like other men.Icouldn4t have married him if he was. He is different, we've got a lot in common...I've tried to get you out of my head but I can't seem to get you out of my flesh  
(14-15)

As a result, the narrator mocks those explanations as clichéd and overused as well. Throughout the affair, the wives often claim to be "happy married," which the narrator regards as hypocrisy. He/she refers to such marriages as "shells" that people

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keep for social public image. For the narrator, marriage is more than a “shell” that people collect for other people to admire: they need only to engage themselves to their real roles as husband and wife.

In one example, the narrator describes a former lover, a dentist named Bathsheba with whom; he/she has a sexual affair. Despite her two-year relationship with the narrator, Bathsheba considered herself to be a "happy married woman." She then confessed to the narrator, having just returned from a trip to South Africa, that her husband Uriah had been diagnosed with a sexual disease on a previous business journey. The fact that her husband was also unfaithful shows a total lack of strong commitment in their relationship. Although passion and tenderness in the conjugal life ceased between husband and wife, each of them return back to the comfort of their husbands.

Even though the narrator frequently employs literary clichés to portray hi/her sexual affairs, he/she looks unaware that he/she is doing so. The absence of self irony in the narrator’s case is undoubtedly what affects the readers in indicating the narrator’s frankness. This is demonstrated when he/she realizes that his lover Louise is not reacting like his/her previous married women. He/she is amazed that Louise is not following the directions; he/she is living an experience that does not respond to the accustomed scheme.

The following quotation of the narrator affirms it this point: “This is the wrong script...you do frighten me. You act as though we will be together forever. You act as though there is infinite pleasure and time without end. How can I know that? My experience is that time always ends” (18).

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Another important point to mention concerning clichés is the fact that Winterson obscures the end of the novel. She intentionally challenges another cliché, that of a conventional happy endings and she leaves space for the readers to think what actually happened. The reader is not provided with the resolution of the story: The readers do not know if Louise has returned to the narrator or not. Hence, it is up to them to come up with the conclusive resolution.

### **4.7. Female Empowerment in the Character of Louise**

The female character Louise, the narrator's lover, fulfills a dual role: one is an obedient wife and another is of the free-spirited beauty. Although she has earned her doctorate in Art History, she endures a role she has not chosen, but has been dictated to her by cultural and societal expectations. As a medical doctor's wife, Louise is expected to be seen by her husband's side, but not to be heard; her existence is merely devoted to strengthening her husband's reputation. The description of Louise's relationship with Elgin is shown early in the novel. During their courtship at Cambridge University, Louise is not impressed by Elgin, but Elgin falls in love with her after she defeats him in a debating competition.

Louise is depicted as a traditionally feminine woman whose power stems from her femininity, in a reversal of traditional gender roles. Her body is fully described, and her colorful, long red hair is frequently mentioned. Her hair is a "fiery furnace" and "blood-soaked," both of which elicit strength and violence. She is termed from Elgin's parents' point-of-view as a "flame-haired temptress" (34). In her article *The Power of Women's Hair in the Victorian Imagination*, Elizabeth Gitter indicates that the luxuriance of the hair is an index of vigorous femininity and sexuality. Therefore,

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the frequent references to Louise's hair also grant her the peculiarity of a Victorian literary heroine. According to Gitter:

No other writers have lavished so much attention on the physical properties of women's hair: its length, texture, color, style, curliness. There is scarcely a female character in Victorian fiction whose hair is not described at least perfunctorily, and often a woman's hair is described repeatedly and in considerable detail (941).

Furthermore, the narrator's portrayal of Louise on his/her first meeting with her is in terms of another character from the literary canon: Her hair was shining with bright drops of rain, the rain ran down her breasts, their outline clear through her wet muslin dress (85).

This gender subversion is evident in Louise's motivation for marrying Elgin; she asserts: "I knew he was safe, that I could control him, that I would be the one in charge" (34). Louise is aware about her husband's weakness which is the desire to be dominated and being a masochist (31). Her power stems from her awareness of Elgin's desire to be controlled which is itself a determining factor for marrying him. She is, therefore, described as a classical, but in the meantime a powerful woman who takes an advantage from his weak point to practice power and dominance over him.

The narrator portrays her as "a Victorian heroine" from "a Gothic novel: She was more of a Victorian heroine than a modern woman. A heroine from a Gothic novel"(49). Additionally, the narrator describes Louise's scapula (the shoulder



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bones) as beautiful and dangerous at the same time: "the winged horse Pegasus<sup>4</sup> who would not be saddled...I want to see your muscle skin flex and stretch. Such innocent triangles holding hidden strength" (131). Elgin on the other hand, is revealed as an authoritative feminized whose body is "small, narrow-chested, [and] short sighted," which means that (Winterson, 33).

The character of Louise becomes complicated after she agrees to an affair with the narrator regarding her role as a wife. Louise becomes extremely powerful as the couple's relationship progresses, claiming the ability to choose for herself. Instead of accepting the restrictions of an obedient wife, Louise is able to create a life for herself based on independence, thereby dismissing the gendered power structures that regarded her as a weak and vulnerable wife. Louise's newly acquired happiness exemplifies how overcoming the barriers of gendered norms allows for the achievement of self-identity.

Throughout the novel, Louise shows moments of oppression in her body. Having cancer is a clear image of suffering and oppression she faces in her marriage. Her marriage is mentally and emotionally suffocating; her ability to overcome cancer becomes entirely reliant on her relationship with Elgin. Hence, both cancer and Elgin become a source of oppression for Louise. Since he is a cancer scientist researcher in the field, Elgin promises to provide her with the advanced and adequate medical treatments to her case and save her life, but only on the condition that she stays with him. Louise on the other hand, does not surrender to him, and accepts to abandon her

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<sup>4</sup> Pegasus, in Greek mythology, a winged horse and one of the most recognized creatures in Greek mythology, usually depicted as pure white. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Pegasus-Greek-mythology>

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marriage in favor of her love to the narrator, which is a courageous decision made by her.

Therefore, Elgin is quite canny to trap Louise to stay with him, and in doing so he uses marriage and her disease as weapons to force her to stay with him. It is even revealed that the treatment he offers her is just a false creation by Elgin to control his wife as well as alienate the narrator from her. More to the point, another doctor's diagnosis shows that Louise is not seriously ill as Elgin persuades his wife. This eventually reveals the extent to which Elgin is a patriarchal husband who takes advantage from his unhappy wife who is possessed by his control and oppression leaving her without any alternative way to escape.

Louise is, nevertheless, the powerful figure here; she does not accept to be dominated anymore by Elgin. She defies all expectations by rejecting her cancer diagnosis and her abusive marriage. Even though marriage is a requisite way to happiness, Louise perseveres outside of it once she is engaged with the narrator. In such way, Louise detaches herself from the patriarchal control she embodies with her illness. Even when the narrator leaves Louise to ensure that she receives the advanced medical treatment by Elgin, she maintains her autonomy by refusing to return to her oppressive marriage. In this way, it is suggested that Louise has rejected the social notion that she a domestic and conventional type of woman who must depend on a supportive other. Consequently, Louise's refusal to belong to anyone as a condition trespasses societal expectation of the female as oppressed and the male as oppressor.

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### **4.8. The Foucauldian Body Traits in the Character of Louise**

Readers of *Written on the Body* are confused and struggle endlessly to become able to reach a conclusive reading of the narrator. Whether we like it or not, gender plays a crucial role in acquiring an informed opinion on the narrator's relationship with Louise. When the body is obscured and mysterious, even masculine/feminine signs become somehow immobilized.

Therefore, again, gender is a vigorous force in the understanding of the narrator's attitudes in the text. The body becomes an important point in the novel in the sense that the readers try continuously to affix the narrator into a body that can be recognized and identified. The body as Roland Barthes claims is a kind of "writerly text"<sup>5</sup>; it means the readers not just look upon the body passively, but they play a dynamic role in shaping it.

The novel's title might be quite enough to situate it within an ongoing debate concerning the relations between bodies and texts and bodies and societies. Michel Foucault claims that the body is completely marked and inscribed by history; it is the result of power relations and regulatory practices. To deepen this point, Foucault gives an example of a nineteenth century French hermaphrodite Herculine Barbin's journals in order to demonstrate the ways in which bodies come to be shaped by history and conventional practices. Barbin was forced to change her gender and name to a man by juridical powers; she was even legally obliged to act and exercise men's rights in society. In this way, his/her body was rendered meaningful, constructed and

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<sup>5</sup> In his *Pleasure of the Text* (1980), the French critic Roland Barthes (1915-80) distinguishes between two basic kinds of text: a readerly text and a writerly text. Readerly texts fix meaning into place. The reader finds pleasure in a well-crafted story. He/she is not given the choice to participate in it. Writerly texts, on the other hand, encourage the reader to construct the significance of the text and actively take part in the creation of the text.

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translated into a legible text related to the culturally prevailing knowledge about sex and gender (See Chapter 2).

Throughout the text, the narrator presents Louise uniquely in relation to her femininity; even her beauty is described as privileged: “Louise charmed everyone. She brought attention, contacts, she cooked, she decorated she was clever and above all, she was beautiful” (35). For her part, even Louise is aware about her precious attractive secret of her beauty. Talking to the narrator about Elgin, she states: “he knew I was beautiful, that I was a prize [...] he wanted to go up to the world and say, ‘look what I’ve got’” (34). Despite the fact that the narrator seeks to differ from Elgin, he/she seems to be the same like the husband; just proud of having Louise by his side.

In the novel, while engrossed in the body of his lover, the narrator discovers indications of Foucauldian bodies and recognizes that Louise's body is inscribed by history, as her body bears the scars of preceding experiences: “I have had you beneath me for examination, seen the scars between your thighs where you fell on barbed wire. You look as if an animal has clawed you, run its steel nails through your skin, leaving harsh marks of owners” (*Written* 117). There are signs of history on Louise's body, implying that her body does not solely belong to her. Again, the narrator continues commenting on the scars left on Louise’s body:

The glossy smoothness of the inside of your upper lip is interrupted by a rough swirl where you were hurt once. The tissues of the mouth ...leave signs for those who care to look. I care to look. There’s a

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story trapped inside your mouth. A crashed car and a smashed windscreen. The only witness is the scar, jagged like a dueling scar where the skin shows the stitches. (117-18)

Despite the scars and marks left by history, the narrator believes s/he can free Louise from the damage occurring over her body by rewriting it.

In her overview of *Written on the Body*, Onega reveals the narrator's battle with Elgin for possession of Louise's body in a patriarchal way: While Elgin behaves as the senexiratus of Plautinian comedy, the narrator assumes the role of all-enduring and romantic lover, a melancholy Werther, ready to sacrifice himself for the good of his beloved" (124). In refusing to grant Louise agency, the narrator further considers her as an object. Hence, Louise's flesh becomes the object of the narrator's affection.

### **4.8.1. 'Body' as a Territory**

Although the narrator aims to extricate Louise's body from the previous dominant heteronormative and patriarchal discourses, he/she only serves to reintroduce the beloved as the other, as an object for the male gaze. He/she divides Louise's body into four unites: cell, skin, skeleton and special senses. A textbook definition of each component is offered in big block letters, and then followed by the narrator's own description of Louise. Here, Louise's body is analyzed with anatomy textbook explanations of each function, followed by a poetic lament of the beauty and tragedy of her failing body:

FOR DESCRIPTIVE PURPOSES THE HUMAN BODY IS  
SEPARATED INTO CAVITIES. THE CRANIAL CAVITY

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CONTAINS THE BRAIN. ITS BOUNDARIES ARE FORMED BY THE BONES OF THE SKULL. Let me penetrate you. I am the archaeologist of tombs. I would devote my life to marking your passageways, the entrances and exits of that impressive mausoleum, your body. (119)

Louise is rendered as an object and a territory. The narrator's subjugation is repeated as he describes the skin of Louise, the outer surface of which is made up of dead cells. As a result of this, the narrator states:

...the piece of you I know best is already dead...Your sepulchral body, offered to me in the past tense, protects your soft centre from the intrusions of the outside world. I am one such intrusion, stroking you with necrophiliac obsession, loving the shell laid out before me” (123)

Louise is therefore denied subjectivity and transformed into an object in which her skin is possessed by the narrator and become his space for exploitation. With a confession like: “Her hair cinnabar red, her body all the treasures of Egypt. There won’t be another find like you Louise,” (146), the narrator maintains Louise’s status as symbolic object, as a treasure and a land to be possessed.

The narrator's frequent references to Louise as property, territory and the space of exploration render Louise as romanticized object. Even when he is near to Louise, the narrator evokes colonial discourses: “I have held your head in my hands but I have never held you. Not you in your spaces, spirit, electrons of life. ‘Explore me,’

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you said and I collected my ropes, flasks and maps, expecting to be back home soon. I dropped into the mass of you and I cannot find the way out” (120).

Even more prominent is the way the narrator portrays Louise’s body as a voyage for exploration. He/she as well as the whole world are absorbed by the size of her body as he/she observes: “Eyes closed I began a voyage down her spine... What other places are there in the world than those discovered on a lover’s body” (82). Louise is portrayed as a place to visit, a journey that satisfies the narrator's curiosity more than it suggests anything about Louise. This journey is an exploration and an admiration of Louise's physical rather than her psyche. The narrator praises Louise solely for her body.

This representation of Louise as a symbolic object and as territory to be examined reveals the narrator's patriarchal power. The narrator, according to Atilla (2008) invokes the need for the beloved in terms of masculine possession and consumption, relegating the beloved to the realm of object” (Atilla 4). The body in this sense is a colonized object needs to be discovered. Moreover, in a question like: “How could I cover this land? Did Columbus feel like this on sighting the Americas? I had no dreams to possess you but I wanted you to possess me” (52), the narrator again refers to Louis as a land as well as calls to mind the patriarchal practices which regard the female body as a sexual object. Hence, in all the above instances, the narrator attaches himself/herself with masculine, patriarchal powers through metaphors of control, power and conquest.

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### **4.9. 'The Female Body' as a Written Text**

You said 'I love you'. Why is it that the most unoriginal thing we can say to one another is still the thing we long to hear? When you say it and when I say it, we speak like savages who have found three words and worship them. I did worship them and now I am alone on a rock hewn out of my own body. (*Written 9*)

The above quotation begins the narrator's story of his/her beloved Louise. Despite his/her gender's fluidity and ambiguity, he/she does not face obstacles in admiring her/his lover and grieving after her loss. In the section of the book, entitled: "The Cells, Tissues, Systems and Cavities of the Body" (113), in which, through the use of the language of medical textbooks the narrator tries to somehow recover the body of the beloved.

As the narrator moves into anatomical representations of Louise's body, he/she begins to see the body as an inscriptive surface for disease, in addition to love and amusement. In this sense, cancer is a metaphor for the persecution experienced within a patriarchal system. While a patriarchal system imposes systemic gender norms that are inscribed on the body, Louise's cancer is used by Elgin to control her. The narrator describes his/her initial perception of Louise's body, now under the influence of cancer:

You are stretching slowly slowly, getting longer, your joints are slipping away from their usual places. There is no connection between



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your shoulder and your arm. You will break up bone by bone, fractured from who you are, you are drifting away now, the centre cannot hold (100-1).

Investigating Louise's body part by part allows the narrator who adopts a sort of doctor-like attitude to grieve for his/her lover's body while also admitting the complex nature of humankind. The narrator makes sense of Louise's fate in this part of the novel: "In the secret places of her thymus gland Louise is making too much of herself. Her faithful biology depends on regulation but the white T-cells have turned bandit...Why can't I dam their blind tide that filthies your blood?" (Winterson 115). The narrator goes on to describe Louise's biological body, delving into each anatomical system. Through this division, the narrator demonstrates the universal corporality of the human body.

Additionally, through re-appropriating her/his lover's body, the narrator translates her into his/her own book. Pursuing the narrator's endeavor of observation and study, in the anatomical section following Louise's diagnosis, the narrator focuses on the body by reading, mapping, and examining it as if the female body had been a text.

Continuing this process of devouring the body, the narrator muses "I have flown the distance of your body from side to side of your ivory coast (117) as well as while saying: "Myself in your skin, myself lodged in your bones, myself floating in the cavities that decorate every surgeon's wall. That is how I know you. You are what I know" (120).

This metaphorical language exploits the parallels between body and text. He/she acknowledges the fact that the language of love is so strong as beyond his/her control

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as is love beyond the lover's control. In other words, these words by the narrator show the amount of love to a body which, although diseased, is still desired, and still contains a secret code written on it. By “writing” his/her lover’s body the narrator hopes to transform Louise's absence into a textual presence and thus revive her body's energy through the language of anatomy.

Although the text is rich of vivid accounts not only of Louise's appearance but also of her body parts and characteristics, the emphasis is on the fact that the narrator is concerned with more than just her body. In the novel's conclusion, the narrator is willing to accept his/ her beloved even as the body is being destroyed, demonstrating not only an interest in the body, but also in the harmony of soul and body together.

Keeping in line with body as a text, the narrator also plays an important part in being involved in the process of writing. The inscriptions on the narrator's body are also a palimpsest, and they are figured by Louise's touch, which represents not only texts onto the skin, but meaning into his/her body. The narrator engenders a virtual space for her/him and Louise in which they can avoid the patriarchal trace, and mingle in each other’s bodies.

Hence, the narrator escapes the effects of history by being written on the body which is “a secret code only visible in certain lights; the accumulations of a lifetime gather there. In places the palimpsest is so heavily worked that the letters felt like braille” (89). In his turn, the narrator cannot resist Louise’s deciphering of his body, and expresses his desire for doing so: like to keep my body rolled up away from prying eyes. Never unfold too much, tell the whole story. I didn’t know that Louise would have reading hands. She has translated me into her own book” (89). With the

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assistance of Louise, the narrator is purified from the totalizing imprints of history which inscribe bodies as a passive medium.

After Louise's prolonged absence, the narrator experiences a deep anguish, as a result of which the cord conjoining their bodies weakens and detaches, and s/he cannot hold on to something solid. The narrator dissolves, and her/his body is no longer solid. Initially, on discovering Louise's illness, the narrator thinks about the ugly and unwanted results of this long and afflicting process, and envisages the physical transformation of Louise's body under the assault of cancer cells:

Cancer treatment is brutal and toxic. Louise would normally be treated with steroids, massive doses to induce remission. When her spleen started to enlarge she might have splenic irritation or even a splenectomy. By then she would be badly anaemic, suffering from deep bruising and bleeding, tired and in pain most of the time. She would be constipated. She would be vomiting and nauseous. Eventually, chemotherapy would contribute to failure of her bone marrow. She would be very thin, my beautiful girl, thin and weary and lost (102).

In this passage, the narrator describes how Louise's body is being attacked from within by white cells that spread to other parts of her body. It will be significantly affected her cancer treatment. The disease leaves signs and traces of its existence both on and inside her.

As a result, afraid of losing his love because of cancer, the narrator focuses on reading medical textbooks and their significant meanings about the wholeness of the

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body. And after deconstructing the body into parts using anatomical language, the narrator plunges into the process of knowing it, and of familiarizes himself/herself with the interaction between bodily parts. Immediately after that, he/she describes them with a poetic language. Hence, the body becomes a site of knowledge for the narrator.

To take an example, when the narrator talks about the skeleton, he/she thinks of Louise's clavicles as an instrument with its soft strings and how wonderful and soft its touch. Again, when he/she talks about the senses, he compares Louise's smell to fermenting bread and perfumes. Another example is when describes her taste, he compares her to the first moment of biting an olive. (119)

All in all, in including both traditional narrative and the conventions of an anatomy textbook, Winterson trespasses readers' expectations of genre. Therefore, Winterson finds in the language of medicine, a knowledge that quenches his/her desire and thirst. While the narrative reflects the narrator's personal sentiment, the biological ingredients of the narrative is a perspective on the narrator's relationship with Louise.

### **4.10. Conclusion:**

*Written on the Body* is a romance narrative whose main protagonist and narrator is genderless. The gender free narrator juxtaposes male-connoted scientific language with female poetic language which makes the reader caught in a net of hints and false assumptions concerning the gender of the narrator. Winterson therefore, employs the narrator's undisclosed gender as a trick to question the concept of gender and sexuality as pillars of identity. The narrator's non-gendered identity is thereby used in

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the novel as a process in weakening fixed ideas on gender and sexual constraints. Her text is an imagination of a world in which the genderless self becomes matters of the heart.

The novel's exaggerated play with presumptions of sexual affairs, cultural conventions about the female body is a social criticism made up in a Shakespearian love affair. The body has been the focal point of the novel since, as the title suggests, *Written on the Body* is divided into two parts: "writing" and "the body."

The body serves as a text, an empty page, or a space for writing. The Foucauldian body manifests itself in the text in which the body is regarded as a meaningful surface which has its own language. The Foucauldian body is directly constructed and molded by historical and cultural forces. Through physicality, the narrator and Louise decipher each other and inscribe meaning into each other's body.

Louise is depicted as a traditionally feminine woman who derives her power from her femininity. Though she is a housewife, she is not a typical woman of the age she lives in. "She (Louise) was more of a Victorian heroine than a modern woman, a heroine of a Gothic novel, mistress of her house". Louise is often described as a beautiful and charming person whose savage beauty is a key to her empowerment. She frequently refers to her as a strong and free woman.

Despite the fact that both cancer and Elgin become contributors of oppression for Louise, she accepts to give up her marriage in order to satisfy her love for the narrator, which is a brave decision on her part. Even after the narrator abandons her, Louise retains her independence and rejects the social notion that she is a domestic and conventional type of woman who must rely on a supportive other.

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Furthermore, *Written on the Body* can be regarded as a revisionary of the romance genre, as it is a restoration of love in the midst of postmodern skepticism. Winterson touches upon the theme of love and its language through a postmodern irony. The prevalent portrayal of love refers to marriage, roses and endlessly repeated clichés: “I love you” or “love is blind”.

This portrayal according to the narrator is false and this language of love constructs an illusory meaning of reality. Therefore, love is in need of new expressions and conceptualizations. Regardless of whether the love is homosexual or heterosexual, he or she is looking for a unique, unconventional way to express it.

*Written on the Body* is a remarkable piece of work both from a narrative and textual point of view. The use of the medical terminology or the language of medical textbook is a way the narrator expresses his love and the everlasting presence of the beloved. The narrator poetically dwells on every part of Louise's body. Winterson demonstrates here that scientific or anatomical language does not have to be limited to medical diagnoses or textbook descriptions and that the discourse of science can serve as a medium to understand the discourse of love which is always uncountable.

On the whole, as a postmodernist, Winterson always opts for oppositional thinking. She frequently portrays her female protagonists who are characterized by ceaseless sexual affairs transgressing boundaries and expressing desire beyond compulsory gender norms. Her use of camouflage and deconstruction of gender expands its boundaries and challenges the preconceptions of its audience, inducing them to envision a whole new universe of possibilities.

## ***Chapter Five: Lighthousekeeping (2004): A World of Female Survival***

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### **5.1. Introduction**

*Lighthousekeeping* (2004), a semiautobiographical novel, revolves around the story or stories of Silver, an orphaned girl who grows up in a lighthouse on a Scottish coast with a blind wise man named Pew. Winterson portrays her protagonist as a strong female who has a penchant for stories and tales that teach important lessons. Through her unusual upbringing, she tells the tale of her life, and the lives of others, and she questions some important thoughts that concern life itself.

When analyzing *Lighthousekeeping* (2004), storytelling presents itself as Winterson's major theme and serves as a reminder of Winterson as a quintessential storyteller. Hence, storytelling and intertextuality are basically the main postmodern features present in the narrative which on the personal level represent a refuge, somewhere she could find comfort.

The novel then recounts two main stories, both allegorical: that of Silver and the other is of a local nineteenth century clergyman called Babel Dark. Pew's stories are, for Silver, a map through which she peruses her life and confront the obstacles she faces. As a result, Silver uses storytelling to express her desire to define her existence and form her feminine identity. Moreover, stories allow her to feel like she belongs somewhere throughout the novel.

The attempt in this chapter is to reveal Winterson's unique approach in the portrayal of her female characters and the way their femininity is revealed. In the novel, Winterson presents her protagonist as a non conformist female character who is brave enough to commit to an unconventional love (loving a woman she calls

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‘you’) during the Victorian era, which is marked by conservatism and female subordination. Silver does not fall prey to repressive gender stereotype that binds her.

In doing so, she subverts the concept of traditional femininity and advocates for women to fight for their freedom and pursue their happiness. Silver’s arousing desire for homosexuality can be regarded as a challenging step against the constraint of society. Unlike playing traditional ‘damsel in distress,’ Winterson’s heroine is a dynamic person who is capable of facing difficulties on her own instead of waiting for a man to solve her problems.

### ***5.2. Lighthousekeeping (2004): About the Story***

Published in 2004, *Lighthousekeeping* focuses on both the history of the Cape Wrath lighthouse as told by the lighthousekeeper, and the life of an orphaned girl named Silver, who arrives to the lighthouse as a trainee after the death of her mother. Silver spends her childhood in a Scottish lighthouse directed by a graciously wise old man named Pew, who recounts the life of the 19th-century clergyman Babel Dark. Silver is ten years old when her mother is blown away by a powerful wind, and she is taken in as an apprentice by Pew. Pew is portrayed by Winterson as a blind man, but has a good heart, and his stories save Silver from loneliness and despair.

The tales he used to tell her are linked to the lighthouse, its founder, a wealthy man named Josiah Dark and his son Babel Dark whose name refers to the Tower of Babel where God confounds a single language spoken by all people and the name, Babel<sup>1</sup>. The most important of these stories and which are a turning point in Silver’s

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<sup>1</sup> Babel”. Online Etymology Dictionary, <<https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=babel>>



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life is Babel Dark's story. Josiah Dark built a lighthouse in Salts in 1828, and his son Babel was born.

After some years, Babel Dark met and fell in love with Molly, who eventually becomes pregnant by him; however, after finding Molly with another man (who seems to be Molly's brother), he becomes furious and assaults her. Hopeless as he is, he decides to leave it all and begin a new life. He becomes a clergyman in Salts and marries a woman he does not love at all. Unable to forget Molly, he runs into her again, recognizes he still loves her, and starts living a double life: spending two months a year in Bristol with Molly under the name of Babel Lux and the other months of the year with his wife as Babel Dark.

Silver uses Dark's story as a mirror, to reflect on her own life. Stories are the only thing silver knows to do. During her life time, she encounters many obstacles when she enters the real world. Her unique way to face these obstacles and challenges is to rely on tales and the lessons she learns from them. For example, she has not been unable to join the Bristol library because she lacks a fixed residence and proof of identity.

Despite the fact that she cannot borrow books, she visits the public library reading space daily. Silver never succeeds to end a story before it is borrowed by someone else. As a result, she begins to copy down the stories she reads as quickly as possible in her notebooks which consequently result in endless narratives. This act of saving stories down is totally similar to that of Babel Dark who also tries to preserve his stories by keeping two journals: "the first is an account of a clergyman's life in Scotland. The second is some scattered pages which are disordered and unnumbered.

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Though they come to us in a fragmented way, each story is a new journey for Silver. Creating stories is a dynamic process that anticipates in establishing her identity and proving her existence. This pursuit of meanings out of stories shapes her identity. Even when she finds her lover, a woman she continuously calls her “you” on a Greek island many years later, Silver prefers to tell a story to introduce herself to her. Therefore, stories become quintessential as a refuge, somewhere she would go to find comfort. At the end of the novel, Silver leaves the lighthouse to Italy, then to Greece.

### **5.3. Wintersonian Intertextuality: A Postmodern Element**

In Winterson’s first novel *Oranges* (1985) thanks to which she reached her recognition, the real-life story of Jeanette is told in terms of fairytales. Jeanette’s rebellion against her surrounding is displayed not only in the content of the narrative, but also in the technique or the way the story is told. *Written on the Body* (1992) is another example of the Winterson’s linguistically inventive text especially when juxtaposing it with anatomical language.

Therefore, it is no coincidence that Winterson’s extensive use of intertextuality is highly present in her novel *Lighthousekeeping* (2004). Sonya Andermahr once characterizes Winterson as having a “strong, first-person, unmistakable Wintersonian voice” (153). This term “Wintersonian” can be explained as all the various features that make up Winterson’s works identifiable to the reader.

The novel’s technique can be described as postmodernist because it challenges the conventional techniques of storytelling. *Lighthousekeeping* is full of breaks, fragment, white spaces, and pauses which make the reader both annoyed and at the

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same time being alert to find out the story's meanings. Additionally, there are many blank pages within the novel as well as we find some pages which contain only few sentences. For example page 189 contains only three sentences only:

Tell me a story, Silver.

What story?

The story of how we met (189)

Storytelling is then Winterson's pertinent theme in her narrative, and serves as a distinguishing feature of Winterson as a quintessential storyteller. This is obviously the case for Silver in *Lighthousekeeping*. Her upbringing with Pew at Cape Wrath centers utterly around stories.

Furthermore, *Lighthousekeeping* also draws on the postmodern element of uncertainty. Winterson launches her story a hundred years back in time as follows: "I suppose the story starts in 1814"(11), then shortly after she states: the story begins now , or perhaps it begins in 1802 when a terrible shipwreck lobbed men like shuttlecocks into the sea" (11). Again, she announces: "So the story begins in 1802, or does it really begin in 1789" (13). Winterson complicates her story by suggesting different beginnings. So, with variant dates, places, events and scenes, the reader supposes that *Lighthousekeeping* is not a single story.

Turning back to intertextuality, Winterson draws on legend and employs multiple stories and fairytales to structure her narrative. In addition to Silver's stories which interweave throughout the narrative, Winterson also draws on the Bible mainly the story of Adam and Eve and Noah and the Flood. Silver hears stories from Pew, who

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is an endless source of legends and tales. Hence, Intertextuality is becoming of paramount importance for Winterson as some critics have pointed out, Winterson's frequent use of intertextuality provides different scopes into the analysis, and contributes to the diversity of the novel.

Additionally, *Lighthousekeeping* tells its story in a nonlinear plot which is constructed by the change of the time of the narration. The nonlinearity of the plot is established by the juxtaposition of fairytales and do not possess almost no coherence to the story. Moreover, from the aspect of narration, the nonlinearity of the novel's plot is fashioned through the changing of narrators in the same narrative body. As an example, Winterson in one passage reworks the legend of King Arthur as follows:

He [Babel] loved the story of the Grail coming to the Court of King Arthur at the Feast of Pentecost. He loved it, and it made him sad, because that day every knight had pledged to find the Grail again, and most lost their way [...]. The Court was broken. Civilization was ruined. And why? For a dream-vision that had no use in the world of men. (115).

The ancient Arthurian legend about King Arthur and the Holy Grail are rewritten here. This legend which recognized as of the longest stories which is never finished is the favorite tale of Babel Dark.

Winterson's critics frequently discuss poetic influence in her writing. A comparison is frequently drawn between Winterson's own literary affiliations: the writers associated with the modernist literary tradition, and their influence on her

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writing. Lyn Pykett, for instance, confirms that Winterson's fiction is an example of Eliot's influence on the English language. For her, all of Winterson's fiction inspires Eliotean language precision" (58). T.S. Eliot, along with Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, is one of the great modernist writers honored by Winterson in her essay collection *Art Objects*. Pykett goes on to say that "at its best, Winterson's fiction has the exactness of language that she so admires in the great modernist writers" (60). Winterson's way with words is very important when she describes the setting or the characters in *Lighthousekeeping*.

Furthermore, an ironic quality can be traced throughout the novel which is another characteristic of Wintersonian tone. Her frequent use of humor and jockey that are as easily observable in *Lighthousekeeping* as they are in her other work is present from the very beginning of the narrative. In one scene for instance, she tells with humor how Silver and her mother "lived in a house cut steep into the bank. The chairs had to be nailed to the floor, and we were never allowed to eat spaghetti (3).

Moreover, in another ironic context, we find Winterson not serious. An example of this would be as follows: "just as I was heading for the Reading Room, an assistant with a moustache – she was a woman but she had a moustache, which is usually a bad sign" (144). Using a humorous tone is one of the features Winterson excessively uses throughout *Lighthousekeeping*

### **5.3.1. Robert Louis Stevenson**

When reading *Lighthousekeeping* (2004), one can easily notice that the novel has been elaborated from the work already done by other texts. Intertextuality is then a central feature in the narrative and appears in different forms. The Victorian Scottish

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author Robert Louis Stevenson is one of the most prominent intertextual references in the novel. In the early pages of the narrative, Winterson states: “Close your eyes and pick another date: 1 February 1811. This was the day when a young engineer called Robert Stevenson completed work on the lighthouse at Bell Rock<sup>2</sup> (24). The detail Winterson gives about the Stevensons’ lighthouses shows Winterson’s playful technique to mix fiction with facts.

Besides, Winterson also provides the readers with more fine points about the Stevensons:

There are twist and turns in any life, and though all of the Stevensons should have built lighthouses, one escaped, and that was the one who was born at the moment Josiah Dark’s son, Babel, made a strange and reverse pilgrimage and became Minister of Salts. 1850 – Babel Dark arrives in Salts for the first time (25).

Next, she introduces Robert Louise Stevenson biography in a casual manner: “1850 - Robert Louis Stevenson is born into the a family of prosperous engineers, so say the innocent annotated biographical details – and goes on to write *Treasure Island, Kidnapped, The Strage Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*” (25). Again here, she pinpoints on the *Treasure Island* (1883) as another intertext which becomes an inspiration for the protagonist ‘Silver’.

The novel’s characters seem to have been borrowed from Stevenson’s work particularly the protagonist’s name which stems from Long John Silver who is a

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<sup>2</sup> The Stevenson family’s involvement in lighthouse engineering began with grandfather, Robert Stevenson (1772-1850). Bell Rock is one of the lighthouses built by Stevenson in 1811 (Inchape, off of the east coast of Scotland near Dundee and Fife).

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fictional character (a pirate) and the antagonist of the novel. Another borrowed name is found in Silver's companion Dog Jim who resembles the protagonist and main narrator of Stevenson's *Treasure Island* Jim Hawkins.

### **5.3.2. Virginia Woolf**

As stated earlier, Winterson endorses the reading of her work in relation to other textual references that contribute to the diversity of the novel. Her playful use of intertextuality maybe considered as a way to honor her lovely stories and favorite authors. Remarkably, Winterson's view of intertextuality reflects both the idea of intertextuality as a method and as a dialogue. For her, books always talk to other books; they are always in conversation.

Interestingly enough, one may say that Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927) takes the lion's share in Winterson's *Lighthousekeeping* (2004). Woolf is maybe the writer Winterson likes the most. In *Arts Objects*, Winterson states: "A work of art is abundant, spills out, gets drunk...When I read Virginia Woolf, she is to my spirit, waterfall and wine" (65). The lighthouse holds a point of emphasis in both narratives. Winterson symbolizes the lighthouse in the same way Woolf did: "the stories I want to tell you will light up part of my life...there are lit-up moments the rest is dark" (Winterson 134). This quotation is quite related to the following: she [Mrs. Ramsay] looked across the bay, and there, sure enough, coming regularly across the waves first two quick strokes and then one long steady stroke, was the light of the lighthouse. It had been lit (Woolf 68). As can be seen in these two instances, many similarities exist in describing the lighthouse.

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Another point, which is to one's sense, worth mentioning, is that the sea and light symbolism that manifest in *Lighthousekeeping* (2004) connects the novel to the Woolfian tradition and its interpretation of reality as chaotic. The sea, as an illustration, represents the chaotic, fluid nature of reality in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927), and the light over the water evokes how people can temporarily see reality as meaningful, in an epiphany that then vanishes back to darkness.

Therefore, the same scene of the sea is portrayed by Winterson in *Lighthousekeeping* (2004). Even the key metaphor 'lighthouse' signifies in both narratives some flashes of light that provide characters with instants of insight shining across the sea, in an epiphany that ends up in darkness again. To end up, as has already claimed, Winterson is an heir of Virginia Woolf, and her novels owe an obvious debt to her structurally and thematically.

### **5.4. Storytelling: A Medium of Feminine Identity Construction**

Winterson's works often identify the same autobiographical elements that have traditionally shaped her as an author mainly: social background, religious identity (Pantecostal) and her lesbian orientation. Nevertheless, stories and storytelling have a crucial role in identifying Winterson as an outstanding author. When reading her works, one is confronted to the large number of stories used in her narratives.

Considering Winterson's background, storytelling has come from an early young age to be a very central trait of her life: "I believe in fiction and the power of stories because that way we all speak in tongues. We are not silenced (*Happy* 9).



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*Lighthousekeeping* (2004) is a perfect example to show how she uses various tales that function in the mode of dialogue exploration. Maria Koundoura comments that “despite her use of ‘fictional nobodies’ as her protagonists, Winterson’s novels always have an extratextual reference to somebody; in her case it is always the author” (379).

Silver's life is composed of three layers: her life with her mother, her life at the lighthouse, and her life after she has to depart it. Following her mother's death, Silver is assigned as a trainee to the lighthouse. With its historical past and stories, the Cape Wrath lighthouse is a historic site and a source of storytelling for Silver. Furthermore, it becomes a home for Silver, at which she feels at home thanks to the stories she learns from Pew, the lighthouse-keeper, a common and traditional family job. Silver is looking for meaning in her life, which she cannot encounter in her family.

Since storytelling represents the agency between past and present, it becomes an important part in Silver’s life as well as a means to express her existence. The novel can be then considered as a story of Silver’s quest to pursue the meaning of life by the help of memories and stories of other characters. This way, Silver succeeds to feel a sense of belonging to a place throughout the novel.

Silver builds her own identity through Pew's storytelling while he narrates memories of Babel Dark and the lighthouse. Pew’s narrations are embellished with legends, biblical texts and mythology in addition to memories of a clergyman named

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Babel Dark whose stories resemble the biblical story of Samson<sup>3</sup> who is tricked by a woman. In the story, Samson's hair, which represents power, is cut, and his eyes are removed. Becoming blind is a metaphor for losing sight of the truth, as seen in Babel's surname. Pew compares Dark to Samson because Dark's life changes when he suspects Molly, the woman he loves, is committing adultery and cheating on him. Pew continues to tell Silver about Babel and Molly's love story:

The story starts in Bristol in 1848 when Babel Dark was twenty years old and as rich and fine as any gentleman of the town. He was a ladies' man... [...] There was a pretty girl lived in Bristol and all the town knew her for her red hair and green eyes, [...] She was a shy girl, and Babel was certainly the handsomest and the richest young man that paraded the waterfront. At first she said no, and then she said yes (30-31).

This love story, out of which Silver gets to know so much, will serve as a guide for her in her love story. The coming conversation between Pew and Silver clearly illustrates Silver's approach to find a part in the story by comparing the destiny of Babel's daughter to her own:

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<sup>3</sup> Samson is one of the most recognizable of the judges who ruled over Israel before the time of the kings. He is portrayed in the biblical Book of Judges (chapters 13–16). He was a Nazarite (a Nazirite as a miracle child to an infertile family), yet broke many rules of the Nazarite vow. God gifted Samson with incredible strength, but he lost his strength when Delilah betrayed him to the Philistines, who blinded and enslaved him. At the end of his life, God restored Samson's strength.

<https://www.christianity.com/wiki/people/who-was-samson.html>

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“[...] but they say that Molly found herself having a child, and no legal wedded father.’

‘Like me?’

‘Yes, the same.’

‘What do you think happened to the baby?’

‘Who knows? It was a child born of chance.’

‘Like me?’

‘Yes, like you’

‘It must have been Babel Dark’ (32).

Silver struggles to deal with her solitude by forming an emotional connection with Babel's daughter, who was brought into the world by chance like her. Silver's individualization is hampered by the absence of her father and mother, which causes her to question her existence and seek the meaning of life. She uses stories to construct meaning, comprehend her existence, and explore herself, and the restoration of the past becomes a crucial component of Silver's psyche and identity.

Still with Babel dark's story, there is a significant disparity between what Babel lives and what he desires to live. According to Pew, Babel is similar to this lighthouse in some ways. He was isolated and distant and had a dark complexion. Due to some circumstances, Babel Dark cannot marry his lover Molly and is forced to marry his cousin who is the daughter of Duke of Argyll since he is totally suspicious about Molly's unfaithfulness. As a result, he rejects his child from her. Babel's marriage incarcerates him, and he wishes to be free of it because he cannot get rid of his love for Molly. Moreover, he expresses his fury to his wife by hitting

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her. When he realizes what he has done, he penalizes himself through burning his hands in hot boiling water and cutting woods till seriously wounding his hands. This self-punishment is in fact an expression of regret and an urge to crash his darkness.

Molly's memories are still alive in Babel's life and pervade to an extent to which each gesture or conversation with his wife reminds him of Molly. Babel is disturbed to offer apples to the poor: 'What apples?' he asked. "The ones you brought with you wrapped in newspaper. It is time they were eaten up. I will stew them, and take them to the poor", she replied. After refusing her quest, she tries to convince him that "the tree would fruit again". Babel on the other hand responds: "[n]o, it never will" (57). His memories of Molly pervade his life, and Babel recalls taking Molly to his father's garden to pick apples. With the tree's infertility in mind, Babel keeps refusing to offer apples in memory of Molly. The apple fruit represents the tie that connects between Molly and Babel, and his response that the tree will not give fruit again is a metaphor to his breaking up with her.

Additionally, Silver whose life is shaped by Pew's stories and Babel's life recounts her fate after leaving the lighthouse. She spends her days in the library, where she enjoys reading new stories and exploring new worlds. The library is a harmonious place to her, just like the marvelous and safe space Pew creates with his stories in the lighthouse. Silver tries to create her own unique stories, each with its own meaning for her and at the same time, she establishes her identity and existence out of them. Despite all the obstacles she encounters in her life, Silver resists them relying on the lessons she learns from storytelling.

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Silver is incapable to borrow books from the library without giving a permanent address and a proof of her identity. Her sole solution is to copy the stories out in her notebook. She even goes to the librarian's house to get the book she has not finished reading. Like the lighthouse, the library becomes a meaningful place for her, and all she wants is to have the book to finish. When she is arrested by the police, she defends herself saying:

All I had wanted was to borrow her book. After that, things got tougher, because the police discovered that as I had no mother or father, I didn't officially exist. I asked them to telephone Miss Pinch but she claimed never to have heard of such a person as myself. The police had me interviewed by a nice man who turned out to be a psychiatrist for Young Offenders (145).

Silver tries to figure out who she is and where she comes from throughout her life, as she has no one to officially confirm her existence in the absence of her parents or other authoritative figures. Even Miss Pinch, who is responsible for taking care of Silver after her mother's death and before sending her to the lighthouse, does not pay much attention to her. Silver tries to fill the void in her life by spending time reading stories and using them as a form of comfort.

All in all, as Silver is deprived of memories of her family, she attempts to compensate this loss through Pew's stories. Moreover, the love story between Babel and Molly told by Pew is an aspiration for Silver not only to comprehend what love is, but also to seek a bond between her life and that of Babel. Therefore, Storytelling is the skill silver perfectly crafts thanks to Pew's tales. As Kirwan Rockefeller (1990)

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denotes, “people tell their life stories, certain symbols, images, and metaphors arise which contain patterns and/or configurations which themselves, in turn, convey guiding truths and principles which shape that person’s life” (193).

### **5.4.1. The Lighthouse and its Significance**

As a new space, the lighthouse becomes the centre of Silver’s new life. It is an influential place in creating stories and constructing her identity. The existence of darkness is metaphorically associated with Silver’s lack of knowledge about the lighthouse’s history, and it also refers to her darkness in her attempt to discover herself and identity.

The presence of darkness in the lighthouse symbolizes Silver’s inherent darkness. Her childhood is shrouded by her lack of knowledge about her father. Silver lacks a strong mother figure to support and guide her since this latter died when she was a child. In the following quotation, Silver reflects on her early days and how darkness pervades her life:

Our business was light, but we lived in darkness. [...] Darkness came with everything. It was standard. My clothes were trimmed with dark. [...] Put your hand in a drawer, and it was darkness you felt first [...] that first night, Pew cooked the sausages in darkness. No, Pew cooked the sausages *with* darkness. It was the kind of dark you can taste. That’s what we ate: sausages and darkness (20)

As stated in the quote, Silver’s life is embodied with darkness since according to her ‘darkness is a presence’ she used to see through it.

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In another scene, the protagonist Silver narrates her birth and her obscure father. She describes herself as a fictitious character whose father miraculously emerges from and goes back to the sea. She defines herself as follows:

“[m]y mother called me Silver. I was born part precious metal part pirate. I have no father [...] my own father came out of the sea and went back that way. He was crew on a fishing boat that harboured with us one night when the waves were crashing like dark glass. His splintered hull shored him for long enough to drop anchor inside my mother. Shoals of babies vied for life. I won.” (3).

Silver features to herself a supernatural trait: being both a precious and rare metal and a pirate. Silver recompenses her father's absence by portraying herself as a fairytale character and implying her father as the god of the sea. Silver's story, which is incorporated with fantasy elements, can be explained by the fact that fairytales and imaginary stories are a medium for Silver to construct an identity of herself.

Indeed, Silver's feminine identity process is guided by the lighthouse and the stories Pew tells her. Each story elicits a new point of view. Lighthouse stories form in fact a series of stories that never end, but are passed down from generation to generation, displaying multiple representations of the past that enhance the present and future. These tales about lighthouses with their own space memories are described as follows:

Every lighthouse has a story to it-more than one, and if you sail from here to America, there'll not be a light you pass where the keeper didn't have a story for the seamen [...] These stories went from man

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to man, generation to generation, hooped the sea-bound world and sailed back again, different decked maybe, but the same story. And when the light-keeper had told his story, the sailors would tell their own, from other lights. A good keeper was one who knew more stories than the sailors (39-40).

As stated in the quotation, storytelling is a continuous process because each narrator adds a new thing to it and each story is told from a different point of view. Furthermore, Lighthouses are means of narration and have their own memories developed by the sailors' storytelling. In this regard, Roland Barthes (1997) asserts that the text is like a fabric which is connected with many knots, so the text is formed of many stories linked together: the text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture (146).

Eventually, the lighthouse is of paramount importance for Silver, Pew and Babel Dark. Each one of these characters is lonely and finds refuge in the lighthouse which is a source of both darkness and light. Hence, storytelling represents power to Silver because it gives her the chance to create her own stories to confront this world.

Additionally, one of *Lighthousekeeping's* recurring images is that of the womb as a fantastic space. At different points throughout the novel, the womb represents both a feminine idealistic space and a repressive confinement. On her first night in the lighthouse, Silver "curled up to keep warm, my knees under my chin, and hands holding my toes. I was back in the womb. Back in the safe space before the questions start" (32). In this instance, she begins to crave the safety of this environment, linking darkness with being inside the womb.



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As a concluding note, the act of storytelling is itself a self-liberating act. We can create stories for ourselves that liberate us from the inherited stories of the past that actually hinder and constrain us socially, psychologically, and politically. “I narrate; therefore I become”, writes Brian Finney (173). The act of becoming is achieved by telling one's own story; this interpretation lines up indeed with the feminist agenda in which the other wishes to hear her (woman) own voice in her narration

Hence, after having considered the above analysis, one can say that *Lighthousekeeping (2004)* foregrounds Silver's search for identity and its shaping course through telling. Arendt (1998) emphasizes the idea that storytelling is what ties people together and makes experiences bearable (177). For her, interchanging tales is a means of identity formation, and each individual has a narrative identity.

These stories are in fact a powerful instrument in the novel especially through the way they are recycled and repeated within the narrative. Silver asks Pew many times to tell her one, and her lover asks her to narrate to her a story too: “tell me a story Pew and I won't be lonely” (27). Insofar as the novel suggests that one needs stories to understand where he/she is coming from and where he/she is going to; so, stories furnish the person with a variety of the self.

### **5.5. Silver as a non Conformist Female**

In the novel at hand, Silver seeks to find a direction for her life in a constantly shifting world. She feels that she is lost as if on a large ocean without a “string of guiding lights” and with “no place to anchor” (21). Her sole way to confront this universe is to use her acquired stories as a guide in her life. Silver utilizes Dark's

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story as a mirror to reflect on her own life, and understands that it is necessary to find all the lives in between.

Love is then the red thread which runs through the novel. Winterson explores a new route to articulate the meaning of love. In a chapter entitled: *This is a love story* (209), Silver harmonizes herself while delicately overthrows the boundaries between her inside and outside especially after meeting her lover, who is supposed to be a woman. Love becomes an important turning point for Silver when she meets a woman praying in a Greek church. Silver remembers how she meets her:

You smiled, stood up, and came out into the sunshine. Perhaps it was the light on your face, but I thought I recognized you from somewhere a long way down, somewhere at the bottom of the sea. Somewhere in me. [...] You sat down and I noticed your hands-long fingers, articulated at the joints; if you touched me, what would happen? I am shy with strangers – all those years alone on the rock with Pew. [...] So now, when I meet someone new, I do the only thing know how to do: Tell you a story (200-1).

Silver falls in love with a woman she refers to as "you." She recalls the woman's smile, her fingers, and the brightness on her face. Silver's focus on the light on the lady's face alludes to Molly's association with the moon and light, as well as Babel's impression of Molly as the source of light and life.

Silver describes that day by concentrating on the sun metaphor, shortly after, she makes clear that: "my little orbit of life circles love. I daren't get any closer. I'm not a mystic seeking final communion. I don't go out without SPF 15. I protect myself"

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(199). “SPF 15” is the sun-protection factor, which alludes that as long as she can protect herself against the sun, she can be safe in the figurative meaning. However, by welcoming love, she adds another story to her collection of stories. She permits the sun to penetrate her face and life metaphorically:

But today, when the sun is everywhere, and everything solid is nothing but its own shadow, I know that the real things in life, the things I remember, the things I turn over in my hands, are not houses, bank accounts, prizes or promotion. What I remember is love (199)

As indicated in the quotation, Silver places love in an important place beyond all daily preoccupations listed above. After a conversation with her lover, she informs the reader: “when I meet someone new, I do the only thing I know how to do: Tell you a story” (201). Therefore, Silver continues believing in the power of storytelling to interpret her existence.

Love is therefore the means by which an individual overcomes melancholy. Silver interprets love as a challenge to society's unified identities and culturally established codes. As a result, Silver's love story with another woman, like many of Winterson's novels, is told in an open-ended manner. For her, the genuine love experience erases the boundaries between the self and the other through story-telling. Therefore, in Winterson's words, either queer or not, love deconstructs any power in front of hierarchies and binary oppositions.

In the same vein, as it is quite often with Winterson, love in all its forms has been an essential theme in her novels. The love story between Babel and Molly shapes Silver's memory of love and teaches her what it means. She communicates with

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others through storytelling; she would rather tell a story to introduce herself to the woman she loves. Her vivid memory is an interpretation of past events; history and feeling which evidently shape her identity.

When she meets her lover, who is supposed to be a woman, she welcomes a new story in her life where she tries to find a significant place to it. The protagonist is depicted as experiencing a platonic love the heterosexual expectations and gender norms. Silver's sexual tendency does not conform to the traditional discourse. She is consciously inclined in a specific path toward sexuality through breaking the norms of the Victorian era. Again in portraying her protagonist this way, Winterson shakes the stereotypical image of woman as male's sexual object. She displays the power of a lesbian whose 'unnatural passions' do not appeal to male taste. That is why Winterson puts forward untraditional and non-conformist female character.

In a lovemaking scene, Silver's love tension reaches its zenith: "We were moving together [...] You are beautiful to feel... Beautiful body making geometry out of our separate shapes" (217). After this love scene, Silver is not divided into two, rather she reaches a union with her lover. Accordingly, Silver's same-sex love can be regarded as welcoming the other. This identification of the same sex body is a revelation of going against the symbolic order of male–female desire.

For Winterson, the kind of love she offers in this novel fosters a sense of connection, provides satisfaction, and leads to self-discovery and inner harmony. This love according to Silver dissolves barriers and renders all divisions obsolete. For Ellam, Winterson's love provides an answer to the world's problems. She depicts love as if it were a panacea, as if it should solve problems (83). Through love, the

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boundaries between the real and the fantastic are blurred or eliminated entirely, just as the boundaries between life and death are blurred or eliminated entirely.

Again Winterson portrays her female protagonist defying gender expectations, standing by herself as a positive, assertive and powerful entity. According to Gonzales, (2004), "It is precisely, in her (Silver) rebellion against this social and cultural imposition of "femininity" that we recognize her as a woman". This special portrayal is in fact a scrutiny to the existing patriarchal structures.

In the same vein, the definition of storytelling, in which imagined stories are recontextualized is broadened; it refers to viewing life through multiple lenses; Stories act as a link between reality and fiction. When Silver starts telling herself stories, she starts narrating her life story as a fabricated tale. As a result, Silver who is unable to keep up with social and cultural norms in *Lighthousekeeping* is bestowed with storytelling skills.

To make it clear, from a broader perspective, if a person treats his/her own life as a tale, he/she will create it using his/ her own voice, imagination, and point of view. When it comes to Silver's case, there are two options for her. Either she will adopt people's claims and labels and live her life as an outcast, or she will be the main character in her life story, recreate her own feminine identity and reject to live in accordance with the others.

On the whole, at the outset, *Lighthousekeeping* is considered as a Bildungsroman which not only deals with the character's psychological and moral development, but also emphasizes the protagonist's encounter with language, which she learns to use through storytelling in expressing her love to the woman she met.

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### **5.6. The Strength of Woman Protagonist**

As stated previously, the novel tells the story of a young girl named Silver who, after her mother died, she becomes an apprentice to the city's lighthouse-keeper called Pew. Throughout the novel, Pew tells Silver the life story of a preacher named Babel Dark. Through a variety of characters, Winterson portrays special images of femininity. She often presents women characters surpassing feminine standards.

Silver and her mother live in a precarious house that is out of balance and knocked down. Characterized as single female characters, Silver and the mother struggle with gravity in the novel. In one example when Silver is asked "why didn't they move house?", she replies: "My mother was a single parent and she had conceived out of wedlock" (4). With the natural parents not legally married, Silver's mother is seen as an illegitimate and therefore, is cast away in this off- balance house. As a punishment from the patriarchal harsh society, she is blamed for her misfortune: "she was sent up the hill, away from the town, with the curious result that she looked down on it" (5).

Although the place and the house are seen as banishment for the mother, she never degrades herself and she takes pride in it. Furthermore, this precarious house is described as inappropriate and unsuitable for living: "The chairs had to be nailed to the floor, and we were never allowed to eat spaghetti... we tried peas once- what a disaster- and sometimes we still find them, dusty and green in the comers of the room" (3-4). Beyond its inappropriateness, the house represents also danger for the two female characters.

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As a matter of fact, this house has also other benefits: “tossing pancake s was something you could do really well in our house - the steep slope under the oven turned the ritual of loosening and tossing into a kind of jazz. My mother “danced while she cooked because she said it helped her to keep her balance” (6). Hence, Silver and her mother do not consider exclusion from patriarchal society to be punishment. Instead, they feel pride in this sanction and turn their punishment into dancing and joy.

### **5.6.1. Mother/Daughter Relationship**

Silver’s infancy memories of her house show her relationship with her mother which depends on survival and sufferings. After being ostracized from the society and sent up to the hill, they find themselves in a continuous struggle of fear and alienation. Silver and her mother must use a rope to climb to their home at the top of the mountain.

Generally speaking, the first image of the other that an infant encounters from the early beginning of his/her childhood is a mother who cares for and supplies her/his demands and needs. As a result, the relationship between a mother and a daughter is of paramount importance since it influences the daughter's identity formation, psychology and individualization. Silver’s early memories are based on the struggle to survive in a brutal environment with a non kind mother and the absence of a father figure, both of whom play significant role in the development of a child.

Silver describes her mother’s feeling towards her as follows:

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The eccentricities she [her mother] described as mine were really her own. She was the one who hated going out. She was the one who couldn't live in the world she had been given. She longed for me to be free, and did everything she could to make sure it never happened. We were strapped together like it or not. We were climbing partners. And then she fell (5)

The quote above is a vivid example that strongly demonstrates that the mother is not a free person and must live in the world that society has provided for her. Silver is aware of the fact that her mother transfers her fears and anxieties to Silver instead of guiding her, and she thinks her mother deliberately decides to abandon her. Silver does not also want to break this bond although she perceives her mother as an embodiment of anxieties.

In this regard, Nancy Chodorow in her *Reproduction of Mothering* (2004) reveals that mothers sometimes see their daughters as themselves and aim to transmit their issues, anxieties and problems about femininity (102). Hence, the mother becomes the embodiment of attachment to her daughter. Chodorow further explains:

Mothers tend to experience their daughters as more like, and continuous with, themselves. Correspondingly, girls tend to remain part of the dyadic primary mother-child relationship itself. This means that a girl continues to experience herself as involved in issues of merging and separation, and in an attachment characterized by primary identification and the fusion of identification and object choice (166).



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As stated above, the close link between mother and daughter originates in fact from carrying the same consciousness. Though daughters sometimes deny this perception and break the tie, they keep preserving this bond with the mother. However, projecting one's fears to a daughter is to some extent a harmful relationship especially on Silver.

Beside her father's absence, the death of her mother makes her desperate. Mournfully she expresses her feeling:

When we buried my mother, some of the light went out of me, and it seemed proper that I should go and live in a place where all the light shone outwards and none of it was there for us. Pew was blind, so it didn't matter to him. I was lost, so it didn't matter to me (24).

At an early age, Silver experiences the feeling of loneliness and loss which consequently creates in her a person who struggles continuously with anxiety and disorder. Furthermore, Silver's failure to set up a solid relationship with her mother shapes her life, and manifests itself in different occasions in the story. Her use and creation of stories is the unique way she finds to complete her identity development.

Silver's remembrances of her mother as a child are of climbing partners rather than a mother-daughter relationship. She recalls her mother's tragic drop, which Silver interprets as abandonment:

The rope came faster and faster, burning the top of my wrist as I coiled it next to me [...] she had undone the harness to save me. Ten years before I had pitched through space to find the channel of her

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body and come to earth. Now she had pitched through her own space, and I couldn't follow her. She was gone (7).

After this accident, Silver feels abandoned because she believes her mother chooses her own direction by splitting the bond between her and Silver. Because Silver blames herself for not being capable of following her mother that time, the separation causes her psychological disorders and anxiety.

### **5.7. Empowered Femininity through Silver and Molly**

In the novel at hand, female characters mainly the protagonist, Silver, and the fictional character, Molly, are portrayed as empowered females. Despite the fact that both characters face obstacles in their lives, they embrace their power as women. The death of Silver's mother is the catalyst that starts her adventure which is her life with Pew, and later in her adult life, and shapes her entire being.

As already mentioned, Silver's past memories especially her childhood souvenirs affect her life and the way she perceives the world around her. The broken relationship between her and her parents results in moments of obscurity in her life. She does not feel herself safe and certain. She often feels that there are two Atlantics, one outside the lighthouse and the other inside her which has no lights. Thus, lonely as she is, Silver is brave enough to build for herself a safe world based on stories which function as her guide in life. Due to her parents absence, she is confused how to start her life story:

Already I could choose the year of my birth-1959. Or I could choose the year of the lighthouse at Cape Wrath, and the birth of Babel Dark-

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1828 [...] And what about the year I went to live in the lighthouse - 1969, also the year that Apollo landed on the moon? I have a lot of sympathy with that date because it felt like my own moon landing; this unknown barren rock that shines at night (23-24).

Silver has difficulty in establishing her place in the world and finding out the start of her story of existence. She feels belonging to nowhere since she lacks familial bond. The act of approaching the lighthouse is compared to the moon landing, which represents a new start and exploration.

Indeed, the absence of parents is of paramount importance since it effects the child's psychological development. The mother's loss in *Lighthousekeeping* can be explained as sacrificial because it freed her from the shackles of being an illegitimate, unwanted child of the town, allowing her to become her own person; it enabled her to detach herself from her past, and eventually from her mother. This demonstrates in fact how essential female characters are in this novel. Without Silver's mother, Silver would not exist.

Moreover, Silver stresses on discussing a lot about her mother and the significance of her existence in her childhood. However, when it come to her father whom she does not know, silver often uses a sort of irony in which she refers to him as a lonely boat instead of a person. This emphasizes both the importance of her mother's presence and the nothingness Silver's life becomes without her.

Equally important, Silver is frequently compared to Babel Dark, and she analyzes herself according to the events of his life. Although they are essentially different centuries, their problems remain the same. Both characters' lives seem relatively

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pointless until they recognize that the only meaning in their lives is to love a woman. This emphasizes the importance of women's absence in the characters' loneliness. For Babel, it is Molly who takes control of his life and whom, he cannot escape. Silver, on the other hand, falls in love with a nameless woman who becomes everything in her life, and teaches her that the meaning of life is to love: "I used to believe that love was the highest value, I still believe that love is the highest value" (122). They believe that a meaningful life is one spent entirely loving another. Both are dependent on. This emphasizes women presence is the basis for a happy.

Hence, Silver is courageous enough to commit herself to an unconventional love during the Victorian period which is highly characterized by conservatism and women subordination. In doing so, she subverts the concept of traditional femininity and appeals that women should struggle for their existence as free creatures and explore their happiness. Through Silver, Winterson discusses women's fate and the awakening of their female consciousness during the nineteenth century in an attempt to prove the importance of love in self-development.

Molly, our second feminine character, is taken also as an embodiment of an empowered female. Her absence derives Babel dark insane, and eventually shifts into a schizophrenic person: a kind clergyman and an abusive husband. Molly is a smart woman and muses on her own absence: Can you leave someone and still be with them? She thought you could [...] whether she kept him or lost him, it hardly made any difference" (78). This quote emphasizes the significance of Molly's presence in the novel, because even when Babel is not with her, she is always present in his mind. He confesses: "I find her when I look, even though I will never see her again (97). Even he admits that he made the wrong decision that he chose the wrong road

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at the most crucial time. It highlights how important she is to his life and being. It also proves her significance as a narrative symbol; without her, the story and life of Babel Dark would stay unchanged as they are: gloomy and loveless.

The most compelling evidence of Molly empowerment is Dark's justification why he left her: "I was afraid of how she made me feel" (101). Molly's presence makes him afraid because he knows that she is a powerful force. When the two lovers meet in the Great Exhibition to which Babel goes for honeymoon with his wife, "he remembered her that night, that first night, with the moon shining white on her white skin". Contradictory to his wife, Molly is not passive and embraces her power as a seducer and controller of Babel's life. She is indeed his source of light, of love and happiness. She is continuously compared to the moon which denotes light and energy: "[Molly] was a heat and light to him [...] She was circular, light-turned, [...] She was season and movement" (88).

In another scene, Molloy appears to be the ideal lover and a powerful seducer. Through reversing roles, Molly makes Babel dark as her sex object that cannot resist her. When visiting her at night, they agree on a moonlight tryst, and she proposes a bed trick. She waits for him in a dark room, frankly inspecting his excited body. After making love, Dark finds himself defenseless in front of her unbearable attractiveness.

Molly and Dark's relationship is described in a very sensual manner. Aside from touch, other senses like smell and sight are mentioned too (with details description of colors). Hence, sexuality as usual is prioritized by Winterson. The scene displaying their lovemaking spans many pages; and diligently describes several parts of the

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body. It concludes with a significant statement: “she (Molly) said his name Babel”, referring to his true identity. Therefore, sexuality is the new language that brings happiness to Babel.

Furthermore, Molloy, is Babel’s pursuit of happiness. She is not a conventional woman as his wife whom the reader does not even know. The sensation accompanying his wedded life is one of indifference and described as follows: “ the wife always serves him cold breakfast , their bedroom is chilly, and when they have sex, he keeps her in bed and does not let her get up” (51). What is missing in his legal partner are feeling and emotions.

In another context, Molly is described by Dark as a seahorse<sup>4</sup>, and his insistence on keeping it indicates his efforts to live with memories. The seahorse is then considered to be the symbol of strength and power. Babel’s insistence on keeping the seahorse with him when he is in the cave indicates his efforts to live with memories of Molly. This is expressed in the coming quotation as follows:

I found her in the cave- miraculous, impossible, but she was there, the curve of her caught up in the living rock. When I put my hand in the gap, it’s her I feel; her salty smoothness, her sharp edges, her turnings and openings, her memory” (167).

Hence, the seahorse shows Babel’s memories with Molly and the extent to which he loves her.

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<sup>4</sup> In Rome and Greece, for example, the Seahorse was sacred to Poseidon and Neptune, potent sea gods. As a result, one of the keynote meanings for Seahorse is one of power and authority, particularly in matters of emotion and intuition because of the Water Element involved. <https://whatismyspiritanimal.com/spirit-totem-power-animal-meanings/fish/seahorse-symbolism-meaning>

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In addition, from another fresh perspective, Winterson's portrayal of the precarious wedded life of Babel Dark is an implicit criticism of the institution of marriage. She suggests that marriage is fake and only a façade, a social arrangement serving the unique purpose of attaining a certain social status, void of any feelings and usually hiding some awful truth about the reality of the married life.

Another illustrative example of Winterson's femininity portrayal is also evident in the fantastic figure of Miss Pinch, the schoolteacher who takes Silver in after her mother dies. Miss Pinch appears to oppose forced heterosexuality and gender roles for women. She lives alone in a house that is alike in some aspects to Silver's mother. It's secluded and hidden among the other deserted houses on the street. Miss Pinch's house was boarded up too, because she said she didn't want to attract burglars" (L 9).

Miss Pinch believes she is resistant to these likely male burglars due to the seclusion of her home. Miss Pinch appears to become the most likely candidate to accept Silver. Miss Pinch also exhibits a strong sense of alienation from and fear of the outside world: "the way she describes the world, you wouldn't want to visit it anyway" (16).

Though Miss Pinch does not accommodate into any prescribed female roles, she is also the character with the most clear and strict ideas about what roles women should play. Significantly, it is while Silver is under the care of Miss Pinch that she is first assigned a gender. This happens when the people of the village ask, "Well, what could we do with her?" (16). Before this point in the novel, the reader is uncertain whether Silver is a girl or a boy (This ambiguity about her gender in the beginning of the narrative seems to suggest that *Lighthousekeeping* is taking the

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same direction as *Written on the Body* (1992), which is famous for its ambiguously gendered narrator/genderless narrator).

In addition, Ms. Pinch is portrayed as an assertive character who never says ‘yes’ to matters. She is someone “who hated saying yes” and who is “one of those people for whom yes is always an admission of guilt or failure. No was power” (18). Unlike to Silver’s mother who used to leave the door unlocked, Miss Pinch is obsessed with protecting her house. According to her, the world is dangerous, unpredictable, and threatening.

Moreover, she is represented as a hostile woman who is overly concerned with her personal stability. She lets nobody or nothing throws her off balance. Her guiding principles in life are silence, stability, and immobility. She also exhibits excessive marginalization from and fear of the outside world: "Miss Pinch was a genuine at geography—despite the fact that she had never left Salts in her entire life: “The way she describes the world, you wouldn’t want to visit it anyway” (16).

Furthermore, Winterson plays again with gender dissatisfaction or uncertainty through the character of Miss Pinch. Miss Pinch advises Silver after she leaves the lighthouse to look for a job in a library, but cautions her not to be too ambitious. "Librarianship was suitable for Females," she tells Silver. “Miss Pinch always said Females, holding the word away from her by its tail” (104). Miss Pinch's discomfort with the word ‘females’ almost seems to reflect that she does not like to perceive herself as a female, and as a result, she does not inevitably see a connection between her female body and her gender.



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It is worth mentioning that this is not the first time Winterson gives a special portrayal to her female characters. In the *Passion* (1987) for example, she rewrites the story of the War of Napoleon Bonaparte through two main characters: Henry, a mal French soldier, and Villanelle, a female who is represented by Winterson as unconventional heroine. She is naturally born with webbed feet, a distinctive feature which is a genetic mistake since this particularity is traditionally masculine attributes ( because only men and precisely boatmen can have webbed feet in Villanelle's society). In spite of being a woman, Villanelle trespasses gender stereotypes in the novel. This female character is therefore, androgynous and dares to go beyond categories of physicality and gender; she becomes as an intruder in her society. Torn between femininity and masculinity, she has many affairs while disguised as a man, both with men who are attracted by her sensual tenderness and physical appearance and with women who are attracted by her mystery

In another work mainly *Sexing the Cherry* (1989) Winterson matches history with fairytales to present a type of a female character named "the Dog Woman" who is portrayed as, giant and a grotesque woman. The Dog Woman is no longer the submissive and inferior woman. She had been overweight for as awhile as she had lived with her parents due to a dislike of subordination.

The novel's other female character, the environmentalist, has no name. She is another strong woman who defies gender stereotypes and fights for her beliefs. She is no longer the defenseless, limited housewife (as female characters are typically portrayed), but a strong woman who sees through this dishonest world and can no longer bear it. The current order and norms no longer appeal to her. Men are no longer appealing to her because they all want to be heroes. This reflects the society's

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existing rules and standards. And the environmentalist woman would like to change the current order. The female stands alone as a positive, confident, and powerful force.

The two female protagonists in the novel depict themselves as strong women who defy gender norms and expectations. It is precisely, in their rebellion against the social and cultural codes of "femininity" that we recognize her as a woman. The first person pronoun narration is a way in which the female protagonists represent themselves and is clearly seen as a criticism to the existing patriarchal constraints. The female protagonists live on their own terms and challenge social norms and codes.

Winterson challenges conventional thinking and transgresses gender boundaries. Her female characters are strong-willed, independent women who have a word to say and are capable to change the world. Men, on the other hand, are but portraits, weak, passive, trapped in dreams of becoming heroes.

### **5.8. Conclusion**

*Lighthousekeeping* (2004) is a novel that shows the skills of storytelling. It can be distinguished as a "metanarrative" in the sense that it reflects on the importance of storytelling for human existence. Through the metaphor of a lighthouse, the novel reveals how one can live in an obscure world and a chaotic sea. Indeed, these stories function as flashback through which characters seek meaning of their lives.

This chapter dwells on the function of storytelling in the construction of feminine identity. Silver, the orphan protagonist though she misses an essential part of her life

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which is childhood memories with her parents, she acts in the novel as a powerful female whose strength is taken from the stories she learns from Pew. She is taught how to keep light and avoid darkness in her life through storytelling.

Equally important, in *Lighthousekeeping*, Winterson characterizes her protagonist as a non conformist woman who dares to be in a love relationship with the same sex. Trespassing societal and cultural constraints is a non conformist act, especially in the nineteenth century, Victorian period, when women position in society was precarious.

Her arousing desire for same sex might be regarded as a rebellion against the stern morality of the British society. Unlike traditional portrayal of women characters, Winterson's heroine is an active woman who is able to face difficulties on her own instead of waiting for a man to solve her problems.

Molly, the second female character of the narrative, is also portrayed as an empowered woman who drove Babel Dark crazy as a result of her absence, and eventually transforms into a schizophrenic: a gentle clergyman and an abusive husband. She is also demonstrated as an important narrative symbol; without her, the story and life of Babel Dark would remain unchanged: gloomy and deprived of love. Therefore, Molly, as a powerful seducer, transforms Babel into a sex object who cannot resist her. Unlike to playing 'damsel in distress', Molly exhibits her strength and power as a seducer and controller of Babel's life.

Hence, in this chapter the attempt was to give an account of femininity representation in Winterson's *Lighthousekeeping* (2004). The final comment is that

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Winterson's depiction of her female characters as rebellious, empowered and non conformist is a way to expose her beliefs and to tell her own story of a lesbian.

## *General conclusion*

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### **General Conclusion**

The 1960's, commonly labeled as second wave feminism, was a period of radical changes for women whose perspectives and opportunities were expanding. Gender issues arose as a result of this international movement, and feminism has since evolved according to current demands and split into different factions reflecting the complexities of women's actual experiences and the often conflicting theories surrounding them. In a historical examination of feminism, theorists argue that the movement not only grants women rights, but also vows radical changes wherein women reject the dichotomy between the masculine and the feminine.

In common usage, the term *gender* most typically refers to the perceived and natural differences between men and women. This division was often thought to be based on innate differences in male and female traits, attributes, and temperaments. In the past, femininity/masculinity measures were commonly used to detect problems with basic gender identification, such as feminine males or masculine females.

When open-ended questions are asked about what characteristics society values most in males and females, the answer is that gender-specific, linguistic behavior is allotted to men and women in a number of ways. To ingrain femininity in their daughters, parents tell them to "speak like a lady". Girls are expected to be more sensitive, fragile, less dominant and self-conscious than men, for whom it is acceptable to take an oath, to be assertive, strong and act violently. Of course, all of these points are debatable; these are just generalizations.

Gender as a debatable term in nowadays discourses, plays an important role in the lives of human beings from the moment they are born. From the time they are born, people are treated separately based on their sex. Hence, male and female babies are

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dressed differently and in different colors. Stereotypically, society outfits *male infants* in blue and *girls* in pink, *even* appealing these *colors* as coded *gender* labels.

Even more outstanding is the fact that at an early age, man and woman are taught to follow some prescribed codes and conform to societal expectations to become proper male and female that society expects them to be. Forcing them to fit into gender roles results in fact in gender stereotypes, mainly to man's superiority and privilege and woman's inferiority and subjugation.

Consequently, in this way gender is considered to be socially constructed, as explained by many theorists. Gender socialization means that females and males become women and men through a process in society whereby they acquire feminine qualities and get feminine behavior. Femininity and masculinity come to exist as a result of how individuals are raised by their parents; there are some social forces that give birth to gendered individuals and shape the way women and men exist. This explanation fits the claim of Simone de Beauvoir that 'one is not born, but rather becomes a woman'; which evidently refers to gender socialization.

The definition that gender as socially and culturally constructed was the premise of many feminist critics like Judith Butler who believes that gender is performative which implies that every act is itself a recitation (Butler 187). In Butler's words, gender is real only to the extent that it is performed through a set of repeated acts. Hence, it is something that one becomes: a kind of becoming or an activity. Butler describes it as a non static cultural marker, but an incessant and repeated action of some sort.

Gender is an integral and an essential component of every aspect of social, political and private lives of individuals as well as societies. In the last two decades,

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extensive research has been conducted on gender related issues in different fields and mainly in literature. The postmodern period came with a set of new and challenging modes of thought which consequently have changed the whole scenario of literature.

Women and their place in literature has become one of the major focuses of the postmodern literature. Due to a wish to include women in areas of research from which they have previously been excluded, many literary studies have focused only on women. Historically, in literature, the female gender used to be depicted as being the weaker character. While man has often been considered to be more rational thinking, woman has been commonly portrayed as more irrational.

For many women writers, postmodernism with its emphasis on the politics of representation, has provided an opportunity to challenge some constructed realities on femininity. Women's issues and feminist pioneers have found some relief and a sympathetic ear in postmodern literature. As a result, there has been a lot of interest in women and how they are portrayed from a postmodern standpoint.

Jeanette Winterson, one of the best British women authors and a leading figure of contemporary literature is one of those authors whose concern has been always to depict women in a way that challenges the previously established stereotypes. Experimenting with fictional forms

My dissertation explored the ways in which Winterson not only interrogates gender issues, but also endeavors to offer more particularly an insight into femininity representations in her selected novels. My considerations of these novels interlock with the theories of Judith Butler on gender as performative, and Michel Foucault on sexuality. With regard to the choice of the selected narratives, I find them so interesting and provocative in terms of the way they deconstruct the old femininity

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matrix. They also provide a special reworking of the discursively inscribed constraints that Winterson's female protagonists dare to overcome resulting in a compelling portrait of free women.

The attempt of the beginning of the thesis was to give an overview on feminism and postmodernism and with strong emphasis on postmodern literature and its main characteristics. This section of the work helped in drawing a roadmap to the cherished postmodern techniques Winterson heavily relied on in her narratives. This part also gave a historical overview on feminism and feminist literary criticism. It has been argued that this school of thought intended to view women from a better perspective, supporting their literary knowledge and recognizing their experiences. It is worth noting that feminist literary theory gave women authors the opportunity to challenge passive representations of women in literature, challenge hierarchical ideologies, and reframe women's place in the world.

Judith Butler and Michel Foucault have provided a framework through which to explore the texts selected: *Oranges* (1985), *Written on the Body* (1992) and *Lighthousekeeping* (2004). I assessed how they take up the Butlerian strategy of gender mostly femininity. Each looks forward at presenting female characters who correspond to Butler's theory of performativity. They all feature non conformist protagonists who transmit their stories in an experimental form and who challenge the norms and laws prescribed by their environment.

Jeanette Winterson is a postmodernist in its real sense. Her novels can always be studied from a *postmodern* perspective placing herself within the European literary tradition. Her fondness of the intertextual quest of Bible stories, fairytales, myths, and anatomical texts, makes her juxtapose the real and the fictional. Furthermore,



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through expressing uncertainty, unreliability and using a genderless narrator, Winterson resists dominant ideologies, and aims at reconstructing an alternative discourse in the same society.

In *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985), Winner of the Whitbread Prize for best first fiction, is Winterson's first published novel which challenges the virtues of the home, the power of the church and the supposed normality of heterosexuality. The female protagonist "Jeanette", who bears the same name as the author, dares to doubt and challenge the prevailing patriarchal constraints of society and becomes the real self. Different from those stereotypical obedient women, usually getting numb and accepting intrusion of other male characters to their life, the brave and rebellious love that Jeanette insists on reveals her strong feminist belief.

Set in the historical background of 1960s, the very time the protagonist Jeanette was adopted by her mother. In this novel the writer shows bravery and frankness in depicting the affections and sex experience of lesbians, a topic used to be considered as a taboo. In a religious family, Jeanette grows up in the story like Virgin Mary. However, she was actually no longer the traditional kind of woman who worships virginity. She is depicted as a woman whose sexuality is an empowerment for her, and it is part of her femininity which is labeled as 'transgressive'.

Moreover, the novels also highlighted that most of the male characters are weak, passive while women are strong and independent. Males are ghostly characters in the narrative while woman are given more power to be assertive and create their own space. Hence, men are removed from their conventional gender positions. This portrayal is indeed a frankly declaration from Winterson to subvert gender roles.

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As a concluding note, under the light of things have been mentioned about the novel until here, a return to the title is necessary. The title establishes a perfect ground for the narrative. Oranges represent the dominant ideology that pervades the environment of Jeanette and the whole authoritative system she aims to subvert. Jeanette is aware that oranges are not the only fruit, but there are other alternatives.

In *Written on the Body* (1992), Winterson comes with a teasing trick toward her readers. With a postmodern love story narrated completely in the first person by a genderless narrator, the author transforms the traditional narrative into a postmodern game of uncertainty and unreliability. With some textual clues present in the narrative, the narrator acts sometimes as a woman and other times as a man which might be read as a representative of Judith Butler's theory of '*Gender Performativity*'.

Therefore, it has been argued that Winterson's removal of all gender indications is a tool to challenge dominant patriarchal constructions of gender as well as transgress oppressive boundaries prevailing in society. Despite the fact that femininity has not been declared explicitly in the novel, through my close reading and analysis I came to the conclusion that the narrator and protagonist is a woman. To state an example, the narrator is frequently described by Louise as 'beautiful' which seems to suggest a female. She tells him/her that "you were the most beautiful creature I had ever seen". When I compared how often the narrator is addressed with feminine criteria rather than masculine ones, I found that he has been portrayed as a female in countless instances than as a male. Pointing the readers to different directions the way Winterson does is a process to challenge the traditional prescribed discourse about gender.

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Even more important is that in *Written on the Body* (1992), the female body took the lion's share in the analysis of the narrative. What I hoped to demonstrate here was the presence of the Foucauldian body in the character of Louise. The novel's title is quite enough indicating the importance of the body to the text. Drawing largely from Foucault's claims that the female body is inscribed by history; and functions according to regulatory power practices, I explored how Louise interlocks with this portrayal.

Moreover, to deepen this point, I gave an example (from Foucault's analysis of the female body) of a nineteenth century French hermaphrodite called Herculine Barbin whose journals demonstrated the ways in which bodies come to be shaped by history and conventional practices. I explained that Barbin was forced to change her gender and name to a man by juridical powers; she was even legally obliged to act and exercise men's rights in society. Barbin's traits are typically depicted in the character of Louise in which there are signs of history on Louise's body, implying that her body does not solely belong to her. It is directly constructed and molded by historical and cultural forces. The body was then the subject of narration from the narrator's behalf.

In *Lighthousekeeping* (2004), a semiautobiographical novel, the writer alters between the fictional Winterson, and the real life Winterson who in her storytelling and fiction, directly and indirectly has drawn on her own life experiences. She has rewritten herself repeatedly in her novel in an aim to bring little attention devoted to the biographical aspects of her fiction; she wants her work to be read purely as fiction. Through the metaphor of a lighthouse, the novel reveals how one can live in

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an obscure world and a chaotic sea. Indeed, these stories have functioned as a flashback through which characters seek meaning of their lives.

Winterson characterizes her protagonist as a non conformist woman who dares to be in a love relationship with the same sex. Trespassing societal and cultural constrains is a non conformist act, especially in the nineteenth century, Victorian period, when women position in society was precarious. Her arousing desire for same sex might be regarded as a rebellion against the stern morality of the British society. Unlike traditional portrayal of women characters, the protagonist is a powerful daring character who is able to face and challenge social structures.

Hence, from the analysis of this last work, it is possible to observe how non conforming femininity is represented. Winterson portrays her protagonist as a strong female character who takes storytelling which is a powerful literary technique that functions as her guide in the construction of feminine identity. This portrayal takes into consideration the transgressive aspect of the protagonist's life. By relinquishing her social and cultural norms, Silver embraces other form of living. She ceased to be regulated by 'possible' gender norms and finds it possible to live her sexuality out of bonds.

All in all, by inserting non conforming female characters, Winterson destabilizes hegemonic patriarchal gender ideologies and seeks to declare that gender is fluid and femininity is therefore performative. Moreover, the writer trespasses the traditional depictions of women as non significant, passive, inferior and naturally irrational, she rather depicts them as active, powerful in relation to their lives and destinies. Within the analysis, it has been revealed that the perception of sexuality is a very important

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aspect of female identity, and should not be interfered by the orthodoxy of the patriarchal discourse.

As a concluding note, at the level of analyzing the last selected novel *Lighthousekeeping* (2004), I faced a shortage of documentation dealing with female characters in the story, a fact that has prevented this part to reach ultimate analysis. However, this work would be a starting point for further research to investigate in the field of gender studies in literature. The contribution of this study to the overall studies related to the issue of gender particularly femininity, is to show that literature provides a fertile ground for gender problems and portrayals as much as other disciplines.

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## Appendices

### Appendix1

#### OVERVIEW OF MAIN CHARACTERS

Year of publication	Title	Character's Name	Idea Represented	Function
1985	OAF	Jeanette	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transgressive Femininity</li> <li>• Quest</li> <li>• Non conformist</li> <li>• powerful</li> </ul>	Protagonist
		Jeanette's mother	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• constraints</li> <li>• solid principles</li> <li>• religious upbringing</li> </ul>	Adversary
		Winnet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• power</li> <li>• freedom</li> <li>• empowerment</li> <li>• fairytale</li> </ul>	Heroine
		Pastor Finch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• power</li> <li>• church</li> <li>• Stern Catholicism</li> <li>• judgment</li> </ul>	Adversary
1992	WOB	I narrator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Love</li> <li>• gender ambiguity</li> </ul>	Protagonist
		Louise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sexual body</li> <li>• Beauty</li> <li>• Empowerment</li> </ul>	Heroine
		Elgin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exploitation</li> <li>• canny</li> </ul>	Antagonist/ villain
2004	LHK	Silver	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• orphaned</li> <li>• self relying</li> <li>• powerful female</li> <li>• stories fondness</li> </ul>	Protagonist
		Babel Dark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Silver's reference</li> <li>• Revealing double lives</li> </ul>	Second protagonist
		Pew	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lighthouse-keeper</li> <li>• storyteller</li> <li>• caretaker</li> </ul>	advisor
		Silver's mother	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• shame</li> <li>• wedlock</li> <li>• illegitimacy</li> <li>• Absence</li> </ul>	Minor character

## Appendices

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### Appendix 2

#### Winterson's Major Works

**Jeanette Winterson**, (born August 27, 1959, Manchester, England), British writer noted for her quirky, unconventional, and often comic novels.

Winterson was educated at St. Catherine's College, Oxford, and held various jobs while working on her writing. Her first novel, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985), won a Whitbread Award as that year's best first novel. It concerns the relationship between a young lesbian and her adoptive mother, a religious fanatic. *The Passion* (1987), her second work, is a picaresque historical novel that chronicles the adventures of Villanelle, an enslaved Venetian woman who is rescued by Henri, a cook from Napoleon's army. Attempting to reach Venice, the two travel through Russia in winter.

Winterson's subsequent novels included *Sexing the Cherry* (1989); *Written on the Body* (1992); *Art and Lies* (1994), about dehumanization and the absence of love in society; *Gut Symmetries* (1997); and *The PowerBook* (2000). She later published *Lighthousekeeping* (2004), an exploration of the nature of storytelling told through the tale of an orphaned girl sent to live in a Scottish lighthouse; *The Stone Gods* (2007), a foray into science fiction; and *The Daylight Gate* (2012), set amid witch trials in 17th-century Lancashire. *The Gap of Time* (2015) is a modernized retelling of William Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*. It was part of a project initiated by Hogarth, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, in which various authors reworked a play by Shakespeare to honour the 400th anniversary of the dramatist's death. Winterson's later novels included *Frankissstein: A Love Story* (2019), which was inspired by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's *Frankenstein* and was long-listed for the Booker Prize.

*Art Objects: Essays on Ecstasy and Effrontery*—which covers various topics such as Gertrude Stein, modern literature, and lesbianism—was published in 1995. Winterson produced a collection of short stories, *The World and Other Places* (1998); the vivid memoir *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* (2011); and several children's books and screenplays for television. She was named an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 2006.

(<https://www.britannica.com>)

## Appendices

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### Appendix 3:

#### Résumé

Cette recherche vise à contribuer à l'étude du genre dans la littérature en examinant les représentations de la féminité dans la fiction britannique postmoderne, Jeanette Winterson étant l'une de ses représentantes. L'objectif est d'examiner les romans de Winterson, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985), *Written on the Body* (1992) et *Lighthousekeeping* (2004), et comment ils contribuent à dépeindre la réalité complexe des protagonistes féminines déchirées entre l'expression de leur féminité et les attentes sociétales des femmes. Les héroïnes de Winterson luttent constamment contre les normes de genre et se lancent dans un voyage de découverte de soi. Ce faisant, l'auteur utilise des techniques hautement postmodernes telles que l'intertextualité, la narration, les contes de fées et, surtout, la parodie d'événements bibliques, qui contribuent toutes de manière significative à la représentation. Les trois romans à l'étude visent à montrer des femmes anticonformistes et puissantes qui osent défier et transgresser le sacré (normes religieuses et sociales) afin de subvertir les discours dominants patriarcaux et hétérosexuels. Winterson dépeint des protagonistes volontaires qui non seulement interrogent le système d'opposition binaire entre l'homme et la femme, mais recréent également une nouvelle approche de la féminité et de la sexualité, en utilisant divers portraits tels que des femmes lesbiennes, androgynes et sexuellement autonomes. Certes, cette représentation emploie la stratégie de Butler selon laquelle « le genre devient toujours plutôt qu'il n'est ».

**Mots-clés :** Féminité ; Représentations, postmodernisme, genre, transgression, normes de genre, non-conformité, performativité.

### ملخص

يهدف هذا العمل إلى دراسة الجندرة في الأدب من خلال دراسة الأنوثة في الأدب البريطاني ما بعد الحداثي ، حيث سعت جانيت وينترسون من خلال رواياتها ، *البرتقال ليست الفاكهة الوحيدة* (1985) ، *مكتوبة على الجسد* (1992) ، و *رواية منارة* (2004) ، على تصوير الواقع المعقد للبطلات اللاتي واجهن صعوبة التعبير عن الأنوثة والتوقعات المجتمعية للمرأة. تحارب بطلات وينترسون باستمرار المعايير الجندرية وتشرع في رحلة اكتشاف الذات. في القيام بذلك ، تستخدم الكاتبة تقنيات ما بعد الحداثة مثل التناص ، ورواية القصص ، والقصص الخيالية ، والأهم من ذلك ، محاكاة ساخرة لأحداث الكتاب المقدس ، وكلها تساهم بشكل كبير في التصوير. تهدف الروايات الثلاث قيد الدراسة إلى إظهار النساء غير الملتزمات والقويات اللاتي يجرؤن على تحدي وتجاوز المقدسات (الأعراف الدينية والاجتماعية) من أجل تحدي الخطابات المتغايرة السائدة. تصور وينترسون أبطالاً قويين الإرادة لا يستجوبون نظام المعارضة الثنائية بين الرجل والمرأة فحسب ، بل يعيدون أيضاً إنشاء نهج جديد للأنوثة الجندرة ، باستخدام صور مختلفة مثل النساء المثليات والممكّنات جنسياً. من المسلم به أن هذا التمثيل يستخدم استراتيجية بتلر " الجندرة هي مكتسبة دائماً بدلاً من أن تكون وراثية"

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** أنوثة ؛ التمثيل ، ما بعد الحداثة ، الجندرة ، ، الأعراف الجنسانية ، عدم المطابقة ، الأداء