

Charles University in Prague

Faculty of Education

BACHELOR THESIS

2012

Radka Čampulová

Charles University of Prague

Faculty of Education

Department of the English Language and Literature

**The Theme and Motifs of Sexual Identity in
Selected Novels by Jeanette Winterson**

Author: Radka Čampulová

Supervisor: PhDr. Petr Chalupský, Ph.D.

2012

Abstract

The aim of this Bachelor's thesis is to analyse selected works by the contemporary British author Jeanette Winterson from the perspective of sexual identity and its construction. Two of her novels will be used for demonstration - *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985) and *Written On the Body* (1992). Apart from the examination of these motifs it will try to discover possible interconnections between them. Main constituents of this thesis are the theoretical part, which provides a brief description of women and lesbian literature in the second half of the 20th century, and the practical part in which the analysis is performed.

Abstrakt

Cílem této bakalářské práce je provést rozbor vybraných děl současné britské autorky Jeanette Winterson z pohledu sexuální identity a jejího utváření. K tomuto účelu budou použity dva její romány - *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* (1985) a *Written On The Body* (1992). Kromě zkoumání těchto motivů se bude snažit zjistit jejich možné vzájemné propojení. Hlavní složky této práce jsou teoretická část, která poskytuje stručný popis ženské a lesbické literatury druhé poloviny 20. století, a praktická část, ve které je provedena samotná analýza.

Key words: lesbian literature, women and feminism, sexual identity, gender

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor PhDr. Petr Chalupský, Ph.D. and I would like to thank him for his help and support throughout the writing of this thesis.

Declaration

I hereby declare that I have elaborated this thesis individually and that all the sources that were used are listed on the Works Cited page. No other sources were used.

Prague 2012

Radka Čampulová

.....

Table Of Contents

Introduction	1
1 Theoretical part	2
1.1 Women literature of the 1960s	2
1.2 Rising feminism of the 1970s and its impact on women literature	3
1.3 New changes in lesbian literature	4
1.4 Non-fiction of the late 1970s and the early 1980s	6
1.5 Fiction of the late 1970s.....	7
1.6 Further development in the 1980s	8
1.7 The thriller as a new genre in the lesbian-oriented literature	8
1.8 Jeanette Winterson's biography	9
2 Practical part	12
2.1 <i>Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit</i>	12
2.1.1 <i>Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit</i> – an autobiographical novel?.....	12
2.1.2 Catholic Church and its acceptance of homosexuality.....	13
2.1.3 The family and its role.....	14
2.1.4 Women community and its influence on the main protagonist's acceptance of her sexuality.....	16
2.1.5 The symbol of oranges	17
2.1.6 Biblical allusions	18
2.1.7 The story of Winnet and the orange demon	20
2.2 <i>Written On The Body</i>	22
2.2.1 Device of sexually undetermined narrator	22
2.2.2 Louise as representation of a woman	24
2.2.3 The theme of clichés	25
2.2.4 The theme of losing somebody/separation	26
2.2.5 Alternating between certainty and uncertainty	28
Conclusion	30
Works Cited	32
Websites	32

Introduction

This thesis concentrates on depiction of the themes of sexual identity employed in two novels by Jeanette Winterson. I have chosen this contemporary British author as she made a strong impression on me while reading her novels, which I consider emotive, moving and innovative in certain aspects. I have chosen *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* (1985), not only because it is author's first novel, but also because it is autobiographical (although the author never confirmed this fact). The second book which was chosen is *Written On The Body* (1992). I suppose it could be an interesting contrast to the first book mentioned above due to the fact it is a lyrical novel.

The theoretical part provides an excursion into the women literature of the second half of the 20th century. It starts in the 1960s when women opportunities were expanding and a recognisable number of lesbian-oriented books emerged. Furthermore, it discusses the impact of feminism on women literature and describes certain changes which appeared. Although greater emphasis is put on the works of fiction, certain non-fictional works are mentioned as well. The last period this part describes is the 1980s, the time in which Winterson's first novel *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* was written. The theoretical part also includes the author's biography, containing basic data about her and her main works. It briefly introduces what was her writing influenced by and what are the major themes apparent in her books.

The practical part works with the primary literature and describes individual themes as they occur in both these works. Majority of these motifs is connected with the theme of sexual identity directly, while the connection of some others is rather indirect or metaphorical, yet still relevant. This part begins with *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* as it was published earlier than *Written On The Body*. In both these novels my attempt will be to recognize the most significant attitudes, situations and other aspects that are relevant to the main topic and I will try to analyze and to explore possible interconnectedness between them. I hope to discover to what extent the employed motifs are influenced by the type of the novel and whether they are somewhat related or not.

1 Theoretical part

1.1 Women literature of the 1960s

The 1960s was the age of radical social changes such as the appearance of youth culture, sexual revolution, gay rights movement, rise of feminism, a process of taking apart the traditional family. Consequently, women's perspectives and opportunities were expanding. What broke the barriers to women's freedom and recognition in terms of literature was Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) – one of the most influential books of that period. She was conducting interviews with housewives who were unsatisfied with their roles and tried to raise up topics as women's employment, their consciousness and women's roles in general. Her goal was reached – a debate concerning these topics was aroused and by some considered as a starting point of the second wave of feminism. While the interest of the first wave of feminism was principally in overcoming obstacles connected with law such as the right to vote or to own a property, the second wave feminism women writers started to explore their power and celebrate their experience. As for the main issues, mainly sexuality, employment and workplace, inequalities or family were written on.

Women were also giving their opinions on sexual orientation and a number of lesbian-oriented books emerged, such as Ann Bannon's *The Marriage* (1960), Valerie Taylor's *Unlike Others* (1963) or Marijane Meaker's *We Two Won't Last* (1963). Of course, these women writers were also fighting for being accepted as authors, not only as feminists. They were attempting to change the public's opinion on female authorship, to prove that they are as capable as men, to deny gender stereotypes.

Apart from *The Feminine Mystique*, another significant book was published in 1962 – Doris Lessing's *Golden Notebook*. It is a series of notebooks – Black, Yellow, Red and Blue of the main hero Anna Wulf, who is trying to organize her life according to categories (private and public ones) – such as her experience from WWII, later the experience she gained as a Communist Party member or notes concerning her dreams, feelings and memories. The author also tries to focus on the problems of solitude – Anna Wulf is constantly struggling with the fear of being alone. This Lessing's work could be seen as “an attempt to come to terms with

an intelligent women's sense of private and public diffusions".¹ As feminists often rejected traditional forms and structures in literature, this book can also be seen as a post-modernist experiment – containing multiple narratives and blending together the political and emotional conflicts in the characters' lives. Generally speaking, Lessing is looking for a unity which can support and encourage an individual to survive in the modern life. *The Golden Notebook* is controversial and innovative in its own ways. It comments on women's sexuality and the topic of their relationships with men also emerges. As Lessing stated many times, women had always been expressing these opinions, but had been rarely listened to.

The Dominica-born author Jean Rhys introduced rather unconventional themes into the 1960s women literature. Unlike *The Golden Notebook*, Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) is a historical novel which depicts the society of the post-emancipated Caribbean. In other words, it describes the situation from 1833 onwards, when the Emancipation Act freed the black slaves and ended up with a demise of many white slave owners. *Wide Sargasso Sea* recounts the early life of Mrs. Rochester – a character from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. The injustice of slavery, interactions and prejudices of racial groups and the connection between slavery and femininity are major themes in this novel. It is particularly this book which makes Jean Rhys probably the most famous woman Creole author of the 1960s.

1.2 Rising feminism of the 1970s and its impact on women literature

In the early 1970s, several initial documents of the Lesbian Feminist Movement began to appear. Many of these essays' origin was in the context of group discussions and the essays were addressed to a communal public. The policy of numerous lesbian groups and collectives was influenced by them. Lesbians started to discover their opportunities connected with their historically-conditioned situation. As Julia Penelope expressed in *Lesbian Separatism* (1974), lesbians had been ignored by their culture for a long time, but now they had to take the plunge and decide who they were and what was their identity.

¹Sanders, Andrew. *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

These Lesbian Feminist Movement's early essays also influenced many lesbian groups emerging in the United Kingdom and in North America. Apart from several shorter writings, there was a collection of essays called *Radical Feminism* (1973) edited by Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine and Anita Rapone, published in the USA, which provided an extensive material for these groups. As Paulina Palmer declares: "Its appearance on the shelves of British bookshops was an important event. The lesbian discussion groups talked over several essays it contains."² These essays were stimulating them intellectually, providing the members of these groups a proof they were not alone in creating lesbian literature.

Lesbians were understanding their lesbianism as a choice. Some of them claimed they were lesbians by choice because it gave them independence in their relationships. Another reason for this was that lesbianism allowed them to evolve their individuality. This approach was further developed by Judith Butler in her book *Bodies That Matter* (1993) in which she claims that gender is a social construction, a fiction. "If gender is a social construction of sex, and if there is no access to this "sex" except by means of its construction, then it appears not only that sex is absorbed by gender, but that "sex" becomes something like a fiction."³ In other words, lesbians chose their gender, it was a choice they made in order to be able to realize their potential. Furthermore, Butler claims the society creates a concept of prescribed gender roles. However, everyone has a right to choose his/her gender role and perform it, there is no need to submit to the society.

1.3 New changes in lesbian literature

A new image of lesbian literature was the "defiant" heroine. It is a heroine who is not perverse or deviant, but rather resistant, who defies society. One of the most best-known versions of this heroine is Molly Bolt, a protagonist of R.M. Brown's *Rubyfruit Jungle* (1973). The novel portrays "a lesbian coming of age , literally and metaphorically, charting her progress from childhood to young adulthood which involves the affirmation of the protagonist's lesbian identity and her rejection and move away from the community in which

² Palmer, Paulina. *Contemporary Lesbian Writing*. Buckingham: Open University Press, 1993. 10

³ Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter*. New York: Routledge, 1993. 5

she grew up.⁴ Molly has much in common with Jeanette in Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. Both the girls are adopted, their identity is being constructed through the relation to the community. Additionally, their fathers remain in the background and the girls constantly resist to their mothers. It is typical for novels in which a defiant heroine appears, that the protagonist is inserted into situations which are likely to be considered "so awful by any reader that she will be able to identify with the lesbian heroine's rebellion against this background without having to engage with the protagonist's lesbianism."⁵ In both writings, being a lesbian is never a "problem", but it is rather the narrow-mindedness of a society surrounding them whose reaction to homosexuality is based on prejudices. The heroine's struggle is how to establish herself in her lesbian world, more than how to survive in the heterosexual one.

Additionally, there is a change of vocabulary used in lesbian literature. Unlike the titles of the 1950s and 1960s texts, which were putting an emphasis on the marginalized position of lesbians, in the 1970s the confession of homosexuality became "naturalized". It means a nature-based vocabulary was used. Both titles of the works mentioned above refer to nature. ("Oranges" and "fruit" in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* and both words in the *Rubyfruit jungle*) In the poetry of the American poet Adrienne Rich this vocabulary is noticeable – for example in *Twenty-one Love Poems* (1977) she uses an expression "sacred mountain" as a metaphor for the female body.⁶

Lesbian-feminist literature of this period is very often concerning universal human experience – such as the fear of growing old or how to open oneself to another person. As far as the difference between the heterosexuals and homosexuals is concerned, it is not one of the major topics. However, both the reader and the writer should bear in mind that it exists and that "the universal experiences are somehow filtered through the protagonist's sexual orientation if only because the heterosexist world outside has insisted on the lesbian's difference and has at some time or another impressed that difference on her."⁷ Rich reckons that ignoring the protagonist's sexual orientation results in misreading the work fully. Rich is an example of a lesbian-feminist writer whose experiences have been inspired by a heterosexual world. She feels the need of a "common language" – a language that there is a

⁴Griffin, Gabriele. *Heavenly Love?*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993. 63

⁵Griffin, Gabriele. *Heavenly Love?*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993.66

⁶Griffin, Gabriele. *Heavenly Love?*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993. 70

⁷Faderman, Lilian. *Surpassing the Love of Men*. London: The Women's Press Ltd, 1985. 408-409

need for lesbians to create a language of their own in order to describe themselves and their feelings. During the 1970s a considerable interest of publishing lesbian feminist literature began, which is a crucial step towards its future development.

A name which cannot be omitted when talking about the 1970s women literature is Angela Carter. Her work mainly consists mainly of novels dealing with feminist poetics and politics, for example *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (1972) or *The Passion of New Eve* (1977). However, she is also famous for her collection of fairy tales *The Bloody Chamber* (1979). In Carter's presentation, these ten fairy tales get an original form in terms of the characters and mood description. Carter is dealing particularly with the terrific aspects of marriage and sex and the balance of power within such relationships. She also includes the theme of female identity ("The Bloody Chamber"), as well as pornographical elements which are present in the "Puss-in-Boots". Although it might seem Carter is obsessed with erotic and horror fantasies, she rather likes to play with the stories in sense of re-reading them and inserting new elements into them. According to her own words, she is trying to find the hidden content in the old traditional stories.

1.4 Non-fiction of the late 1970s and the early 1980s

As a consequence of the rising feminism in the 1970s, women started to explore and highlight differences among them. Discussions dealing with topics such as mother-daughter relationships, race and sexual orientation became very lively. The interest was in both women's emotional and sexual attachments. The first non-fictional text dealing with female friendship and relationships in the late 1970s was Nina Auerbach's *Communities of Women* (1977). This work's aim was to uncover a history of female communities from Greek mythology to the present.

Similarly, Lilian Faderman's *Surpassing The Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (1981) was a result of this growing interest in relationships among women. It reconstructs the history of love between women and its uniqueness lies in expressing new ideas – for example that romantic friendships between women in the 19th century had no sexual component. Faderman

examines the traditional view of lesbianism, she tries to demonstrate why love between women is acceptable in one period of time and taken as a taboo topic in another.

1.5 Fiction of the late 1970s

The novel of self-discovery (sometimes also called “The Coming Out Novel“) is one of the most popular kinds of lesbian fiction of the late 1970s. The distinctive feature of this novel is a description of the heroine’s psychological development and its progress. It usually depicts her discovery of her lesbian orientation, which is the essential topic of the novel. This type of novel also depicts the heroine’s act of resistance to the dominant culture and the relationship she creates within the lesbian community in which she finds support.

Another element which relates the novels of self-discovery is a frequent use of the motif of unlearning. The concept of unlearning⁸ has a crucial role in the experience of many lesbians. The Australian writer Elizabeth Riley develops this concept in her novel *All That False Instruction* (1975), where she claims that in order to achieve a lesbian identity, it is important to reject the stereotypes which are established by the dominant culture. The unlearning is a process of forgetting the conventions of heterosexual world, its aim is to liberate women from the stereotypical constraints of that world.

In *All That False Instruction* Riley also touches on the topic of lesbian suffering – she considers lesbians victims who have to face the injustice from society. She expresses her ideas through Maureen Craig – the main protagonist. Maureen’s protest against the male expectations of femininity begins in her girlhood and intensifies as she ages. She often feels herself being mistreated, sometimes even abused because of her sexual orientation.

All That False Instruction features another topic by which it is related to the writings of late the 1970s and it is the lesbian feminist community. It is simply a group of women with the same sexual identity and opinions on feminism in which all its members can find support and understanding. Paradoxically, Riley’s novel concentrates on its absence and expresses its psychological and social importance. As far as sexual relationships are concerned, Riley represents them as a must women have to undergo rather than an enjoyable act. Other examples of the novel of self-discovery could be *A Piece of the Night* (1978) by Michele Roberts or *On Strike again God* (1980) by Joanna Russ.

⁸ The concept of unlearning is presented by Paulina Palmer in *Contemporary Lesbian Writing*. Buckingham: Open University Press. 1993. 41-42

1.6 Further development in the 1980s

Another type of a novel written by lesbian writers in the 1980s is a novel focusing on lesbian groups and organizations, such as Lisa Alther's *Other Women* (1984) or Barbara Wilson's *Ambitious Women* (1982). From the mid-1980s onwards, a general view on these communities changed. They were no longer seen as groups of women sharing similar interests and attitudes, but as organizations where differences of race, class, age or ideology are accepted. *Ambitious Women* highlights the value of these women's communities, as well as their fragility. Wilson depicts a group of women who differ in sexual orientation, age and social rank. However, their relationships are open and sincere.

Similarly to Barbara Wilson, Anna Wilson's fiction *Athogether Elsewhere* (1985) also examines the strong and weak sides of women organizations, it also explores the conflicts which can rise from these differences. Actually, differences between communities are Anna Wilson's essential aim. "Group interaction and fiction is a theme which Wilson treats with exceptional sensitivity and acumen, and the latter novel focuses on it more strongly than the former."⁹ The novel depicts a group of women who differ in sexual orientation, race and class, they gather in order to challenge male violence. They patrol the streets at night with the purpose of protecting other women from being raped or becoming a target of male aggression. Through the narrative Wilson emphasises the difficulties they have to face while working together, since their backgrounds and attitudes vary.

1.7 The thriller as a new genre in the lesbian-oriented literature

The second half of the 1980s was devoted to experiments in reworking popular genres such as the science fiction, comic novel and thriller. It encouraged the writers to mix both low and high style, the marginal with the mainstream. The introduction of these new genres enabled the authors to achieve a larger degree of diversity in lesbian literature, as it has always been a rather minor form of writing. While lesbian comic novel and science fiction had not received much attention, a genre which has occurred as particularly popular was the thriller. It represents strategies employed by writers to bring themes of romance and sex into the thriller format, which are present in *She Came in a Flesh* (1988) by Mary Wings and *Death Wore a Diadem* (1989) by Iona McGregor.

⁹Palmer, Paulina. *Contemporary Lesbian Writing*. Buckingham: Open University Press, 1993. 58

Both these books also combine features from the crime and detective novel. The writer usually forms her text on one of them but adds enriching features from the other. In *She Came in Flesh*, the construction of the crime (murder of the main character Emma Victor's old school friend) and its investigation are neat – which is typical of crime fiction. However, other features suggest influence from the detective novel. For example, the story takes place in the luxurious setting of a Californian New Age Commune – which is rather associated with the detective novel. As far as the *Death Wore a Diadem* is concerned, various genres can be found in this novel as well. The whole text's structure resembles a detective novel, the setting of the 19th century Edinburgh links it to historical fiction. There are also references to women's contributions to medical and teaching areas. These two novels prove that the representation of personal relationships in lesbian crime fiction varies. While in Wing's novel, lesbian sex is represented by Emma's rapid and intensive surges, McGregor depicts it as emotional and romantic.

The above described 1980s novels share a common feature - they are innovative as they provide an "excursion" into the problems lesbians faced in this era. They offer a view into the lesbians' psychology and emotions, mainly in the novel of self-discovery. Barbara Wilson and Lisa Alther introduce the topics of women and lesbian communities. The emphasis on lesbian perspectives occurs in Anna Wilson's novel, who also deals with the difficulties in women relationships. The end of the 1980s witnessed the tendency of writers to reject forms political in character (such as the Coming Out novel), as their interest was mainly in the popular genres – the thriller being the most common. All these works create an insight into the complexity of women's life in patriarchal culture.

1.8 Jeanette Winterson's biography

Jeanette Winterson was born in 1959 and was adopted and raised by evangelist parents. Her adolescence was a constant struggle between her relationship to God and divinity and her sexuality. She left home at the age of sixteen due to her love for another girl. Since then she supported herself by evening and weekend work. Winterson's literary career started in 1985 when she published her first novel, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985), which launched her literary career.

The mid-1980s – a period in which Winterson and her fellow writers (Salman Rushdie, Julian Barnes) were publishing their major works, was a period of social and

political disarray. Jeanette Winterson belonged to the group of writers whose work rarely reflected the contemporary situation. She was rather “pre-occupied with identity and selfhood as a fictional construction.”¹⁰ This feature is also evident in her next novel *The Passion* (1987) whose plot is set in Napoleonic wars and *Sexing The Cherry* (1989) occurring in the 17th century.

Winterson is influenced by modernist narrative techniques, as she enjoys experimenting with fictional forms and sees art as an essential value of human existence. In 1995 she published a collection of essays *Art&Objects* in which she emphasizes the role of art in life. “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.”¹¹ The main theme of these essays is that art is central to human life. Winterson also suggests that for her art replaces the evangelical religion which she encountered in her youth.

Winterson follows the tradition of Gertrude Stein or T.S. Eliot as she experiments with literary genres and forms. In *Written On The Body* (1992), which she labeled as an experimental novel, she claims that “it is the clichés that cause the trouble.”¹² In spite of the fact she has never labeled herself as a poet, this work bears evident features of poetry. Her longing for experiments with language can be also found in *Art&Lies* (1994) – “a radical deformation of language and literary form”¹³. She concentrated on the connection between this book and music- instead of the written ending, she used a section from Strauss's opera *Der Rosenkavalier*. Additionally, her tendency for experimental forms is apparent in her last book *The Stone Gods* (2007), which has a lot in common with the science fiction genre.

As for the major themes in Winterson's works, there are three most essential ones, which occur in her works frequently. Firstly, the enduring theme is love. She presents it as a transcendental value, which is independent on institutions such as marriage. In fact, quite a strong anti-marriage approach is presented in most of her works. All her novels explore love in various ways – the risk of falling in love with another person, breaking up, sexual desire. In her novel *Lighthousekeeping* (2004) she tries to find a universal mode of expression that

¹⁰ Andermahr, Sonya. *Jeanette Winterson: A Contemporary Critical Guide*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. 16

¹¹ www.jeanettewinterson.com. January 21, 2012

¹² Winterson, Jeanette. *Written On The Body*. London: Vintage, 2001. 77

¹³ Andermahr, Sonya. *Jeanette Winterson: A Contemporary Critical Guide*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. 18

would speak to all lovers regardless their gender and sexuality. Secondly, another theme used by Winterson in her novels is the metaphor of lovemaking as writing. The human body is often pictured as a piece of writing or a text which the lover reads. This occurs mainly in *Written On The Body* (1992) and *The Powerbook* (2000), both of these novels focus on the relationship between body and reading. As Ginette Carpenter says, if body works as a metaphor of reading, it means that reading becomes something that can transform and change lives.¹⁴ The last feature which appears in most of Winterson's works is the reworking of fairy tales, an Arthurian legend (*Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*) and a classical myth, especially in *Weight* (2005), which is a reworking of the story of Atlas and Hercules.

As the above implies, Jeanette Winterson is an acknowledged experimenter with narrative forms and techniques. Although she tries to resist being labeled, she can be marked as a lesbian-feminist writer. Her career proceeds simultaneously in two directions – towards the universal, general readership and towards more specific readers – especially lesbians and feminists. Her position within the contemporary British literature is unique due to the fact that her work features aspects of postmodernist and feminist traditions, and provides a journey through space, time, and gender.

¹⁴ Carpenter, Ginette. "Reading the reader." *Jeanette Winterson: A Contemporary Critical Guide*. Sonya Andermahr. London. Continuum. 2007. 79

2 Practical part

2.1 *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*

2.1.1 *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* – an autobiographical novel?

Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit is Jeanette Winterson's first novel. Although the author herself did not characterize it as an autobiographical one, there is a certain overlap of the most crucial events in her life and the novel's plot. The main protagonist's name is called Jeanette, she has been adopted by evangelist parents and raised and trained to be a preacher – these elements are identical with Winterson's life. Even the following events – her first relationship with members of her own gender, conflicts with the congregation, leaving home at sixteen, working in various part-time jobs – all of them are based on her own life experience as well. However, several inserted mythical stories and fables refuse the designation as an autobiographical novel. Placing these stories is not accidental, they fulfill a certain role. They question reality, validity and seriousness of the whole story. "This is the way with stories; we make them what we will. It's a way of explaining the universe while leaving the universe unexplained... The only thing for certain is how complicated it all is, like string full of knots. It's all there but hard to find the beginning and impossible to fathom the end."¹⁵ Considering the fact none of the stories can be verified by any reliable data, all of them are to be accepted as fictions. Consequently, the same criteria can be applied to the rest of the book – Jeanette's description of her childhood and adolescence. It seems that Winterson herself is trying to suggest to the readers that the whole book might not be a true account at all. Kim Middletown Meyer says this feature is most visible especially in her first novel: "A fictional/autobiographical technique that continually questions the relationship between literature and life, the written and the real, appears in many of her subsequent writings, but none so dramatically as in this first novel."¹⁶ The author tries to demonstrate that no stories are utterly true, their faithfulness always depends on both the writer's and the reader's subjectivity. In other words, the more readers, the more interpretations.

As the above implies, there is no right answer whether the novel is an autobiographical one or not. Although many features support the fact it is, certain amount of them deny it. Taking into

¹⁵ Winterson, Jeanette. *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. London: Vintage, 1996. 91

¹⁶ Lane, Richard J., Rod Mengham, Philip Tew. *Contemporary British Fiction*. Cambridge: John Wiley & Sons, 2003. 211

account it is Winterson's first novel, it is possible she wanted to keep a certain distance from what she had written. She herself might have been confused by her different sexuality, which lead to writing an autobiographically-based story without admitting it directly.

2.1.2 Catholic Church and its acceptance of homosexuality

Jeanette (both the author and the protagonist) comes from an evangelical family, as already mentioned above. Both her parents are believers and especially her mother is very closely attached to the Church community and its members. Jeanette has never been acquainted with any other religion or view of the world. Therefore she accepts all its values and respects its rules. However, as she is growing up, she disagrees with some of the pastor's statements. Later on, she strongly disagrees when the Church says loving the same gender is incorrect. Two issues are concerned at the same time – sexual identity of the main hero and the Church's attitude to it.

The way the Church tries to cope with Jeanette's homosexuality is quite unusual. None of the members has ever mentioned she is lesbian, they all are convinced she has been "attacked" by a demon. She is very confused and a certain turning point of her thinking can be seen there. She feels to be betrayed by the Church. Jeanette has always been taught it is God who is preparing a way for her. Now she is becoming a bit suspicious and uncertain about it. Additionally, she observes that other members are not truly convinced about all the commandments either. Again, she starts to question the interpretation of the Bible similarly as she does with the mythical stories. She is analysing this in the Deuteronomy chapter. What she criticises here is a blind acceptance of biblical stories and their content. Even these stories were written by someone, which means they are subjective, thus shaped by their writer. She is concerned about believing these stories and chapters without even having doubts about their validity. "If you always eat out you can never be sure what's going in, and received information is nobody's exercise. Here is some advice. If you want to keep your own teeth, make your own sandwiches."¹⁷ Although the author is writing about stories, it might have a much more general connotation – human tendency to believe something, but without searching for its roots and basis. The same applies to homosexuality – the Church rejects it without being interested in what it is influenced by and why it actually happens.

¹⁷ Winterson, Jeanette. *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. London: Vintage, 1996. 93

When Jeanette is asked to repent because of her relationship with Melanie, she leaves home to stay overnight at Miss Jewsbury's. As she discovers, Miss Jewsbury is a lesbian herself and they sleep together. This is an interesting experience for Jeanette – on the one hand because of the sex, on the other hand because she is Christian and does not know how to cope with it. She might query the existing situation. Miss Jewsbury is lesbian, but still a member of community, still accepted by God. Why could not Jeanette be the same? Later on, she decides to insist on her decision and preserve her feelings and quits the Church. Nevertheless, she never mentions to act against God. Although the Church community excluded her, she has accepted God and the Church as she sees them to be – sometimes imperfect.

2.1.3 The family and its role

The family and relationships within it is one of the central themes in Winterson's novels. Friendship occurs only in *The Passion* and unnamed friends are mentioned in *Written On the Body*. Consequently, family is concerned very frequently in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. This chapter was included in order to describe the background Jeanette was coming from and which have influenced her sexual identity.

Jeanette comes from a traditional religious family. Nevertheless, its structure and functions are traditional only in some ways. First of all, a certain switch of traditional gender division appears. It is Jeanette's father who is the weakest figure of the whole family. As he is rather subdominant and passive, the writer rarely mentions him. Much more often, she regrets him. "Poor Dad, he was never quite good enough."¹⁸ Even the house works traditionally attached to men are done by Jeanette's mother – for instance building a bathroom.

Moreover, no sexual relationship appears between the parents. As Jeanette declares, her mother used to go to bed at four and her father would get up at five o'clock. It also suggests why their daughter was adopted. In addition, her mother avoids speaking about her former relationships. She only mentions Pierre with whom she had sex, but apparently regrets it. There is an interesting issue of her mother's inclination towards other women, which comes out when Jeanette and her mother are looking through a photograph album. There is a picture of Eddy's sister. As soon as Jeanette asks about her, it is removed from the album and never discussed again. Even though it is not a prove of something specific, it gives Jeanette a

¹⁸ Winterson, Jeanette. *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. London: Vintage, 1996. 11

certain suggestion. She is suspicious about her mother's desire towards this woman. Presumably, her mother has suppressed it and has kept on doing so since that time. Another hint is given to Jeanette when she visits Miss Jewsbury. "She's a woman of the world, even though she'd never admit it to me. She knows about feelings, especially women's feelings."¹⁹ To some extent this explains mother's rather conventional marriage. She married in order to be able to adopt a daughter, not because of loving her father.

Having found her adoption papers, Jeanette is confused and disappointed. Nevertheless, she does not comment on it very much. There is no passage which would regret not having this information from her mother or speculating on her origin and her biological parents. In spite of the fact the biological ties are missing, there still exists a firm attachment to the past, as Jeanette's mother was taking care of her since she was born.

Although Winterson does not comment on the fact that she has been adopted very much, certain consequences can be seen throughout the novel. One of them is lack of understanding between Jeanette and her mother. Jeanette is continually pushed into something she in fact does not want to. A disagreement of larger extent emerges when buying a new mackintosh for Jeanette. Despite her strong objections, her mother chose a large pink one for her. Jeanette hates it from the very beginning. The reason is not just its colour and size – neither of them suits her - but the conflict with her soul. The bright pink colour usually expressing girliness is in contrast with her homosexuality. It is the mother's attempt to force her daughter into something she rejects. It is not only the mackintosh she hates, it is the obligation to follow her mother's ideas and decisions. She thinks of the *The Man in the Iron Mask*, who was kept in a prison wearing an iron mask on his face. It is this pink mackintosh which is a symbol of this mask – she feels imprisoned as well and prevented from expressing her objections. Paradoxically, she is wearing this very piece of clothing when she meets Melanie – her first love. Apparently, this was a final attempt done by her mother to which she yielded. As Ellam declares, the mother's character is full of contrasts. "When Jeanette changes her mind and no longer wants to be this missionary her mother's reaction is illogical yet typical of her paradoxical character. Mother's complicated mind could never stop wishing

¹⁹ Winterson, Jeanette. *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. London: Vintage, 1996. 104

that Jeanette would be a missionary. ²⁰ Nevertheless, Jeanette chooses a different way of life which is a difficult fact for her mother to cope with.

To sum up, the only traditional function of Jeanette's family is that she belongs somewhere and is provided with food and clothes. Although Jeanette mentions she loves her mother, she does not bring any information about her father. There are hardly any proves she considers family a source of pleasant feelings and moments. Moreover, the relationships within the family certainly formed Jeanette's sexual identity – especially the switch of gender roles.

2.1.4 Women community and its influence on the main protagonist's acceptance of her sexuality

The main protagonist spends most of her time in the church community consisting mostly of women. In spite of the fact the main authority is represented by a male pastor, the everyday organization is carried out by women. Since the Church plays an essential role in Jeanette's life and she is very fond of it, she treats the community the same way – she respects and loves it simultaneously. The structure she is acquainted with within the Church is a means which forms her opinion on traditional family role division. It affects on her view of gender role paradigms surrounding her, marriage being one of them. To some extent she is influenced by her dream about her own wedding. She sees herself walking up the aisle to meet a husband. "...there were 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."²¹ It might explain why she does not see a reason for getting married. "This reveals Jeanette's awakening sexuality and her anxieties about becoming part of a traditional heterosexual relationship."²² In other words, the background where she is being raised has an indisputable influence on her. The women community provides her everything she needs and she likes to be surrounded by them. Therefore Jeanette finds comfort and love in the people of her own gender in the future.

²⁰ Ellam, Julie. *Love in Jeanette Winterson's novels*. Amsterdam-New York: Editions Roboti B.V., 2010. 20

²¹ Winterson, Jeanette. *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. London: Vintage, 1996. 69

²² Bentley, Nick. *Contemporary British fiction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008. 111

After Jeanette has discovered, she is “distinct“, she is naturally puzzled. However, soon afterwards she finds out that some women of the community are also lesbians and that is one of the reasons why she does not feel neither guilty nor stressed about it. She does not feel as if she were suffering from a disease or committing a sin. She regards her feelings as natural and instinctive. Jeanette’s discussion with Melanie could be a prove of this fact. ““Do you think this is Unnatural Passion?’ I asked her once. ‘Doesn’t feel like it. According to Pastor Finch, that’s awful.’ She must be right, I thought.”²³ Jeanette is sure she is not to blame. This is how Mekinen comments on it. “The lesbian protagonists have no difficulty with their sexuality, accepting it as unproblematic and this construction argues for an equivalent value of heterosexuality, indeed an open celebration of lesbianism.”²⁴ It follows that it is not the protagonists’ conscience which causes them troubles. It is the society and its acceptance of them they have difficulties to cope with. On the one hand, in Jeanette’s case the women community did not help her much to show she is accepted the way she is. On the other hand, it helped Jeanette to realize she is not “so“ different by discovering the fact that some of its members have a different sexual orientation as well. However, Jeanette was the only one to admit it.

2.1.5 The symbol of oranges

The title of this Winterson’s novel was not chosen incidentally. The more the book is progressing to the end, the clearer its meaning is gradually becoming. The oranges appear in various situations. Jeanette’s mother uses them to comfort her daughter – Jeanette is offered an orange when she goes to school for the first time or when she is being cured in a hospital. Once Jeanette hesitates or feels uncertain about something, she is offered an orange.. By giving Jeanette an orange, her mother means to say that following God is the right way, he will take care of her. The oranges are symbol which represents the system Jeanette is being raised in and influenced by. As the title suggests, oranges – or in the other words the Church, for which only heterosexuality is considered to be right, are (is) not the only way. Although Jeanette’s sexual identity is formed by “oranges“, she chooses the other way.

²³Winterson, Jeanette. *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. London: Vintage, 1996. 86

²⁴Makinen, Merja. *The Novels of Jeanette Winterson*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. 7

Soon after Jeanette had repented and thus her relationship with Melanie had finished, her mother brought her something to her room. “It was a bowl of oranges. I took out the largest and tried to peel it. The skin hung stubborn, and soon I lay panting, angry and defeated. What about grapes and bananas?”²⁵ The last sentence expressed her anxiety. The “grapes and bananas” could be replaced by “other types of love”. It seems that Jeanette is trying to convey the message of possible existence of other relationships, not just the heterosexual one. There is one more situation in which the same principle is obvious. When Jeanette meets Melanie after their relationship has finished, Melanie offers her an orange. “‘Want an orange?’ she offered as we sat close, in a steady silence. She made to peel it. I grabbed her arm. ‘No, don’t do that. I mean I’ll be having tea soon. Don’t waste it.’”²⁶ Jeanette refuses and by this refusal expresses her attitude towards heterosexuality. She decides to remain loyal to her fundamental conviction, beliefs and sexuality.

At the end of the novel, Jeanette returns to her home town and stays in her mother’s house. “The latter behaves as if Jeanette had never left home but arguably her very indifference suggests that Jeanette’s difference has been accepted if not approved. Significantly, it is her mother who speaks the words of the novel’s title when she philosophically admits that oranges are not the only fruit.”²⁷ Her mother has finally accepted other ways of love apart from heterosexuality. Ellam reckons that Jeanette’s excommunication is also partly caused because of her mother’s inability to understand what love is.²⁸ Paradoxically, what becomes apparent is that lesbianism Jeanette’s mother was blaming her daughter for, is partly the mother’s fault. Stating that “Oranges are not the only fruit” might be considered as a kind of conceding her mistake and admission of her blame.

2.1.6 Biblical allusions

What is easily noted by every reader of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* is the fact that the Bible creates a framework for Winterson’s writing. “Such a narrative form would apparently indicate an acceptance of biblical authority. In Winterson’s hands, however, it acts only as a

²⁵ Winterson, Jeanette. *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. London: Vintage, 1996. 111

²⁶ Winterson, Jeanette. *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. London: Vintage, 1996. 119

²⁷ Andermahr, Sonya. *Jeanette Winterson: A Contemporary Critical Guide*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. 59

²⁸ Ellam, Julie. *Love in Jeanette Winterson’s novels*. Amsterdam-New York: Editions Roboti B.V., 2010. 38

framework that allows other narratives to intrude.²⁹ There are several inserted stories based on biblical events. One of them is the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. These names emerge twice in the novel. Firstly, Elsie names like this three mice in her paper painted box and, secondly, they are names of the sorcerer's three ravens. These names appear in the biblical book of Daniel. While Jewish people were staying in exile, these three men were working for King Nebucanezzar. Once they refused to fulfill their king's wish, a consequence of which was king's anger and immediate casting into a furnace. However, none of them died since they were all saved by God. The king Nebuccanezzar made up his mind, gave them freedom and, moreover, praised the immensity of their God. Winterson must have been well acquainted with this story as she provided a "modern transcription" of it in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. Similarly to these three men, Jeanette also reacts against the higher authority – the Church and its ideal of heterosexuality in this case. She is not thrown into a furnace, but punished anyway – she is ostracised from the community and labelled as "full of demons"³⁰. Against all the odds she does not give in. She still retains her belief in God and it is actually what brings her salvation.

As the above demonstrates, the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego mirrors Jeanette's story. It proves that the way to success leads through suffering and anguish and those who are truly faithful will be protected. Eventually, same as these three men, even Winterson is eventually promoted and appreciated by the society.

Moreover, all the chapters follow the Bible's arrangement. *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* consists of eight chapters whose names are identical with the first eight parts of the Bible. The reason for this is the fact that the only book ever mentioned in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* is the Bible and *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë. Jeanette's mother was occasionally reading this book to Jeanette, slightly shaping the story in order to "educate" her in terms of women-men relationships.

For instance, Jeanette's early age and childhood is described in the first chapter entitled Genesis. Genesis in the Bible depicts creating of the world and beginning of the life on the Earth. Another feature consistent with this chapter is the appearance of number seven. According to the Bible, the world was created in seven days. Jeanette is exactly seven years

²⁹ Lane, Richard J., Rod Mengham, Philip Tew. *Contemporary British Fiction*. Cambridge: John Wiley & Sons, 2003. 212

³⁰ Winterson, Jeanette. *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. London: Vintage, 1996. 119

old when Pastor Finch tells her she “could herself be a house of demons”³¹, and adds that the demon might return sevenfold.

Another biblical part, Exodus, describes the flight of the Israeli people from Egypt. This is a metaphor for Jeanette’s leaving for school described in the novel’s Exodus chapter. She is rather an outcast there, no one likes her religious drawings and she is accused of being too much preoccupied with God. In other words, she is facing many troubles – similarly as the Israeli people after leaving Egypt. In the biblical Exodus Ten Commandments are mentioned for the first time and so are in the *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. “My mother hooted and took me to the cinema as a treat. They were showing *The Ten Commandments*.”³² On the other hand “biblical episodes and themes also have their authority undercut by appearing in settings which are comically inappropriate.”³³ For instance, when Jeanette wants to create a present for Elsie, a member of the Church community, she wants to use the text: “The summer has ended and we are not yet saved“, which might seem a bit queer, but for an 8-year-old child who is being raised up in an evangelical family, it is probably natural.

As for the link between this chapter and the theme of sexual identity, this connection is rather indirect. Winterson uses the Bible as a source of inspiration. Her aim was to provide a description of her own experience of discovering a lesbian in herself, of her new identity. She uses the Bible as a means which helps her to organize her writing and share feelings with a reader.

2.1.7 The story of Winnet and the orange demon

Once Jeanette begins to be in opposition against both her family and the local Church community, Winterson uses her fantasy and inserts another story. This is a story of Winnet – an imaginative protagonist. This name is a combination of the first syllable of author’s surname and the last syllable of her first name. Winnet is an adopted daughter whose father wants to make her his apprentice to keep the “magic arts“. All goes well until Winnet is expelled from the community. She decides to travel to a great city, which is a place without betrayal, where truth matters. The story ends with Winnet on the threshold of this new world.

³¹ Winterson, Jeanette. *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. London: Vintage, 1996. 12

³² Winterson, Jeanette. *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. London: Vintage, 1996. 42

³³ Palmer, Paulina. *Contemporary Lesbian Writing*. Buckingham: Open University Press, 1993. 32

Similarities between Winnet and Jeanette's stories are evident, because Jeanette's mother also wants her daughter to be a kind of apprentice, a missionary in this case. It is interesting that there is a switch of the gender (Winnet has a father), but the story remains the same. As Andermahr explains, this story not only offers a mythical parallel to Jeanette's story, it also brings a supernatural feature in it.³⁴ Once, Winnet's lucky pebble appears in Jeanette's pocket. This pebble, like the whole story, seems to be a certain support for Winterson. "Winnet, like Jeanette, wanders beyond the sway of those who would exercise power on her, while at the same time retaining the skills she had learned from them."³⁵ As she was dealing with all the problems concerning her sexuality, she obviously needed some encouragement. Consequently, she made up a story with a heroine, whose fate is similar to hers.

Jeanette is also having dialogues with an orange demon. It is another imaginative figure which helps her dealing with the Church's accusations. The demon suggests the only way to keep her integrity is keeping the demon.

Jeanette as a social being naturally longs for sympathy and understanding. She faces difficulties finding it in the enclosed society she lives in and that is the why she escapes to her fantasy. She identifies herself with Winnet, who is an outcast as well. It seems that while struggling with her homosexuality, Jeanette needs to find an evidence which proves that different identity is not an obstacle to reach success. And it is Winnet who is the proof of this.

³⁴ Andermahr, Sonya. *Jeanette Winterson: A Contemporary Critical Guide*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. 58

³⁵ Lane, Richard J., Rod Mengham, Philip Tew. *Contemporary British Fiction*. Cambridge: John Wiley & Sons, 2003. 212

2.2 *Written On The Body*

Written On The Body (1992) is a lyrical novel with the first person narrator. The narrator's identity remains uncovered throughout the whole novel. The author does not provide neither the narrator's name, nor his/her gender. This sexually indeterminate narrator suffers permanent anxiety and distress, he/she finds relief only in temporary love affairs. As for the plot, the novel describes a love relationship between the narrator and Louise, who is married. Louise leaves her husband in order to live with the narrator. Subsequently, the narrator discovers Louise suffers from blood cancer and decides to leave her to her husband Elgin, who is a cancer specialist. The narrator moves to the countryside to study medical textbooks to learn as much as possible about his/her lover's disease. He/She meets an other woman and has a short affair with her, but afterwards he/she realizes his/her love for Louise and decides to discover where she is. However, the narrator does not succeed and only expresses his/her wish to tell Louise how much he/she loves her.

The title of the novel itself implies the similarities with tattooing – which is actually writing on a naked body. Both love and tattooing could be seen as a means of causing pain as well as a device of creating an unerasable print in (on) the human's body. "The moulds of your teeth are easy to see under my shirt but the L tattoos me on the inside is not visible to the naked body"³⁶ The "L tattoos" probably stand for "love", which is according to the narrator, inscribed in his/her body.

2.2.1 Device of sexually undetermined narrator

The narrator of *Written On The Body* is unreliable. As he/she admits "I can't be relied to describe Elgin properly."³⁷ and his/her point of view of other people is very subjective and, consequently, the characters' description is untrustworthy. Moreover, what makes the narrator very unusual is his/her unknown gender. There are several hints suggesting the narrator is female "I shall call myself Alice"³⁸, "I felt like a girl in the story of Rumpelstiltskin"³⁹, but

³⁶ Winterson, Jeanette. *Written On The Body*. London: Vintage, 2001. 118

³⁷ Winterson, Jeanette. *Written On The Body*. London: Vintage, 2001. 92

³⁸ Winterson, Jeanette. *Written On The Body*. London: Vintage, 2001. 10

³⁹ Winterson, Jeanette. *Written On The Body*. London: Vintage, 2001. 44

there are also signifiers suggesting the narrator is male “Christopher Robin”⁴⁰ or a “street job”⁴¹. Additionally, Winterson also often uses the phrase “I had a girlfriend once”⁴² with almost the same frequency as “I had a boyfriend once”⁴³. Thus, the reader is permanently unaware how to decode these clues. Neither the situation in which Elgin’s maleness is ridiculed while he is wearing a pink helmet does not provide any reliable explanation. According to Hobbs, “Elgin becomes a physical representation of the penis, a literal caricature of male biology: he is a cock.”⁴⁴ His maleness, which is socially and historically constructed, is not sufficient to satisfy Louise. However, both the narrators, male and female could emphasise the colour of Elgin’s helmet in order to ridicule his maleness.

Conversely, at some point the narrator seems to be male, such as in the situation when he/she is in the hospital, in the waiting room in front of the Venereal Diseases section. “At the Clap Clinic the following day, I looked at my fellow sufferers. Shifty Jack-the-lads, fat businessman in suits cut to hide the bulge. A few women, tarts yes, and other women too. ‘Who gave it to you, love?’ I wanted to say to one middle-aged woman in a floral print.”⁴⁵ What becomes apparent from this situation, it is the “otherness” of the women in the waiting room. It is their femaleness which is “other”, as the narrator is obviously male. On the other hand, when Louise decides to leave Elgin and is confessing her love to the narrator, there is a switch in the gender role. “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 putting an emphasis on biological similarity of the narrator and Louise – who is known to be female. Their bodies look the same, and so do their blood and face. This is a fact which is not to be noticed from the ambiguous narrative style, but something we can actually deduce from their physical description.

The text provides two different meanings – it depends on whether the reader believes the narrator to be a man or a woman. By creating this undeclared narrator, Winterson is aiming to derange the traditional perception of gender differences. This narrative strategy serves to “defamiliarize” gender norms, the author is trying to make the readers pose the

⁴⁰ Winterson, Jeanette. *Written On The Body*. London: Vintage, 2001. 77

⁴¹ Winterson, Jeanette. *Written On The Body*. London: Vintage, 2001. 94

⁴² Winterson, Jeanette. *Written On The Body*. London: Vintage, 2001. 19

⁴³ Winterson, Jeanette. *Written On The Body*. London: Vintage, 2001. 62

⁴⁴ Hobbs, Richard. *Writing On The Body*. Nottingham: Paupers’s Press, 2004. 11

⁴⁵ Hobbs, Richard. *Writing On The Body*. Nottingham: Paupers’s Press, 2004. 46

⁴⁶ Hobbs, Richard. *Writing On The Body*. Nottingham: Paupers’s Press, 2004. 99

question of what we assume to be normal and natural for each sex? Nevertheless, there is no explanation given and the narrator's gender is remaining undisclosed. The reader is therefore made not to rely on general knowledge about the gender patterns or, in other words, what is believed men and women do. The narrator crosses boundaries which are socially constructed – such as sexuality, gender and identity. His/ her unfixed gender might have a double influence – for some readers it might be rather frustrating and for others it might represent a pleasant relief.

2.2.2 Louise as representation of a woman

Unlike the narrator's, his lover Louise's gender is known to the reader from the very beginning. She is a woman, although her sexual orientation is unknown. She lives with her loving husband Elgin in a house from the 19th century. However, it is not only the house which suggests that she does not “belong“ to the 20th century. She is a representative of time in which the female and male roles were marked and distinguished between. This might lead the narrator to assume that Louise is a woman made within “the cultural confines of historical representation, a woman constructed.”⁴⁷ Another feature supporting this fact is her liking of their house's attic – a dark and mysterious place – where she and her lover meet in order to make love. It is possible that Winterson wants to highlight the similarity between the Gothic motif of the madwoman in the attic (derived from Charlotte Brontë's Bertha Mason - a character in *Jane Eyre*) and her heroine. As far as Louise's character is concerned, again, 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.”⁴⁸ Louise is often described as a beautiful and charming person. However, she has no children and neither longs for having any. It seems pure and romantic love is the only thing she desires to have, her only achievement. Louise leaves her husband in order to live with the narrator, to fulfill her dream. This intention is, however, thwarted by her illness.

Nevertheless, according do Andermahr, even the narrator leans to the tradition of romantic love – he/she is depicted as a lady's protector.⁴⁹ Once he/she discovers Louise

⁴⁷ Hobbs, Richard. *Writing On The Body*. Nottingham: Paupers's Press, 2004. 15

⁴⁹ Andermahr, Sonya. *Jeanette Winterson: A Contemporary Critical Guide*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. 80-81

suffers from cancer, the narrator decides to defend her. (“Will you let me crawl inside you, stand guard over you, trap them as they come at you?”)⁵⁰ The narrator is aware of his/her possible abandonment of these romantic principles. Immediately after Gail accuses him/her of stopping to support Louise (who is emotionally dependent on the narrator), this is what comes to his/her mind : “That doesn’t sound like the heroics I had in mind. Hadn’t I sacrificed myself for her? Offered my life for her life?”⁵¹. The narrator thinks himself/herself to be a romantic hero whose deal is to save someone else’s life, to devote himself/herself to the beloved person. At this point, he/she starts to have doubts whether the goal has been fully reached.

2.2.3 The theme of clichés

While reading *Written on The Body* it can be noticed that Winterson frequently uses one particular sentence. It says “It’s the clichés that cause the trouble”⁵² Throughout the story, she often questions various clichés concerning love, relationships or feelings and presents her attitude towards them. Winterson might be pointing on that if there were no clichés, there would be no obstacles.

Once the narrator longs for expressing his/her love for Louise, he/she faces a difficulty finding the adequate words for it. In his/her opinion, the phrase “I love you” is too common, too empty and hollow to be used. Therefore, the narrator decides to avoid this cliché through using scientific and medical language. For instance, before the narrator starts to explore and admire Louise’s skin, he/she includes the definition of skin provided by one of his/her medical books “The skin is composed of two main parts: the dermis and the epidermis.”⁵³ By bringing together and mixing apparently two distinctive languages – the language of medicine/anatomy and the language of emotions, the text provides us with a possibility of seeing beyond the conventions of each of the two discourses. Winterson also comments on the paradox within Louise’s body. In the above mentioned part about her skin, the following sentence is: “Odd to think that the piece of you I know the best is already dead.” In other words, while the external body seems to be perfect, the body “underneath the skin” is dying due to Louise’s cancer. Moreover, Winterson “forges a reinvigorated language of love out of

⁵⁰ Winterson, Jeanette. *Written On The Body*. London: Vintage, 2001. 115

⁵¹ Winterson, Jeanette. *Written On The Body*. London: Vintage, 2001. 159

⁵² Winterson, Jeanette. *Written On The Body*. London: Vintage, 2001. 10

⁵³ Winterson, Jeanette. *Written On The Body*. London: Vintage, 2001. 123

the hybridized discourses, capable of crossing the boundaries of both gender and genre.⁵⁴ Through the usage of this mixed language, the author is fighting against clichés, she is inventing a new means of expressing love. It is neither romantic nor euphonic, but it is unconventional and innovative – which is probably Winterson’s goal.

The theme of clichés, facing them, accepting them and the narrator’s own attitudes towards them can be seen as a metaphor of the narrator’s sexual identity. In spite of the fact we do not know whether the narrator is a man or a woman, we know that he/she falls in love with and feels the need to express her/his feelings towards Louise. Regardless of which love is involved – homosexual or heterosexual one, he/she is looking for a different, unconventional way of expressing it. The narrator wants to avoid clichés in both aspects : same as it does not matter what the sexual identity of the two lovers is, it does not matter how their love is expressed.

In the final part of the novel, the reader is not provided with any conclusive resolution. We do not know whether Louise has returned or whether “it is her figuration in narrative that returns to haunt.”⁵⁵ Winterson intentionally challenges another cliché – that of a conventional happy ending and she leaves space for the reader to think what actually happened. Again, she tries to emphasise that [it’s the clichés that cause the trouble]⁵⁶. In other words, it is not good to expect a clear conclusion or resolution and Winterson encourages the readers to come up with their own. The same principle applies to the sexual identity of the narrator, it is better to stay uncovered, which leaves a smaller space to generalization and clichés.

2.2.4 The theme of losing somebody/separation

The theme of separation from a beloved person is a theme which was already employed in *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, where Jeanette fears of being separated from her mother. In *Written On The Body* the examination of fear of loss is much more developed. “This novel is another Winterson’s romantic story that thrives on separation and the fear of separation to

⁵⁴ Andermahr, Sonya. *Jeanette Winterson: A Contemporary Critical Guide*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. 83

⁵⁵ Andermahr, Sonya. *Jeanette Winterson: A Contemporary Critical Guide*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. 61

⁵⁶ Winterson, Jeanette. *Written On The Body*. London: Vintage, 2001. 10

magnify its poignancy⁵⁷ In other words, the novel could be understood as an investigation of what it is like to lose a loved one.

The fear of loss alludes to disappointment. As it can be deduced, the narrator has already been disappointed and refused by his/her lovers. Apart from Jacqueline, all relationships were ended by his/her lovers, not by the narrator. The loss of a lover due to illness can be interpreted as a climax of all these relationships. The fear of losing somebody is alluded to constantly in the narrative. Both the main heroes are postponing the inevitable. The motif of *carpe diem* is present here – the lovers are seizing the moment, enjoying the time together, though simultaneously, being aware of the fact they are just postponing their separation. Although the narrator becomes conscious of passing of time, he/she knows that their relationship is limited by it. Subsequently the narrator is told by a friend he/she is lucky the relationship with Louise has not failed, that it has been a perfect romance. Soon afterwards the narrator asks himself/herself. “Is that what perfection costs? Operatic heroics and a tragic end?”⁵⁸ The narrator grows to come in terms with the fact that to love somebody necessarily means to be tied to this person.

The narrator presents an attempt of how to face up to the loss of a beloved person, once he/she fails to come to terms with Louise’s premature death. He/she chooses the way of becoming acquainted with her illness as much as possible. He/she starts studying the medical and anatomy books. Louise becomes alive and is reconstructed by language. It is obviously connected with the narrator’s profession – a translator. He/she finds comfort and stability in words. Additionally, the rather technical language is a means of avoiding the awfullness of leukaemia.

“To lose someone you love is to alter your life for ever. You don’t get over it because ‘it’ is the person you loved. The pain stops, there are new people, but the gap never closes. How could it?”⁵⁹ The narrator never manages to accept Louise’s absence. He/she is constantly trying to master the loss, which is (not) achieved at the end of the novel by Louise’s reappearance. There is only a sight of Louise’s face in the corridor, which may be understood as a glimpse of a beloved person – as it has already happened to the narrator years ago with her dead friend.

⁵⁷ Ellam, Julie. *Love in Jeanette Winterson’s novels*. Amsterdam-New York: Editions Roboti B.V., 2010. 113

⁵⁸ Winterson, Jeanette. *Written On The Body*. London: Vintage, 2001. 87

⁵⁹ Winterson, Jeanette. *Written On The Body*. London: Vintage, 2001. 155

The novel proves that love does not terminate at the point of losing the beloved person. Conversely, love intensifies when one of the two lovers is absent. As the author suggests, love is measured by loss and it is only when the desired person is lost when we can measure a love for him/her.

2.2.5 Alternating between certainty and uncertainty

Searching for certainty occurs when the narrator is desperately looking for Louise. He/she is not succeeding and longs for retreat of love. "I want the diluted version, the sloppy language, the insignificant gestures. The saggy armchair of clichés."⁶⁰ The narrator wants to escape the passion she is caught in, he/she wants to come back – as he/she considers that period of time better and safer, or more certain. Subsequently, the narrator claims not to love Jacqueline – his/her previous girlfriend, and considers the fact in her favour. It is Louise who breaks this safety and rebrings passion into the narrator's life. Nevertheless, from the narrator's point of view, passion means uncertainty. It is very paradoxical when he/she realizes that love remains the only reliable and permanent certainty. It is Louise and her presence which enhances the importance of love and it becomes apparent in the narrator's fixation on her.

The institution of marriage is resisted due to its false certainty – it is not always the culmination of a heterosexual relationship – as the general cliché suggests. The narrator expresses his/her opinion on love as something which cannot be legislated or given orders. "Love belongs to itself, deaf to pleading and unmoved by violence."⁶¹ He/she understands the love as transcendent, as something which is separated from laws and commandments.

Louise refuses the stereotype of a beautiful but powerless woman. She claims she married Elgin only for one reason – she could control him. The only reason for this marriage was for the wife to be safe, love is not even mentioned there. Julie Ellam uses a metaphor in which she suggests following⁶²: Although Elgin was not aware of that, Louise was a "master" and he was a "slave". Their marriage failed because the tension between the master and the slave was broken. According to Ellam, this tension is necessary for love because "total

⁶⁰ Winterson, Jeanette. *Written On The Body*. London: Vintage, 2001. 10

⁶¹ Winterson, Jeanette. *Written On The Body*. London: Vintage, 2001. 77

⁶² Ellam, Julie. *Love in Jeanette Winterson's novels*. Amsterdam-New York: Editions Roboti B.V., 2010. 120-121

enslavement kills love⁶³ It is exactly this enslavement which brings certainty into marriage. On the other hand, as the above suggests, it is love which is certain. Marriage is not a guarantee for love to be there and its certainty is rather “official“.

The device of uncertainty is apparent in two more aspects - the impossibility of solving the narrator’s gender, and even the ending of the novel itself. The novel is approaching its end when Louise’s face appears in the corridor. There is no explanation provided whether she has died or not, the ending is left open.

The most significant uncertainty, after all, is the undecidable gender of the narrator. “It circles around the unfairness and insecurity that is experienced with the loss of the beloved.”⁶⁴ Certainty, on the other hand, occurs in the love idealization. In spite of the impossibility of a union between the two lovers, Winterson seems to suggest the possibility of romantic love exists. The author comes back to the beginning of the novel in which the narrator asks why love is measured by loss. She arrives to a conclusion that it is not possible to erase the lover from one’s life, neither by his/her death. What increases the love is the loss of the beloved and desired one.

The relation between the theme of sexual identity and this chapter is rather indirect and metaphorical. Winterson emphasises that whichever love is taken into account (homosexual or heterosexual one), it is based on the same principles. Another interpretation is that uncertainty is constantly present in the narrator’s life. It might be possible that neither the narrator him/herself is certain of his/her sexual identity and that is why it stays uncovered. Nevertheless, the only certainty for him/her is romantic love, which can exist regardless of one’s gender.

⁶³ Ellam, Julie. *Love in Jeanette Winterson’s novels*. Amsterdam-New York: Editions Roboti B.V., 2010. 121

⁶⁴ Ellam, Julie. *Love in Jeanette Winterson’s novels*. Amsterdam-New York: Editions Roboti B.V., 2010. 130

Conclusion

The most essential motifs and aspects of sexual identity which appear in *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* and *Written On The Body* have been analyzed in this thesis. It took a closer look at each of them, trying to explore their function, differences and similarities.

It is possible to say that there is a considerable difference between the themes discussed in each novel. *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* is Jeanette Winterson's first piece of writing and it is particularly in this novel where the protagonist discovers she is a lesbian and faces the reaction from her surrounding. The reader is provided with a subjective description of the situation, and witnesses Jeanette's discovering of her sexual identity and dealing with it. That is the reason why motifs like family, women community, the Catholic Church and different attitudes to homosexuality appear in it as well. Motifs of *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* reflect the author's personal experience with sexual identity, with no intention to generalize. Winterson simply writes about the topics she personally encountered and is very familiar with. On the other hand, *Written On The Body* is exploring more serious topics as clichés, the theme of separation, the aspect of certainty and uncertainty. It is a clear evidence of the author's writing development. She no longer deals with issues she is personally surrounded by, but is interested in more general and complex ones such as the narrator's unspecified gender or the role of a woman in an intimate relationship. The sexual orientation of the narrator is now clear, but his/her gender stays unknown. He/she is already accepted by her surrounding and the main issue is rather how sexual identity and love are interconnected.

I have encountered a problem while searching for the motifs connected with sexual identity in *Written On The Body*. As it is a lyrical novel, it uses different devices to describe the reality in comparison with *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*. For instance, the second part of the book consists of quotations from medical and anatomy books. The narrator compares the definitions of certain parts of human body with the body of Louise. He/She uses this scientific expressions as a contrast to the description of her/his feelings. Additionally, the aspect of uncertainty and the open ending of the book contributes to rather difficult analysis of the motifs mentioned above. Consequently, the connection is often rather indirect and much more metaphorical compared to *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, where the metaphors are present occasionally in the story of Winnet and biblical allusions, the rest is rather story-

based. There is a clear plot-line, the gender is evident with all the characters and the reader is provided with a clear ending.

An interesting overlap between *Written On The Body* and *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* is Winterson's statement concerning stories. In *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* Winterson develops an argument claiming that no stories are utterly true, the reader's perception of stories has to be taken into account. *Written On The Body* is a clear evidence of this argument, Winterson used the device of a sexually undetermined narrator in order to prove it. It is the narrator's hidden sexual identity which makes reading of the book highly subjective and open to different interpretations. Another feature which is established in *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* and further developed in *Written On The Body* is the author's attitude to the institution of marriage. It is presented as useless and negative in *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* and resisted due to its false certainty in *Written On The Body*. On the other hand, in both the novels Winterson believes in the existence of romantic love and considers it more important than marriage.

A feature which is shared by both the novels is the gender division of family roles. In *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, Jeanette's father is subdominant in the family, in *Written On The Body* it is Elgin, Louise's husband who is depicted as rather a weak man governed by his wife. It seems that the author does not show much respect for men. What goes hand in hand with the above mentioned is Winterson's opinion on traditional heterosexual relationship. It is suppressed in *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, however, when it comes to the *Written On The Body*, it can be hardly deduced due to the uncovered sexual identity of the narrator.

To conclude, each of the two analyzed works deals the with motifs of sexual identity in a different way. While *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* concentrates on problems with protagonist's strive to accept her sexual identity and the process of its formation, *Written On The Body* focuses more on the consequences and troubles which are to be faced once it is constructed .

Works Cited

Primary Sources

Winterson, Jeanette. *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. London: Vintage, 1996.

Winterson, Jeanette. *Written On The Body*. London: Vintage, 2001.

Secondary Sources

Andermahr, Sonya. *Jeanette Winterson: A Contemporary Critical Guide*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Bentley, Nick. *Contemporary British fiction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008.

Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter*. New York: Routledge, 1993.

Carpenter, Ginette. "Reading the reader." *Jeanette Winterson: A Contemporary Critical Guide*. Sonya Andermahr. London. Continuum. 2007.

Ellam, Julie. *Love in Jeanette Winterson's novels*. Amsterdam-New York: Editions Roboti B.V., 2010.

Faderman, Lilian. *Surpassing the Love of Men*. London: The Women's Press Ltd, 1985.

Gilbert, Sandra M., Gubar, Susan. *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women*. New York: Norton Company, 1996.

Griffin, Gabriele. *Heavenly Love?*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993.

Hobbs, Richard. *Writing On The Body*. Nottingham: Paupers's Press, 2004.

Lane, Richard J., Rod Mengham, Philip Tew. *Contemporary British Fiction*. Cambridge: John Wiley & Sons, 2003.

Makinen, Merja. *The Novels of Jeanette Winterson*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

Palmer, Paulina. *Contemporary Lesbian Writing*. Buckingham: Open University Press, 1993.

Sanders, Andrew. *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Websites

www.jeanettewinterson.com