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Dismantling Conventional Gender and Sexuality: Lesbianism in *Written on the Body* by Jeanette Winterson

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By

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Letter of Recommendation

Rekha Chandhas completed her thesis entitled “Dismantling Conventional Gender and Sexuality: Lesbianism in *Written on the Body* by Jeanette Winterson” under my supervision. She carried out her research from 2069/11/28 to 2070/12/15 B.S. I hereby recommend her thesis be submitted for viva voce.

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Approval Letter

This thesis entitled "Dismantling Conventional Gender and Sexuality: Lesbianism in *Written on the Body* by Jeanette Winterson"submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Rekha Chand has been approved by the undersigned members of the research committee.

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Abstract

This researchentitled “Dismantling Conventional Gender and Sexuality: Lesbianism in *Written on the Body* by Jeanette Winterson” problematizes and redefines the concept of gender and sexuality created by hetero-patriarchal discourse of western metaphysics thereby blurring the strict boundary between male and female based on binary oppositionsthat createdichotomy and hierarchy between themand opening up the other alternatives as lesbian, transsexual and bi-sexual relationships rejected and dejected by the western thought. Deconstructing and destabilizing gender and sexuality, *Written on the Body* dramatizes a lesbian love story between the genderless, nameless and ageless narrator and Louise. It subverts and deconstructs the male-supporting patriarchal and heterosexual discourse thereby reconstructing the stereotypical feminine attributes. Thus, in this research, the traditional adherence to heterosexuality is revisited in post-feminist advocacy of genderless narrator in order to challenge and subvert the binary opposition between male and female thereby critiquing and deconstructing the traditional notion of gender and sexuality.

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I. Jeanette Winterson, Her Novels and Lesbian Concerns

This project entitled “Dismantling Conventional Gender and Sexuality: Lesbianism in *Written on the Body* by Jeanette Winterson”fore-grounds the homosexual and other non-conventional relationship between and among female charactersand their rejection of the traditional mode of heterosexual relationship in order to search their lesbian self. The narrator violates traditional hetero-sexual division of gender and sexuality by remaining to genderless, nameless and ageless; and keeping relationships to both males as well as females and Louise celebrates her lesbian body in its true form rather than as defined otherwise by the society and refuses to be written on her body by the ideology of hetero-patriarchal discourse thus challenges its so-called well-established norms and values. Highlighting the queer and deviant activities of the characters, this research dismantles conventional concepts of gender and sexuality and dramatizes lesbian issues of homosexuality, transsexuality and bi-sexuality which are rejected by the western thought.

The central story of *Written on the Body* is woven under the rubrics of queer narratology in general and lesbian narratology in particular in order to question the traditional heterosexual and patriarchal concepts of love, sex, marriage, family, gender and other male-supporting ideals thereby highlighting the possibility of transgender, homosexual and bi-sexual relationships. Drawing the perception of Kauer and Farwell as strategic use of genderless narrator as positive, this research goes in the line of John Southerland, Aurelie Jane Sheehan and Andrea Stewart, who assume the narrator as female. The notion of genderless narrator creates a debate about gender and sexuality, a debate that might not have existed without this narrative

strategy. Interpreting *Written on the Body* as a lesbian narrative not only serves to oppose the heterosexual norm, but also the patriarchal hegemony.

Written on the Body is a lesbian novel that subverts the existing concept of sexuality and gender created by hetero-patriarchal discourse. It discards the idea that heterosexual relationship is the absolute and universal and provides other possibilities. Moreover, socially queer, odd, deviant and restricted behaviors like homosexual, transsexual, bi-sexual, transgender and other sexually dysfunctional and perverse activities are highlighted bringing them into mainstream. In such situation, in order to dismantle conventional notions regarding gender and sexuality and other associated concepts including love, marriage, sex, family, morality and so on, this research makes use of lesbianism as a primary critical apparatus. The lesbian ideas developed by Judith Butler, Lillian Faderman and Adrienne Rich are heavily drawn in this research. Moreover, the concept of queer theory is necessary as lesbianism is grounded on its politics. In order to justify the applicability of genderless narrator, the ideas of post-feminist developed by Rosalind Gill and Nancy F. Cott are taken. Finally to highlight narrator's strong position in her both homosexual as well as heterosexual relationship, the 'butch-femme'concept of Helen Boyd is borrowed. On the bedrock of all these concepts, lesbianism is celebrated as pedestal and primary tool in order to deconstruct hetero-patriarchal concepts of gender and sexuality.

Jeanette Winterson was born on27, August 1959 in Manchester; England.She was adopted by Constance and John William Wintersonin January 1960 and raised in the Elim Pentecostal Church. Brought up in an evangelical atmosphere, Winterson began preaching and writing sermons at age of eight. Given her talent for winning converts, she seemed destined for a career as a missionary.As she intended to become a Pentecostal Christian missionary, she began evangelizing and writing sermons. Her

inclination toward ‘unnatural passion’ led to irreconcilable differences with the church congregation, and, consequently, she left home at fifteen (Patricia 23). She subsequently attended Accrington College of Further Education and supported herself through a variety of odd jobs, including driving an ice cream van, doing janitorial work in a mental hospital, and preparing corpses in a funeral home, experiences to which she makes wry reference in various novels.By the age of 16 Winterson had identified herself as “a lesbian and left home” (Patricia 29). Winterson was eventually admitted to St. Catherine's College, Oxford, from which she received a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1981. After graduating, she moved to London, where she worked at the Roundhouse Theatre and in the publishing business.She is a British writer as well as journalist.

In addition to her novels, she has written a fitness guide for women and has edited anthologies of short stories. A writer of great intelligence and imagination, Jeanette Winterson has gained a following not only among lesbian and gay readers but mainstream ones as well. She promises to be an influential force in shaping the future of English-language letters. Throughout her literary works, Jeanette Winterson describes sexual passion in the language and with the understanding of a parallel and informing spiritual faith and compassion. Winterson's narratives of romantic love and sexual passion seek in a different form the experience of perfect union with another demonstrated in the ecstatic practices of charismatic Christianity. From her first book, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985), to her most recent fictions, Winterson has consistently drawn on Biblical language and religious experience to produce her own exalted discourse of passion. In drawing on Biblical language to express erotic passion, Winterson resists the popular cultural image of perfect rapprochement, the merging of self and other typically ascribed to the lesbian couple. Rather, she

emphasizes the challenge of union in love, using the language of faith to indicate the elusive qualities of passionate connection. The language she borrows from her Pentecostal childhood allows her to describe a kind of charismatic experience of meeting between self and lover while recognizing the essential difference between partners, the foreignness of the beloved.

Winterson has been a prolific writer for long time and is awarded with various literary awards. She was awarded Whitbread Prize for *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* in 1985, and its television version won the British Academy of Film and Television Arts award for best drama. It also won Prix d'argent Best Script from France and Whitbread First Novel Award.*The Passion* won the John Llewelyn Rhys Memorial Prize for best writerand Mail on Sunday Award thereby enriching her literary reputation.For *Sexing the Cherry*, Winterson received the E. M. Forster Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.She is a two-time winner of the Lambda Literary Awards for *Written on the Body* 1994 and for *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* in 2013 respectively. *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?*is short-listed forIndependent Booksellers' Week Book Award 2012; *Light housekeeping* for Commonwealth Writers Prize 2005. She also won International Fiction Prize for Experimental Literature 1999 from Italy. Moreover, she was made an officer of Order of English Empire (OBE) at the 2006 New Year Honours for her services to literature.From 2012 she is professor of creative writing at the University of Manchester.

Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit (1985) is Winterson's first and fictionalized semi-autobiographical novel that vividly, painfully, and humorously portrays the absolutist mindset of Christian fundamentalism and the intense homophobia of the basically homosocial female members of the congregation. It attributes her lack of

feeling to the hard upbringing consistently and relentlessly referred to in all of her works. The much-praised, autobiographical novel followed the bleak upbringing of a girl adopted by Penecostal parents. Like her protagonist, Winterson grew up an adopted child in a grim northern English town, and similarly left home after discovering her sexuality and falling in love with a girl.The real story, it turns out, was much more devastating.She describes a cruel, unhappy, oppressive mother; a distant, equally unhappy father; constant feelings of rage and despair; spiritual struggles; and her fierce longings for girls. And she recalls the isolating experience of having been raised in a family that had no phone, no car, no indoor toilet, and no friends.

Her second novel*Boating for Beginners* (1985) is published after three months of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. It is a retelling of the infamous Story of the Flood in the Genesis -- only in a rather funny and sarcastic way.It presents Noah's Ark of creating God out of ice cream. As a biblical parody of the Great Flood with a veryunusual setting and cast of characters. So, it is a total reinvention of the Biblical story, told in a very blasphemous means.This is a comic book with pictures.*The Passion* (1987) established her as a full-time professional writer. Set during the Napoleonic Wars, this novelpresents the narrative of Henri, a young man of ambivalent sexuality conscripted as a cook into Napoleon's army, crossed with that of the androgynous, bisexual Villanelle, the web-footed daughter of a Venetian boatman. It uses magic realismto present the story strongly.It can be read as historiographic metafiction as the text combines historical material with metafictional self-reflexivity (Onega 56). It parodies and rewrites history apparently with feminist and lesbian concerns at stake. Through it, “Winterson unsettles the taken-for-granted distinctions between past, present and future, in this place [Venice] freed from linear temporality”

(Stowers 143). Through parodying the historical narrative and mingling it with fantasy, the novel attempts to deconstruct the conventional historical discourse.

Her most ambitious novelset in a fantastical 17th-century London, *Sexing the Cherry* (1989), further elaborates the magic realism of *The Passion* in the digressive tale of Jordan and his giantess mother, the Dog Woman the lover of many dogs. Set initially in Restoration London against a backdrop of wondrous discoveries from the New World, the narrative follows the travels and travails of its characters as they transcend time, place, and gender, thus questioning the reality of any central, unified truth or, indeed, reality itself.The central narrative is about a savage and unorthodox love that leads family life to the grotesque and dangerous situation.*Sexing the Cherry* is firmly in the postmodernist camp that brings together farce, magic realism, fairy-tales, metaphysical discourse, satire, and commentary on its 17th century historical context.

Most of the novels of Winterson are mainly concerned with the themes of a post apocalyptic love story, the harshness of war, and the dehumanization that technology brings, and blurring of binary oppositions. They explore the boundaries of physicality and the imagination, gender polarities, and sexual identities. As a lesbian writer, she shows the attachment between females by rejecting heterosexual relationships. The voice of females in her novels is louder and that even turns upside down the traditional gender roles. Winterson's fictions should be read as texts which allow female voices to be heard in history. The writer inserts historical material in her fiction and she turns it into a playground where she can foreground the suppressed histories in the postmodern text of her novels. In an interview, she relates this:

> I wanted to use the past as an invented country. So I knew I was going to land on some moment of history and rediscover it . . . We

> continually understand our past in a different way because we are continually reinterpreting it. And fiction does that very well. But you can only do it well if you let some freedom in for your imagination. You can't do it well if you are trying to lock yourself slavishly into your notion of the past – which will not be true anyway. Or if you're making the past into the present, but in a silly wig and a different costume. (qtd. in Reynolds and Noakes 22)

To Winterson, history is simply a series of continual reinterpretations of the past, and this makes it possible in her fiction to write feminine subjectivity into history, or rather a hero-story which denies any easy definition. As a result, her fiction opens up new possibilities with regard to historiographic representation where the voice of the repressed or marginalized 'Other' is heard.

In her novels, Winterson is supportive to the postmodern idea that no truth can be true since our reality can only exist in the way that we represent it, which is always subjective. Her novels explore the boundaries of physicality and the imagination, gender politics and sexual identities. She forces the realization that no objective reality exists anywhere. Whenever reality is represented by an art form, the realness of the reality must be called into question because it has been subjectively framed. Christy L. Burns' judgments of Winterson is:

> Fantasy is at best an unstable term in Winterson's writing, but she often uses it (and art) to bridge the gap between harsh reality and a more hopeful construction of the social imaginary. This social imaginary includes the constant possibility of renaissance and alternative realizations of identity, in that fantasy can offer far more potentialities than reality. If the fixity of reality is the hallmark of a

> static status quo, Winterson's use of fantasy and eroticism pulls away from such fixations to open up a space for alternative life styles (alternatives to family, to heterosexuality, to society, to post-modern media). (304)

Blending fantasy and reality, Winterson's writing is coloured with autobiographical touch. Her sexual inclination towards partner of her own sex is the manifestation of her rebellious spirit; questing her own identity lost in the labyrinth of hetero patriarchal discourses of the society. *Written on the Body*foregrounds the same theme.

Written on the Body is generally considered as the critique of science, critique of traditional marriage and reproduction, both masculine as well as feminine text, postmodern text and so on. It is also viewed from the perspectives of psychoanalysis as well as disability studies. The novel can be seen as a focal point for debates about gender, Winterson, and identity generally. "Although championed by a minority, the novel was generally seen as overwritten, melodramatic and/or derivative" (Andermahr 2). The narrator's ambiguous gender has led many critics to feel that Winterson has abandoned a kind of feminist politics (Pearce 25). Other critics try to place Winterson within an explicitly feminist and lesbian reading (Stowers 41). Still others read her as being driven by a mainly postmodern approach to feminist issues. For example, Rachel Wingfield claims that Winterson's work in the nineties exemplifies the depoliticization of women's writing and is instead concerned with postmodernism and individualism. He sees no tension between a postmodern project and a feminist one. "The postmodern constructions of such innovative paradigms mobilize and animate a feminist political strategy of resistance, forcing and enforcing new mappings of the social and cultural order through feminist revision and reconsideration, and reconceptualization" (154). Whether one views Winterson's approach as

universalizing or postmodern, feminist or post-feminist, it becomes clear that her work contains both a relationship to some kind of gender politics and an investment in a particular kind of aestheticism that supports her with modernist writers and identity politics in which art should transcend social difference.

In *Written on the Body* the gender of the narrator is never specified in the text thus granting gender identity an open-endedness that undermines hegemonic patriarchal/ heterosexual discourses on the body and on the text itself. So, it has received most of its critical attention because of its use of a genderless narrator. Winterson questions the dichotomies set up around gender and desire, casting aside restrictive notions of sexual/gender difference, and proving that the narrator's sexuality is ultimately irrelevant to a deeper understanding of love and the sexual-corporeal dimension of human life. Regarding this idea Catherine Belsey points out:

> In her novel *Written on the Body*, Jeanette Winterson tells a love story without revealing the gender of the narrator. The object of the narrator's desire is a woman, but there have been others, some of them men. Winterson's story is compelling, passionate, and lyrical. What matter, it seems to say, who is speaking, when desire is always derivative, conventional, already written. (Belsey 7)

According to Belsey, the narrator performs ambivalent role between male and female. His/her attraction is towards both male and female. In this sense, the narrator can be taken as transsexual as well as bisexual. But, most of the critics accept the narrator as female. For Kauer, the narrator is a female but performs traditionally masculinerole - active and dynamic. He notes that in *Written on the Body*"stereotypes about masculinity are mocked and employed as a means to undermine traditional concepts of female behaviour" (46). In the passage above, the interpretation of the narrator as

female then destabilizes male and female behaviour.More interestingly, when regarding the narrator as female, Kauer brings forth the importance of irony and parody as means of deconstructing the traditional feminine role (46). Furthermore, Kauer remarks that with a female narrator the stereotypically masculine actions would then be a mask of male behaviour worn in order to be able to deconstruct gender binaries (47). His interpretation is plausible and upon its close reading, most of the readers are convinced that the narrator is that of female having multiple relationships with other female characters.

The narrator has not only single affair but multiple with many of the married females and even with some men. When Jacqueline discovers the narrator's passion for Louise, her possessiveness impels her to exact a grotesque revenge; she vandalizes the flat and spreads excrement on the walls in what Susana Onega describes as "a parodic example of Cixous's 'excessive woman'" this action profoundly disturbs the narrator (116).Both the narrator and Louise are presented as strong characters fighting against the narrow boundary of the society. It "exemplifies the ongoing process of female appropriation of the symbolic realm that we are witnessing in contemporary women's literature" and its "storytelling engages in a literary project of self-creation and self-explanation that boldly rewrites the position of the female heroine in the patriarchal realm of language" (117). His argument demonstrates what contemporary women writers like Winterson have achieved to break free of the restrictive boundaries of the Law by using a language which articulates the multiple voices of women and ultimately repositions their place in the symbolic order:

> *Written on the Body* is an enigmatic novel which constantly invites the reader to call into question the accepted order of the heterosexual economy; human duality is a key term in understanding the ambivalent

> and mysterious nature of the ‘s/he’ narrator. Anything can be split into its self and its opposite, Winterson tells us, advocating plurality of desire as a complex form of consciousness that defies binary antitheses and sexual stereotypes (Kauer 46).

The intention of the writer as per Kauer is the show ‘the ambivalent and mysterious nature of the narrator’ through this undecided gender thereby challenging the monolithic concept of gender of the society. With this notion it becomes less significant to determine whether the narrator is a man or a woman. Kauer argues that “by joking with these roles and the stereotypes attached to them, the narrator constantly plays with the categories determining our view of the world and of the text” (47). When the genderless narrator identifies him/herself with Alice in Wonderland or Lothario it is a performance that is anchored in culturally constructed gender premises. *Written on the Body* never lets the reader become certain of the narrator’s gender, but instead perceives gender as a continuum, never fixed to an implicitly sex. The performance of different gender roles is constantly broken up and aims to show that identity is not connected to gender.

Written on the Body is the voice of the female against all kinds of suppression, oppression, domination and exploitation. It challenges the traditional concept of gender boundary between male and female, which gives preference to male thereby discarding the female as object. Moreover, it is the “blatant critique of science” which makes everything possible (Rubinson5).The genderless condition of the narrator is associated with scientific concept, and at the same time it also indicates the conceptual preference to both genders.

Lesbian is defined as a female-female sexual-orientation or behaviors or homosexual relationships between women. In other words, romantic and erotic

attraction of a female to other females is considered as lesbian. It also refers to the condition in which a woman self-identifies herself as a lesbian. Lesbianism is a tendency, principles and the ways lesbian is advocated and supported. Some women who engage in homosexual behaviour may reject the lesbian identity entirely, refusing to identify themselves as lesbian or bisexual. Lillian Faderman precisely defines lesbianism in an overview, “Surpassing the Love of Man: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present” placing herself midway between the exclusive and inclusive approaches to lesbianism. She straightforwardly claims that:

> ‘Lesbian describes a relationship in which two women’s strongest emotions and affections are directed towards each other. Sexual contact may be a part of the relationship to a greater or lesser degree, or it may be entirely absent. By preference the two women spend most of their time together and share most aspects of their lives with each other. (17-18)

The different ways in which lesbians have been portrayed in the media suggests that Western society at large has been simultaneously intrigued and threatened by women who challenge feminine gender roles and fascinated and appalled with women who are romantically involved with other women. Women who adopt the lesbian identity, however, share experiences that form an outlook similar to ethnic identity - as homosexuals; they are unified by the discrimination and potential rejection they face from their families, friends and others. As women, they face concerns separation from men. Lesbians may encounter distinct health concerns. Political conditions and social attitudes also continue to affect the formation of lesbian relationships and families.

The heterosexual domination of western metaphysics, which is guided by the strong principles of patriarchal social system,is extensively dramatized in her novels. There is more emphasize on her own experiences of attraction towards females in her novel than fictionalized events. She rejects exploitation of male-dominated society and demands actual identity of female. Though she rejects her novels to be called lesbian novels, lesbianism is the life-giving heart of her novels. Like her lesbian characters, she realizes that love for same sex is the part of her nature that cannot be separated. The narrator of *Written on the Body* is nameless and genderless though through deep reading the narrator is female. Her identity is lost under the veil of patriarchal gender dichotomy and binary oppositions. Her nameless status shows that her identity is buried within the dynamics of harsh and cruel heterosexual society. Chloe Taylor Merleau in "Postmodern Ethics and the Expression of Differends in the Novels of Jeanette Winterson" discusses the nature of Winterson's novels as:

> Winterson's passion on and its relation to love is complex. Here is neither a defense of the self-contained ego, what we might call the modern self, but nor is it a celebration of the utterly dissolved, fractured self sometimes attributed to postmodernism. Walls limit the body, but they also protect. Circles entrap the soul, but you can also sit in your circle to be safe. Being named is disempowerment, but it is also letting yourself be loved and called home. Winterson seems to say that women need power - a name, an identity - but they need also know when to let it go. Love for Jeanette is to be destroyed but also to destroy another, to be 'mixed up' in the wreckage of destruction, and to rebuild. (94)

These lines clarify women are in need to power, not name. They need identity, not control. They need self, not help. This is because as per Winterson name makes us disempowered, stable and mechanized. She supports dynamic nature of female self. The nameless and genderless narrator of *Written on the Body*indicates her same thrust. The narrator does not need name and gender in order o fight against the strict and strong rules and regulations of the heterosexual society, where homosexual, intersexual and transsexual activities are marginalized and othered as abnormal and dysfunctional.

Thus, in spite of Winterson's strong denial of *The Written on the Body* as lesbian text, on close reading of the novel, we can find queer subject matters dominating dominant everywhere throughout the book. With the minute observation of the activities in which the protagonists of the novel are engaged against the firm blasphemy of the Church and strong defiance to the rigid systems of the orthodox community, this reverberation of queer issues in the text can be justifiable. Winterson finds homosexual and queer concerns as the best and most suitable means to challenge the prejudicial and discriminatory systems of religious and hetero patriarchal discourse. In this condition, the research intends to show how she neutralizes the long-established heterosexual systems supported by Western metaphysics in order to restructure the society and to make it more adaptable, all inclusive, secular and non-normative. The researcher finds lesbianism and queer theories genuinely pleasing and contextual for dealing with these dominant subject matters for giving sincere tribute to the main thrust of the novel. To analyze these issues, the study has been divided into three chapters. The first chapter presents the general introduction of this research including the background to the present study, hypothesis, literature review, objective of the study and others. In the same way,

thorough textual analysis has been made in the second chapter with theoretical tool of lesbianism and queer theories in embedded form and conclusion has been rendered in the third chapter that encapsulates the overall project in brief.

II. Dismantling Conventional Gender and Sexuality: Lesbianismin *Written on the Body*

The present research attempts to dismantle the conventional concepts of gender and sexualitywhich are based on the hetero-patriarchal discourse created by western thought. Highlighting the homosexual and bi-sexual relationships of the narrator and Louise, it explores the transgender and transsexual activities often rejected, dejected and discarded in the heterosexual male-dominated society thereby dramatizing lesbian issues. The traditional concept of love, sexuality, gender and family are subverted opening up the possibility of other alternatives. Taking the supportive issues of lesbianism which is backed up by the politics of queer theory, it analyzes *Written on the Body*as lesbian text. The narrator challenges hetero-patriarchal discourse of the society involving in transsexual relationships with multiple partners including females Bathsheba, Jacqueline and Louise; and males including Crazy Frank thus challenging the morality of western society. She sees happy family formation with Louise despite the condition of childlessness through such relationship. Louise too terminates heterosexual relationship with her husband, Elgin, favors miscarriage and enjoys homosexual relationship with the narrator. Rather than being romanticized, she celebrates her diseased body and rejects being written on the body by the hetero-patriarchal ideology of the society.

Winterson advocates alternative ways to understand the sexual, emotional, and intellectual self thereby disrupting patriarchal order such as our sense of self and its restrictive heterosexual model of love, thus defying thediscursive concepts of fixity

within the totalizing binary patterns of Western thought. Through the story of the nameless narrator, Winterson deconstructs narrative conventions and shows how storytellingneed not be subordinated to the constraints of the patriarchal grand narratives.She attempts to subvert the constructed binary oppositions betweenmasculine and feminine through innovative and challenging ways of writing.

Wrtitten on the Body explores the boundaries of genderconstruction and desire. By creating a protagonist who escapes any genderidentification, the novel subverts the traditional patriarchal binary discourse on genderidentity. It is a narrative, which explores both the psychic andbodily space of the self, as well as the relationship between literature, language anddesire. At the same time the text examines how disease changes one's perspective ofcorporeality, how it fragments us into healthy/sickly parts, somehow leaving us notwhole; and the way in which sexual love can heal and destroy.The relationship between the unnamed narrator and Louise becomeseither heterosexual or lesbian depending on whether readers identify thenameless/genderless narrator as a male or as a female. But, this research draws the conclusion of many of critics in order to declare the narrator as female. Assuming the narrator as female, it forwards its discussion. Moreover, bi-sexual relationships of both the narrator and Louise are central to the study, which directly challenge the monolithic heterosexual compulsion of western society.

The narrator engages herself in multiple relationships but married women are her target. There is no age limit and gender limit to her. Like Jeanette in her personal life, her characters are involved in homosexual relationships. The narrator enlists many of her boyfriends as well as girlfriends. It seems that the narrator is a playgirl, who challenges not only the heterosexual relationship but also the morality set by the western society. Her masculine character is contradicted with the feminine character

of Louise. Louise is also presented as rebellious. She is not satisfied with her heterosexual relationship with her husband. Her relationship with the narrator as well as other female characters shows that she questions the one and only option provided by the western society. Moreover, their relationship is not for creating family by giving birth to baby. Both the narrator and Louise dismiss their concern of giving birth to the children.

Lesbianism refers to sexual preference of female to another female, which challenges the notion of normative sexualities that discards homosexual activities as deviant. A womansexually, emotionally and affectionatelyattracted to other woman is known as lesbian. Some women prefer to be called gay rather than lesbian. Lesbianism might have been a restriction of female identity in earlier times at least if the woman was eager to get children. But since this is possible while generally leading a lesbian life, any attempt to pathologize lesbianism is absurd. However, radical lesbian feminists try to deal with the question like -"Why females should become a subject to male's physical pleasure"? As an articulate spokeswoman offering an inclusive definition of lesbianism, Adrienne Rich states that:

> I mean the term lesbian continuum to include a range - through each woman's life and throughout history-of-woman identified experience; not simply the fact that woman has had or consciously desired genital experience with another woman. If we expand it to embrace many more forms of primary intimacy between and among women, including the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support . . . we begin to grasp breadths of female history and psychology which have lain out

> of reach as a consequence of limited, mostly clinical, definitions of 'lesbianism'. (21)

Lesbianism is an avant-garde term that is developed challenging the heterosexual normative discourse that rejects all other options as deviant and anti-social. It subverts the politics of long-established and deep-rooted heterosexual ideology. It has its foundation on feminism and helps females to release from the narrow and parochial concept of othering different voices. The nameless, genderless and ageless narrator in *Written on the Body*performs queer activities beyond the limitation of the society. This research relies her gender as female mainly based on her activities towards other characters and her preference to be genderless in order to challenge patriarchal system.

The narrator is a female wearing the mask of male. Her activities are masculine directing against the ideology of patriarchal. Her assumption of masculine mask parodizes many systems and traditions of patriarchal society. Her nameless, ageless and genderless condition indicates that the narrator is female - not male - because in male dominated society, males do not need such masks. Such fact is supported even through her activities and her relationship with male and female characters in general and her lovers in particular. Her in-between position is her politics to dismantle the male orthodoxies and rigid monolithic systems favoring males. In *Heterosexual Plots and Lesbian Narratives*, the butch-femme [masculine and feminine] relation is described as a constellation which denies male and female gender categorization for instance by disrupting the boundaries of traditional clothing (Farwell 12). The genderless condition of the narrator is supported by butch-femme dynamics:

> The titles “butch” and “femme” are most commonly assumed to be labels used in the lesbian community to distinguish the more masculine partner in a relationship from the more feminine partner. In reality, there is a lot more to it than that . . . being a butch does not only mean tough or strong, and it definitely does not mean in control in relationships. Being a femme also does not mean feminine all the time and it definitely does not mean powerless. It is not about power, it is not about one partner being the “man” and one being the “woman” in the stereotypical heterosexual sense, but it is an amazing dynamic where two people who are at opposite ends of the spectrum balance each other out perfectly. (Boyd 23)

The butch-femme dynamics in lesbianism plays vital role as there is not equal relationship and equal power between two partners. Between the two, the radical partner assumes the role of butch and takes other as femme. The narrator in *written on the Body* plays the role butch partner - having multiple relationships with many of the partners both males and females - and she is powerful in all of her relationships. Though she is a female biologically her relationship is targeted with females particularly with that of married. She presents herself as a player - player intending to play her game with many people regardless of their gender, age and nature as: “I started a game with myself” but at the same time “feel like a kid in the examination room faced with the paper” (41). Her confused state is triggered by the domination of patriarchal ideology. Though she is rigid, strong and extremist in her position; she still lack space and respect in the male-dominated society. This butch-femme dynamics also helps us to diagnose her as female within the guise of male mask in order to challenge the one and only heterosexual option created by the western metaphysics

discarding others - homosexuality, lesbian, gay, intersex and bi-sex as abnormal and anti-social.

The narrator has multiple relationships with both males as well as females thereby challenging the traditional and patriarchal notion of heterosexuality and subverting the single-headed heterosexual relationship and advocating the possibilities of other relationships. In all her relationships, the narrator supposes her as butch person controlling and dominating other partners as:

> We were eating our spaghetti. I though, as long as I don't say her name I'll be all right. I started a game with myself, counting out on the cynical clock face the extent of my success. What am I? I feel like a kid in the examination room facing with a paper I cannot complete. Let the clock go faster. Let me get out here. At 9 o'clock I told Jacqueline I was exhausted. She reached over and took my hand. I felt nothing. And then there we were in our pyjamas side by side and my lips were sealed and my cheeks must have been swelling out like a gerbil's because my mouth was full of Louise. (41)

Here Jacqueline is presented as feminine and the narrator as masculine. The narrator's activities are like that of the male lovers of patriarchal society. Jacqueline is fully depends on her taking her hands and walking side by side. Moreover, in their physical relationships too; the narrator plays active role and assumes her partner as passive like her beloved. More interestingly, when regarding the narrator as female, Kauer brings forth the importance of irony and parody as means of deconstructing the traditional feminine role (46). Furthermore, Kauer remarks that with a female narrator the stereotypically masculine actions would then be a mask of male behavior worn in order to be able to deconstruct gender binaries (47). Thus, thorough and close reading

of Written on the Body revels that the narrator is female though she takes different masks depending upon the situations and having relationships with both males and females.

Her active role in her relationship subverts the traditional male-female role in which male assumes active role. Her frequent visits to her lovers and her manipulation to them highlight this fact. Like the traditional male lover, she "believes in free expression" (41). Moreover, her satiric statement also exposes the hidden fact:"I hesitated to ring the bell. Hesitated because to reach the bell meant pushing my private parts right into the head of the snake" (41). This event shows a fear of castration, a fear which logically would only apply to men: why would a woman feel threatened over losing her non-existing penis? However, if the narrator is a female acting in the role of a male, the fear of castration would be ironic, showing that men are so afraid of losing their penis that they dread a paper snake. Antje Lindenmeyer observes that "Winterson never affirms the importance of the penis/phallus as marker of sexual difference, but plays around it, offering only shifting positions of phallic woman/castrated woman/man ridden with castration anxiety that can never be immovably allocated" (51). The mask of a male persona thus allows a female narrator to enter the sphere of the patriarchal discourse and as Judith Roof proposes it is "possible to perform a masculine persona without necessarily accepting it" (qtd. in Stowers 92). Just because the narrator acts within the frame of male behaviour does not mean that she agrees with it, but rather uses it as a tool to deconstruct social conventions.

The narrator's role as the typical male lover is depicted in the novel. For instance when talking about the phrase 'I love you', the narrator treats the subject with carelessness:

> I had said them many times before, dropping them like coins into a wishing well . . . I had given them as forget-me-nots to girls who should have known better. I don't like to think of myself as an insincere person but if I say I love you and I don't mean it then what else am I? Will I cherish you, adore you, make way for you, make myself better for you? (11)

Comparing the words 'I love you' to the commonplace gesture of giving away flowers leaves a casual impression. Obviously the narrator has treated the subjects of his/her love with little concern for their feelings. The depiction of the narrator thus creates an image of the confirmed bachelor who goes from lover to lover. When reflecting over the many love affairs, the narrator addresses the unrealistic side of this casual lifestyle: "I've always had a sports car, but you can't rev your way out of real life. That home girl gonna get you in the end" (21). This vision actually comes true when the narrator meets Jacqueline who is the definition of the conventional housewife.

In the relationship with Jacqueline the narrator tries to conform to the picture of the faithful lover. Introducing her to the reader, the narrator says, "It was Jacqueline's job to make everything bright and shiny again. She was good with parents; good with children, good with animals . . . She was good with me" (25). The description of Jacqueline matches the image of the home girl that could change the characteristic Casanova with her caring and motherly instincts for both children and pets. Nevertheless, this image is just as cliché-ridden as the notion of the restless bachelor in a fast sports car. When the narrator, after falling for Louise, ends the love affair with Jacqueline, it shows that no such fairy tale exists in real life.

In *Written on the Body*, the narrator transgresses the narrow concept of gender and assumes genderless. The use of transgender is diplomatically used to critique the heterosexual marginalization of homosexual and bi-sexual activities. Chris Beasley explains the practice of transgendering as "transgender refers to people adopting a sexed identity different from their assignment at birth" (52). The lines presuppose that certain gender roles are assigned to every individual at birth. But if one goes beyond the boundary of this gendered identity (man and woman), it is the practice of transgendering. At this point, homosexuality is essentially a practice of transgendering. A lesbian, in this context, does not fall under either of the category: masculine and feminine. Judith Butler in her *Gender Troubles* writes on this issue as follows:

> Indeed, a lesbian . . . transcends the binary opposition between woman and man; a lesbian is neither a woman nor a man. But further a lesbian has no sex; she is beyond the categories of sex . . . Indeed, the lesbian appears to be third gender or, as I shall show, a category that radically problematizes both sex and gender as stable political categories of description. (144)

These lines of Butler ascertain that lesbianism in practice is embedded in trans-politics, especially transgendering and transsexuality. To be a lesbian is surely to go beyond the discourse of sexuality. Moreover, having homosexual relation is the practice that makes the category men-women more problematic. In this sense, lesbians cross this limit; they are neither men nor women since the opposition between men and women sees heterosexuality the only option in normal discourse. Here, the remark of Chris Beasley seems relevant: "It [transgendering] is used to distinguish those who wish to alter their gender in a permanent but less literal sense,

that is, those who live as the opposite gender or as ambiguous gender" (160). In this way, sexual intercourse in the traditional discourse is possible only between the two gender or sexed categories of man and woman. Hence, if there is homosexual relation between the same sexed categories, it definitely blurs the sexual boundary, it is transgendering.*Written on the Body* blurs the strict boundary between male and female and presents the in-between position of the narrator. Here, gender is determined not by biological criteria but by performance. The activities and performance of the narrator are beyond the identification of any of the parameter set to determine gender.

Written on the Body dramatizes the politics of homosexual relationship adopted by lesbians. Like patriarchal discourse to females, the heterosexual discourse has pressed homosexuality into the margins. This oppression has led to homosexuals being almost invisible in mainstream culture and politics. This trend is even seen in literature. Rictor Norton observes that "homosexual literature is written, read, criticized, and taught within a generally hostile environment" (272). Therefore, even though homosexuals, explicitly or inexplicitly, have written about the subject of same-sex love, it has been disregarded by a homophobic society. This trend got break-through with the introduction of queer theory. The emergence of queer theory has become a necessary part of "scrutinizing and celebrating sexual desires and erotic practices that question and reach beyond the bounds of normative heterosexuality" (Cooper 17). Hence, queer theory is a way to establish an identifiable homosexual discourse aside from the heterosexual hegemony present in society. For Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick 'queer' indicates "an indeterminacy or indecipherability about their sexuality and gender, a sense that they cannot be categorized without a careful contextual examination and, perhaps, a whole new rubric" (Espinoza 37). It blurs the

boundary between the categories of normative and deviant sexual behavior. It grew out of gay/lesbian studies in 1991. Form narrow homosexual activities of gay/lesbian studies, queer theory expands its realm of investigation and becomes political critique of anything that falls into normative and deviant categories, particularly sexual activities and identities. In *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, M. H. Abrahams states that "the term queer was originally derogatory used to stigmatize male and female same sex love as deviant and unnatural" (263). He further comments that:

> A number of queer theories, for example, adopted the deconstructive mood of dismantling the key binary oppositions of western culture, such as male/female, heterosexual/homosexual and natural/unnatural, by which a spectrum of diverse things is forced into only two categories, and in which the first category is assigned privilege, power, and centrality, which the second is derogated, subordinated and marginalized. (264)

The mobilization of queer foregrounds the conditions of political representation, its intentions and effects, its resistance to and recovery by the existing network of power. Queer theory concerns itself with all forms of sexuality that are "queer" and by extension, with the normative behaviors and identities which define what is "queer". Thus queer theory expands the scope of its analysis to all kinds of behaviors, including those which are gender-bending as well as those which involve "queer" non-normative forms of sexuality. Queer theory insists that all sexual behaviors, all concepts linking sexual behaviors to sexual identities, and all categories of normative and deviant sexualities, are social constructs sets of signifiers which create certain types of social meaning.

Written on the Body exploits the politics of queer theory in order to deconstruct the dichotomy of male-female category. It mingles the hetero-homo relationships thereby supporting the possibility of bi-sexual relationship. It employs not only gender ambiguities, but also diverse images of sexuality to confuse the reader. For instance the narrator addresses the importance of finding "Mr. Right", but later on adds to the sentence "Miss Right" (10). The question of whether the narrator is male or female thus becomes a question of whether the narrator is hetero - or homosexual. In the beginning of the novel the narrator only refers to past girlfriends, making it natural to assume that the narrator is a heterosexual male. However, this is later on contradicted when the narrator suddenly retells memories of former boyfriends: "I had a boyfriend once called Crazy Frank" (92). With the references to both girlfriends and boyfriends it is unavoidable not to regard the narrator as bisexual. This numeration of boyfriends and girlfriends is direct questioning of the ideology of western metaphysics. In the following lines the narrator questions the western heterosexual relationship between male and female:

> I started to walk home, convincing myself that I would never hear from Louise again. She would go to Switzerland with Elgin and have a baby. A year ago Louis had given up her job at Elgin's request so that they could start a family. She had miscarried once and had no wish to it again. She told me she had firm about no-baby. (92)

The narrator has a homosexual relationship. Moreover, she has relationships with many of males. This homosexual as well as bi-sexual relationship crosses the narrow boundary set by the western society. Moreover, Louise too has this kind of bi-sexual relationship. She is a married woman and she is in relationship with the narrator. She is not satisfied with her husband and even thinks of other males to have a baby. But,

still she is confused whether to give birth to a baby or not. She does not like any baby because “it might look like Elgin” (92). Elgin here is the symbol of patriarchal society and she want to create another agent of such society. In this regard, she even questions her marriage: “ten years of marriage is a lot of marriage” (92). She is tired of her marital life. This questioning of traditional marriage further leads to rejection of giving birth to children and formation of traditional happy family.

The narrator’s position as bisexual allows a questioning of heterosexuality, and especially the heterosexual marriage. In the beginning of the novel the narrator addresses the tradition of marriage: “How happy we will be. How happy everyone will be. And they all lived happily after” (10). In this passage the narrator ridicules the conventional view of marriage leading to happiness by using a fairy tale cliché. This cliché implies that one can only reach happiness through marriage. In the anthology *I'm Telling You Stories*, Duncker notes that “heterosexuality – with all its manifold ramifications of marriage, motherhood, the family . . . was the political regime within which women were kept down” (79). The heterosexual and patriarchal discourse has thus been able to suppress women within these institutions. By questioning heterosexual marriage as the perfect constellation, Winterson opposes this suppression.

Moreover, Winterson creates an alternative to the conventional image of heterosexual marriage. Since society has excluded homosexuals from the institution of marriage, *Written on the Body* produces a counter-part to this tradition. When the narrator imagines a wedding ceremony it is portrayed very differently:

> We must have walked wrapped around each other to a café that was a church and eaten Greek salad that tasted like a wedding feast. We met a cat who agreed to be best man and our bouquets were Ragged Robin

> from the side of the canal. We had about two thousand guests, mostly midges and we felt that we were old enough to give ourselves away. (19)

This rejection of traditional marriage is a challenge to the mainstream social convention posed by the lesbians.Winterson uses irony to challenge the traditional wedding. By refusing trite traditions such as the father giving his daughter away, the novel suggests that such traditions are partly a legacy from a patriarchal hegemony. Since marriage is a tradition that has restrained homosexuals and women, the narrator reverses the fundamentals of marriage to create new ways of thinking.

The heterosexual marriage is questioned further in the depiction of Louise and Elgin's marriage. The fact that Louise engages in an affair with the narrator suggests that she is not content with her husband. In one passage the narrator asks, "You despise him, don't you?" and Louise answers, "No, I don't despise him. I'm disappointed in him" (63). This heterosexual marriage cannot give Louise what she desires and she therefore rejects the monogamy that it stands for. While Louise seeks comfort in the narrator's arms, Elgin goes to prostitutes and Louise tells the narrator that "his present hobby [is] to fly up to Scotland and be sunk in a bath of porridge while a couple of Celtic geishas [rubber-glove] his prick" (68). The adultery that both parties commit crushes the illusion of the holy marriage. On the topic of heterosexual versus homosexual love, Norton discusses the common opinion of the heterosexual relationship as 'closed' and monogamist whereas homosexuality is 'open' and promiscuous (273). By instead depicting a heterosexual marriage as 'open' Winterson contradicts this opinion.

In *Written on the body*, it seems to be essential not to reveal the gender of the narrator, which is evident in the passage above. When Louise addresses her lover she

does not specify whether the person she is in love with is male or female. Instead by referring to the beloved as a creature, the narrator's gender stays undeclared. Since the story is narrated from a first-person perspective, the reader only gets the narrator's point of view. It is therefore possible to keep the narrator's gender disguised because the narrator never provides any information on the topic. Employing the use of a genderless narrator thus seems to be a deliberate strategy.

In order to discuss the complex of problems of the ungendered narrator in *Written on the Body*, it is imperative to have the concept of gender and even sex. Gender is socially constructed concept and it is different from society to society while sex is biological and anatomical. Simone de Beauvoir's famous statement that "[o]ne is not born a woman, one becomes one" is essential for the modern view on gender (qtd. in Lynn 224). Beauvoir distinguishes the biological sex from the socially constructed gender, and implicitly raises the question of how gender should be interpreted. A critic that later builds on the assumption that gender is a construction shaped by social and cultural conventions is Judith Butler. Butler takes the discussion even further, arguing that the different gender roles are performed and indicating that they are in fact just roles acted out (184). This argument suggests that there is no direct connection between the female sex and feminine behaviour or the male sex and masculine behaviour.

Written on the Body is a serious discussion of the very notion of gender. It questions the traditional monolithic concept of heterosexual gender and poses the possibilities of different versions. *Written on the Body*asserts that male-female binary restriction is the outcome of the politics of patriarchal ideology. Besides, male-female category, there is possibility of third gender, which challenges the long-established concept. It also subverts the unnecessary hierarchy created between male and female.

Gender is the socially constructed component of human sexuality. Gender is an inner feeling that you are male, female, both, neither, or somewhere in between. It is a complex concept based on certain characteristics based on society like male: dominant, independent, rational, assertive, analytical, brave, active and, insensitive and female: submissive, dependent, emotional, receptive, intuitive, timid and passive. Gender is a term that refers to social or cultural distinctions associated with being male or female. Gender identity is the extent to which one identifies as being either masculine or feminine (Diamond 323). Its basic and concise concept can be drawn as:

> Gender refers to the array of socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviours, values, relative power and influence that society ascribes to the two sexes on a differential basis. Whereas biological sex is determined by genetic and anatomical characteristics, gender is an acquired identity that is learned, changes over time, and varies widely within and across cultures. Gender is relational and refers not simply to women or men but to the relationship between them. (Esplen and Jolly 3)

These lines indicate that gender unlike sex is temporal, situational, social and ideological concept and subject to change over times. Though it has natural link with the concept of sex but it is a politically biased and discriminatory term. Gender is "typically theorized as a multidimensional, context-specific factor that changes according to time and place, it is routinely assumed to be a homogeneous category in research, measured by a single check box" (Knaak 312). Like him, for Joy L. Johnson and Robin Repta "gender is a multidimensional construct that refers to the different roles, responsibilities, limitations, and experiences provided to individuals based on their presenting sex/gender" (152). Ideas about gender are also culturally and

temporally specific and subject to change. Gender is often an amorphous concept. Gender is “about much more than sex differences between men and women on interesting dependent variables” (Addis and Cohane 635). Gender is both produced and shaped by institutions such as the media, religion, and educational, medical, and other political and social systems, creating a societal gender structure that is deeply entrenched and rarely questioned, but hugely influential.

In the recent years, gender studies has excavated the true nature of gender politics. Lesbian and gay critics deny the concept of strict binaries. Homosexual activities get equal importance as heterosexual activities even in literature. Moreover, the concept of Trans as well as intersex is also fore-grounded. Trans and intersex bodies in particular have disrupted strict and static categories of gender and sex, as these “uncategorizable” bodies highlight the limitations of current conceptualizations (Fausto-Sterling 26). It is important to note that while transgendered bodies can call our categories of sex and gender into question, they can also confirm and reinforce the conventional gender system in the way that transgendered bodies are judged and evaluated for sex reassignment surgery.

Written on the Body by Jeanette Winterson is an erotic tale of love. The novel is about an unnamed narrator who is grieving the loss of love. The narrator, after a long string of fatal love affairs, finally found a soul mate in Louise. However, the narrator came to a point in their relationship where a choice between happiness and Louise's life had to be made. The narrator made the choice alone and comes to regret it. *Written on the Body* is a story of love with all the stereotypes removed, leaving in its place the purity of love between human beings, not gender or sexuality.

Written on the Body is a profound meditation on love, loss, language and identitywhich tries to defamiliarize or ‘make strange’ the constructed ideas of

gendercategorization.In this novel,the gender of the narrator is never specified in the text thus granting genderidentity an open-endedness that undermines hegemonic patriarchal/ heterosexualdiscourses on the body and on the text itself. We encounter a narrator who consciously deconstructs gender binary signifiers, refusing to alignherself/himself with either the masculine or the feminine and highlighting the arbitrarydivision constructed between the two sexes. In her analysis of Monique Wittig's workJudith Butler argues that "one can, if one chooses, become neither female nor male,woman nor man, [and that] the linguistic discrimination of "sex" secures the politicaland cultural operation of compulsory heterosexuality" (*Gender Trouble* 153-154). This compulsory heterosexuality is rejected and discarded in *Written on the Body* providing the possibility of bi-sexual relationship.

In *Written on the Body* the narrator's scrutiny of love and desire illustrates the unstable and shifting nature of sexual desire and the struggle to overcome the culturally constructed meanings attached to gender identification of those whose gender identities, because they are multiple and fluid, resist containment. Moreover, what Winterson seeks to tell us through her narratives is that sexual desire is as fluid and flexible as gender identity, a perspective echoed by Judith Butler who contends that not only gender a cultural construct but:

> If gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way. Taken to its logical limit, the sex/gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders. Assuming for the moment the stability of binary sex, it does not follow that the construction of "men" will accrue exclusively to the bodies of males or that "women" will interpret only female bodies. Further, even if the

> sexes appear to be unproblematically binary in their morphology and constitution (which will become a question); there is no reason to assume that genders ought also to remain as two. (9)

Winterson criticizes the limited conception of love and gender that isdrawn from the heterosexual economy and she emphasizes a more fluidrelationship between one's own sexuality and its relationship with that of others.AsLuce Irigaray writes in *This Sex Which Is Not One:* "we put ourselves into watertightcompartments, break ourselves up into parts, cut ourselves into two, and more.Whereaswe are always one and the other, at the same time.If we separate ourselves that way, we'all' stop being born" (217).Irigaray and Winterson here are similar in their concept of binary opposition created in the society and for them such creations are the politics and ideology of heterosexual and patriarchal society.

In the beginning of the novel, we see the evocation of the narrator's relationship with Louise, and the episodic accounts of thenarrator's many sexual affairs preceding Louise. Taking the form of diary entries, thenarrative is chronologically structured around the seasons of the year: "I am thinking ofa certain September", the narrator says, remembering the past (9). Although on most occasions the narrator'snumerous affairs are presented comically, there is nevertheless a kind of yearning aboutsome of them that indicates the narrator's greater commitment to the relationship; forexample s/he seems totally shattered when one of the lovers, Bathsheba, decides toreturn to her husband. With another of her/his girlfriends, Jacqueline, the narratorconsciously tries to form a stable if passionless relationship, but it soon becomesapparent that their barren life together has no possibility of prospering. When Jacqueline discovers the narrator's passion for Louise, she decides to quit their relationship.

Enlisting the number of male as well as female lovers is a direct threat to morality set on the basis of religious principle. Other lovers mentioned by the narrator attest to the volubility of desire and theelusiveness of gender identification, thus the boyfriend called Crazy Frank, who hasbeen brought up by midgets although he himself is a kind of giant, is a bisexual libertinewho ". . . had the body of a bull, an image he intensified by wearing great gold hoopsthrough his nipples. Unfortunately he had joined the hoops with a chain of heavy goldlinks. The effect should have been deeply butch but in fact it looked rather like thehandle of a Channel shopping bag" (96). Although the narrator admits tohaving fallen in love with Crazy Frank despite the latter's warning not to do so. The narrator sees no reason behind the relation with other person:

> No-one knows what forces draw two people together. There are plenty of theories; astrology, chemistry, mutual need, biological drive. Magazines and manuals worldwide will tell you how to pick the perfect partner. Dating agencies stress the science of their approach although having a computer does not make one scientist . . . Shortly the pseudo--lab coat approach of dating by detail will make way for genuine experiment whose result, however unusual, will remain controllable. (96)

Winterson here advocates that there is not a single reason but multiple reasons for having relationships. Her narrator sees no reasons of her relationships with many of her partners declaring it just as reality - "virtual reality is on its way" (96). It is just the reality of life.

In *Written on the Body* the narrator is then at one point seen as the male lover, keeping love at a distance, but later, as the female lover embracing it fully. The

oscillation between these identifications creates an uncertainty in the reader of how to interpret the role of the narrator. In accordance with post feminism, one has to break down the binary relationship between male and female stereotypes (Lynn 222). By contrasting the image of a traditional Don Juan with the depiction of an emotional mistress, Winterson shows that these images are not in opposition to each other, but that both are a legacy of traditional gender conceptions.The post-feminist woman is constantly vigilant of her appearance and presentation; carefully monitoring her body to make sure it stays in shape, since in a post-feminist context, the very idea of being female rests in maintaining the standard of an aesthetically pleasing figure, among other factors. Post-feminist women empower themselves by placing emphasis on them, using them as a means of self-definition and self-assertion. Subsequently, a huge weight is placed on the female body in post-feminist culture:

> One of the most striking aspects of post-feminist…culture is its obsessional preoccupation with the body. In a shift from earlier representational practices it appears that femininity is defined as a bodily property...Instead of caring or nurturing or motherhood being regarded as central to femininity . . . in today's media it is possession of a 'sexy body' that is presented as women's key (if not sole) source of identity. (Gill 6)

As Gill suggests, the post-feminist woman uses her body and sexuality for self-expression; however, her use of her body and sexuality also affects her development as a person and exerts influence over her relationships. In *Written on the Body*, the narrator rewrites the anatomical expressions of these body parts, creating a tribute to the lesbian body: “Within the clinical language, through the dispassionate view of sucking, sweating, greedy, defecting self, I found a love-poem to Louise” (111). The

narrator does not romanticize the image of Louise's diseased body, but embraces the full extent of it.The remapping of Louise's body continues when the narrator goes through her body parts one by one. Louise's diseased body is divided into four different sections:"The cells, tissues, systems and cavities of the body which includes the skin, the skeleton and the special senses" are mentioned (110).Post-feminism is launched by which "female literary radicals" stated "'we're interested in people now—not in men and women'", that "moral, social, economic, and political standards 'should not have anything to do with sex,'" that it would "be 'pro-woman without being anti-man,'" and that "their stance [is called] 'post-feminist'" (Cott 282). In the same vein, post-feminism also heralds a shift from sex object to sexualized object, as Gill explains:

> Where once sexualized representations of women . . . presented them as passive, mute objects of an assumed male gaze, today . . . Women are not straightforwardly objectified but are presented as active, desiring sexual subjects who choose to present themselves in a seemingly objectified manner because it suits their liberated interests to do so. (Gill 9)

Similarly, post-feminist writers today widely focus on sexuality and the female body, both of which their characters use as vehicles for self-discovery and self-expression.*Written on the Body* has its foundation of the notion of post-feminist, which advocates on the concept of genderless concept. The female characters may assume genderless position in order to challenge the patriarchal orthodox of heterosexuality. The traditional adherence to heterosexuality is revisited in post-feminist advocacy of genderless characters in order to challenge and subvert the binary opposition between male and female.

Written on the Body consciously deconstructs gender binary signifiers, refusing to align the narrator with either the masculine or the feminine and highlighting the arbitrary division constructed between the two sexes. In her analysis of Monique Wittig's work Judith Butler argues that "one can, if one chooses, become neither female nor male, woman nor man, [and that] the linguistic discrimination of "sex" secures the political and cultural operation of compulsory heterosexuality" (153-154). If in the process of asserting the lesbian sexual identity the narrator of *Written on the Body* refuses to be either male or female in his/her journey towards self-consciousness and an understanding of the ethics of love, thus disrupting "the easy flow of meaning and making us aware of the inherent ambiguity and mediating influence of language" (Kirby 5).Feminist critiques of reproductive technology were driven by an anxiety that reproductive technologies would further control women's bodies. As time passed, these critiques moved towards a greater acknowledgment of reproductive technologies' ability to provide women with a choice rather than an obligation to reproduce.

Winterson's use of the genderless narrator is clearly meant to destabilize narrative legibility, denying the possibility of an easily categorizable heterosexual or lesbian romance. Such ambiguity forces the reader to abdicate his or her ability to categorize and control the narrative in this way. Whether male or female, the narrator is clearly critical of the regulation of relationships through the institution of marriage. We can observe this not merely because the narrator has dated so many married women, but by the way marriage itself is discussed and portrayed throughout the novel. "I used to think of marriage as a glass plate window just begging for brick. This self-exhibition, this self-satisfaction, smartness, tightness, tight-arsedness. The way married couples go out in fours like a pantomime horse, the man walking

together at the front, the women trailing a little way behind…It doesn't have to be like that, but mostly it is" (13). We see the fragility of marriage through the description of it as a glass plate window. The comparison of the married couples to the pantomime horse gestures both to the theatricality of marriage and the power structure inherent in the institution as "with men walking together at the front and women trailing a little way behind" (45). Of course, this example also emphasizes the gendered separation within marriage and women's subordinate role. Thus, *Written on the Body* breaks the patterns of family, sex, gender and love in an attempt to create the lesbian heritage.

Written on the Body is the critique of traditional marriage and reproduction. Marriage controls mating through the rights and incentives that it provides to heterosexual couples, science is now encroaching upon the process of sex and procreation. This controlled reproduction is depicted as dull and miniature:

> What are the characteristics of living things? At school, in biology I was told the following: excretion, growth, irritability, locomotion, nutrition, reproduction and respiration. This does not seem like a very lively list to me. If that's all there is to being a living thing I may as well be dead. What of the other characteristic prevalent in human living things, the longing to be loved? No, it does not come under the heading Reproduction. I have no desire to reproduce but I still seek out love. Reproduction… Is that what I want? The model family two plus two in an easy home assembly kit. I don't want a model. I want the full-scale original. I don't want to reproduce. I want to make something entirely new. (108)

The concept of marriage and reproduction is subverted in *Written on the Body* as the narrator is always in search of love but not of marriage and reproduction. He violates

the natural process of procreation. Within this conception of marriage, the narrator's relationship with Louise is shown as opposition not only regarding marriage but also to the notion of a categorizable body. It focuses not only the idea of heterosexual reproduction but also the whole idea of standard life functions and the need to reproduce a controllable normative body. This idea of marriage beyond social naturalized norms and values is further supported by drawing the reference of "Mark Twain [who] built a house for himself with a window over the fireplace so that he could watch the snow falling over the flames" (108). In this sense, it critiques the traditional system of marriage and supports for widow marriage which is not easily accepted in most of the societies of the world.

Furthermore, the narrator shows the importance of appearance and dress codes in the reader's perception of gender identity. A modern person might be reluctant to consider the idea that clothing would still be a gender signifier. Society has come a long way since the time when men were the only ones wearing pants, but there are still certain dress-codes that are associated with either a male or female persona. For instance the narrator, on several occasions, wears "a pair of shorts with recycle tattooed across one leg" (12), and in another passage just about to get undressed by a lover the narrator says, "Off with the business suit" (72). Shorts and suits are garments that might conform to the reader's notion of male attire and make the reader assume that the narrator is a man. However, except for a few indefinable descriptions of the narrator's appearance, these descriptions are as vague as the gender identifications. Searching for clues to the narrator's gender by looking for depictions of clothes and appearance therefore gets the reader nowhere, but rather reinforces Winterson's aim to expose the fixed gender assumptions in society.

According to queer theory, society sees heterosexuality as the 'norm' and homosexuality as the opposite, the 'abnormal'. Queer theory can be closely linked to feminist criticism and gender studies, as well as postcolonial studies since they all put focus on an oppressed group. The prominent queer theorist Judith Butler claims that “sexuality is always constructed within the terms of discourse and power, where owner is partially understood in terms of heterosexual and phallic cultural conventions” (41). Just like feminist criticism questions the notion of feminine identity, queer theory strives to challenge the idea that there is supposedly a gay identity. By looking at different depictions of gender and sexuality in *Written on theBody*, this research discusses whether the novel succeeds in escaping the traditional perceptions of gender and sexuality. It also deals with how Winterson plays with stereotypical male and female identifications, appearance and behaviour in order to deconstruct gender. Moreover, investigates in what ways the heterosexual discourse is questioned in the novel. The focus is on the deconstruction of marriage and the nuclear family. Subverting the heterosexual concept of sexuality and gender, it also turns the concepts of marriage, family, sex, love and morality upside down providing multiple alternatives.

Thus, *Written on the Body* shows that instead of perceiving gender as either male or female, it is possible to perceive gender as a performance.Gender and sexuality should not be limited into narrow traditional opposition between male and female. Bi-sexual relationship of the narrator and Louis with both males and females crosses the boundary created by hetero-patriarchal ideology. As a strong post-feminist, Winterson presents the genderless narrator which is justifiable to challenge the so-called ultimate norms and values of patriarchal system. The unidentifiable gender, name and age of the narrator show her perpetual search for identity which is

otherwise lost within the veil of patriarchal ideology. In this sense, homosexual and bi-sexual activities presented in the noveldeconstructthe narrow perception of gender and sexuality established by western metaphysics.

III. *Written on the Body*: Redefinition of Gender Boundaries

Throughout *Written on the Body*, Jeanette Winterson advocates the lesbian issues of homosexual relationship between two females - the named narrator and Louise - claiming a space and place for them. Critiquing the hetero-patriarchal concepts of gender and sexuality, the present novel questions the grand narration of love, sex, family, marriage and morality established by western metaphysics thereby breaking the familiar patterns of the society in an attempt to create the lesbian heritage. The narrator's relationship with multiple partners mainly married women like Bathsheba,Jacqueline Louise exposes homosexual activities. Moreover, her enumeration of boyfriends like Crazy Frankdespite her preference to females shows her practice of transgendering. Louise's broken marital life with Elgin depicts the problematic situation of traditionally highlighted heterosexual relationship. Louise does not accept the things written on her body and attempts to explore her true inner self establishing homosexual relationship with the narrator. In this sense, unlike traditional heterosexual discourse of narrative, the plot of *Written on the Body*is set against a heterosexual patriarchal discourse or the disruption of gender dichotomies.

Written on the Body is one of Winterson's most well known and controversial novels, a love story in which the narrator's gender remains unspecified. The narrator

falls in love with a married woman who leaves her husband and then is diagnosed with leukemia. The novel's use of a genderless narrator can be interpreted as an attempt to transcend gender boundary between male and female. Only through deep and close-reading of the novel, we can discern that the narrator is biologically female. The critics John Southerland, Aurelie Jane Sheehan and Andrea Stewart assume that the narrator is female. Her relationship with other characters, her interpretation of the world, her costume and her thoughts towards sex, love, marriage and gender help us to conclude that she is a female in the disguise of male mask. The bi-sexual relationship of the narrator and Louise deconstructs the long-existing notion of gender and sexuality.

Highlighting the so-called deviant behaviors including homosexual, bi-sexual and multi-partner sexual relationships, *Written on the Body* is written on the foundation of lesbian politics thereby it draws the conceptual framework of queer theory, which fore-grounds the queer, odd, strange, deviant and restricted behaviors of people. The traditional image of the nuclear family is also deconstructed. The family structure of father, mother and child has long been seen as the foundation of heterosexuality, excluding homosexuals since they cannot reproduce in a natural way.Instead of the image of a nuclear family, the novel compares the narrator and Louise's relationship to the comfort that a family gives: "This place will warm me, feed me and care for me" (51). The narrator experiences all qualities connected to a home in the company of Louise, and together they create their own notion of a family. At one point when lying next to Louise in the bed the narrator also states, "I put my arms around her, not sure whether I was lover or child" (80). By dismissing the traditional family construction, Winterson shows that there are other possible

structures.By crossing the boundaries of heterosexual markers, Winterson creates the space for another love than the heterosexual to take place.

Interpreting *Written on the Body* as a lesbian narrative not only serves to oppose the heterosexual norm, but also the patriarchal hegemony.Furthermore, Farwell states that the term lesbian goes beyond the notion of women loving women and becomes a metaphor for the feminist woman (16). As the lesbian subject, Louise is active, strong and no longer defined by male paradigms.*Written on the Body* thus becomes a post-feministic work, which reaches beyond the search for a female persona and further on deconstructs the very notion of female identity.The concept of genderless narrator is raised from Winterson's post-feminist concern because the post-feminists think that such state helps the female to oppose and dismantle all forms and discrimination and exploitation done to the females by the ideology of patriarchal system.

Thus, *Written on the Body*is a lesbian novel that subverts the existing concept of sexuality and gender created by hetero-patriarchal discourse, which embraces heterosexual relationship as one and only alternative discarding other possibilities. This research excavates the homosexual, bi-sexual and other transgendering activities of the narrator and Louise highlighting their so-called deviant behaviours in order to deconstruct and subvert the notions of love, marriage, sex, family and morality created by the western metaphysics. Being based on lesbianismthat is grounded on the politics of queer theory, this research fore-grounds the possibility of family formation between two homosexuals - the narrator and Louise - as an alternative to heterosexual family, thereby dismissing the hetero-patriarchal accusation of sterile and unproductive formation. Moreover, Louise celebrates her lesbian body in its true form rather than as defined otherwise and refuses to be written on her body by the hetero-

patriarchal discourse thus challenges the so-called well-established and deep-rooted norms and values of the hetero-patriarchal society.

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