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Subversion of Heteronormativity in Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*

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Abstract

This article argues that *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, a novel by Jeanette Winterson, challenges conventional discourses of gender and sexuality through its portrayal of the protagonist Jeanette's subversive queer performances. Drawing on queer theory and employing content and textual analysis, the article discusses how Winterson represents queer embodiment not only as a form of resistance to heteronormativity but also as a means of pursuing self-liberation from heteronormative indoctrination. The article concludes that Winterson subverts the heteronormative discourses on gender and sexuality through four queer interventions: demystification of essentializing human identity and truth, dramatization of the resisting queer drives, articulation of the liberating potential of queer desires/bodies, and portrayal of the possibility of queer love. Hence, the article contributes a fresh perspective on the novel and encourages further scholarly engagement with queer narratives in literary criticism and the real social world.

Keywords: Gender, heteronormativity, lesbian, queer, sexuality

Introduction

> Oranges appear many times in the story. When Jeanette feels uncertain about something, her mother always gives her oranges. In this way, oranges become a symbol of heterosexuality and the only possible way to live life, according to her mother. There are other possible ways, but they are not available to her mother as she is not ready for the mixed feelings. (Biradar 446)

Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* is a novel that follows the life of Jeanette, the protagonist and narrator, from childhood to early adulthood. Adopted by a Christian mother who intends to make her a missionary, Jeanette is raised with Biblical teachings and quizzes until she begins school at age seven. As she grows, Jeanette deviates from the gender and sexuality discourses imposed on her and begins engaging in queer relationships with characters like Melanie, Miss Jewsbury, and Katy. Despite severe punishments, including exorcism attempts

by a Church pastor and forced confinement by her mother, Jeanette refuses to renounce her intimate lesbian feelings. Her mother's intolerance to heterosexual intimacy complicates their relationship, hinting at two possibilities: Jeanette's confession and repression of her queer desires, and a liberating resistance. Jeanette chooses self-exile over submission, embracing her queer identity without regret, believing that "oranges are not the only fruit"—a metaphor for the diverse possibilities of love, identity, and self-liberation beyond societal and Christian discourses on gender and sexuality. During the development of the plot revolving around the protagonist Jeanette, Winterson sporadically interweaves the narrative with some fairy tales too.

In the novel, the protagonist Jeanette transgresses the boundaries of gender and sexuality while performing her queer/lesbian identity. Her queer partners like Melanie, Miss Jewsbury, and Katy also transgress the limits of heteronormativity. In this sense, the novel showcases the subversive potential of queer identity counterpoised with its narrative strategies and character development, foregrounding queer desires and bodies as resistive drives. Therefore, there remains a need for deeper critical engagement with how Winterson's *Oranges* presents queer identities as counternarratives to heteronormativity.

Literature Review

Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* has received critical attention from various theoretical frameworks. In this section, I review existing literature on the novel by weaving the authors into three themes: Jeanette's relation with the family and her Christian community, identity, and feminist intervention.

Scholars have interpreted the novel, concentrating on the mother-daughter bonding and Jeanette's search for independence. Caryn Carter, employing Freudian and Kristevan psychoanalysis, views Jeanette's identity development as dependent on separating from her mother. As Carter explains, "the daughter's development as a subject relies on a process of separating herself from a dominating, even monstrous mother who threatens to engulf her selfhood" (17). Lakshmi and John argue that Jeanette's journey is about confronting and rejecting societal norms as she moves through different spaces in pursuit of selfhood: "Jeanette discovers her own self after leaving home and Church and experiencing the city life" (488). For Biradar, Jeanette's rebellion takes symbolic form through the recurring motif of the orange, which represents the heterosexual ideal forced upon her by her mother. "Oranges become a symbol of heterosexuality and the only possible way to live life according to her mother," (446) he argues, and Jeanette's refusal to conform marks "her successful conquest over her internal territory" (449). Hence, Jeanette's quest for queer identity has been interpreted in terms of her relationship with her mother.

The intersection of religious authority and personal identity is another prominent theme exposed by critics in the novel. Al-Shara notes that Winterson "creates a chaotic atmosphere" by confronting the rigidity of conservative religion with Jeanette's emerging sexuality, exposing the "hypocrisy and irrationality" of religious dogma (239). Brown deepens this point by suggesting that the church's condemnation of Jeanette enables her interpretive freedom: the church's rejection "implicitly unlocks for her both the Bible and her own sense of authorial agency" (246). Bollinger similarly underscores the novel's manipulation of religious narrative, observing that Biblical texts "are already problematic; not quite history and not quite storytelling," which allows Winterson to parody and rewrite dominant religious discourse (356).

Structurally, critics make high claims about the feminist insights in the novel. Anne DeLong, drawing on Luce Irigaray, praises the novel's refusal of linearity and its embrace of multiplicity, describing it as a "female discourse… characterized by simultaneity, fluidity, and multiplicity." She compares the novel to a "cat's cradle," a tangle of narrative threads that resist patriarchal structure (63–64). Bordwin echoes this by showing how queer materiality and

narrative nonlinearity work together in the novel, where literary objects and allegories animate a world "strangely dependent on human amanuenses even as they insist on their own existence" (228). Bordwin connects queerness to the material world, arguing that Winterson uses objects—"an uncanny pebble, a slice of fruitcake… a piece of whalebone"—to express lesbian identity and subjectivity, claiming that these strange and ambivalent items allow the "lesbian artist to thrive" (228) in reinterpreting the objective world.

Across these readings, Winterson's *Oranges* is shown to resist easy categorization, offering a layered and radical vision of identity, family, religion, and narrative. However, the lesbian body performance of the protagonist Jeanette has not been brought into scholarly conversation. Therefore, in this article, I discuss how Jeanette's lesbian body performance undoes gender and sexuality discourses.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frameworks I have used in this article are queer theory, gender performativity, and lesbianism as theorized by Nikki Sullivan in *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*. As Nikki writes, queer theory asserts that heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality are social constructions and contingent on their cultural contexts (1). It rejects the "humanist notion of the subject as unique, unified, rational, autonomous" (41). Therefore, Chris Beasley asserts that "queer theory offers a postmodern critique of metanarratives of identity" and rejects "fixed identity gender/sexuality categories" (162). It means human identity is in a state of flux and contingency. At the same time, Tony Purvis, citing Eve K. Sedgwick, describes queer as "the open mesh of possibilities" that resists monolithic meanings of gender and sexuality (qtd. in *Literary Theory*, 438). It means queer theory imagines the possibility of multiple performances of human identities. Thus, queer theory denaturalizes the heterosexual social norms like sex, love and marriage imagined only between two different gendered categories: a male and a female.

According to Nikki, central to queer theory is Judith Butler's concept of performativity. Queer notion of performance is built on the statement that "any project of (self)transformation is necessarily limited, is already conditioned by the world" (Nikki 94). In this context, for Butler, gender is "a representation and ritual" naturalized through repetition (*Gender Trouble* xv), and sex itself is inseparable from its cultural construction (*Bodies* 5). Beasley elaborates that Butler "refuses assumptions regarding the biological underpinnings of gender" (*Gender* 101) and that gender "has no 'real-ness' at all" (102). Louis Tyson reinforces this by stating that sexuality is "fluid, fragmented, [and] dynamic," existing along with "a continuum of sexual possibilities" (335). Purvis adds that identities emerge from repeated discursive positions, not biological determinism (*Literary Theory*, 442). Therefore, masculinity and femininity, heterosexuality and homosexuality are a part and parcel of human discursive performances.

Queer theory opens the possibility for a celebration of lesbian desire/body. It is built on the thesis that heterosexuality is not a transhistorical category but "a discursively constructed institution" (Nikki 120). Lesbian desire for cross-dressing embodies this subversion, acting as a heterosexual gender parody that exposes the disconnect between anatomy and gender performance (Butler, *Bodies* 175). Hence, rooted in this performative logic, lesbian desire/body as a resisting force against heteronormativity. Beasley defines this force as "identities that transcend gender identities assigned at birth" (160). Butler asserts that a lesbian body "transcends the binary opposition between woman and man" (*Gender Trouble* 144), and critiques heterosexual frameworks where "lesbian desire is always and only a mask" (*Bodies* 127). As Chris Barker and Emma A. Jane write, cross-dressing destabilizes the claims of hegemonic heterosexual masculinity (367), while Hans Bertens views it as heavy artillery against fixed, phallogocentric categories (230).

Queer theory accepts the possibility of homoeroticism and same-sex love as a form of sexuality. As Nikki writes, it opens the "possibility of moving away from stablised notion of gender and sexuality" (134). It sees the possibility of making love among individuals regardless of gender identity. *Encyclopædia Britannica Online* defines lesbianism as "the tendency and orientation of a human female to be emotionally and usually sexually attracted to other females, or the state of being so attracted ("Lesbianism"). Hence, lesbian body performance is informed by queer and performativity theories that unsettle the normative constructs of gendered and sexual identity, revealing gender and sexuality as fluid, discursively produced, and inherently unstable discursive constructions.

Methodology

In this article, I have used the theoretical framework of lesbian body performance to read Winterson's *Oranges* using content and textual analysis methods. As a research method, content analysis is "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorff 24). Here, the content means the "texts in the sense that they are meant to be read, interpreted, and understood by people other than the analysts" (38). Within content analysis, I have used the textual analysis method in my article. Textual analysis is a systematic and scientific method of generating meaning from any meaningful unit known as text: "A text is something that we make meaning from" (McKee 4). It allows researchers to connect the text with the world and generate meanings to make sense of the world invented in the text: "Textual analysis is a way for researchers to gather information about how other human beings make sense of the world" (McKee 1). In the context of this article, Winterson's *Oranges* is the text and the protagonists' queer performance is the content that I aim to explore. Through analysis and interpretation, I investigated that the novel presents queer performance to demystify the normalized discourses on gender and sexuality. When, I tracked and traced the subverting potential of queer identities in the novel, four mutually reinforcing themes emerged: demystification of gendered identity and truth, queer performativity as resistance, queer desire/body as liberating drive, and lesbian love as counter-performance. The themes have been discussed in the following section.

Results and Discussion

The content and textual analysis of the novel from the perspective of queer theory suggested that Winterson's *Oranges* dramatizes queer performance as an antithesis to heteronormativity through the queer journey of Jeanette as well as some intrusive stories. Winterson demystifies heteronormativity through a journey of the formation of queer identity that culminates into lesbian love. The subversive queer performance navigates through gendered identity and truth, queer performativity, queer desire/body, and finally the lesbian love.

Queering Gendered Identity and Truth

Winterson's *Oranges* portrays the queer identity of the protagonist Jeanette with many other characters who play with their desires. According to Nikki, queer theory has been built on the thesis that there is no correct way of defining gender, sexuality, relationships, and love (1). Therefore, queer performance starts with queering or demystifying humanist belief in coherent and uniform identity.

In the novel, Jeanette's queer love demystifies the discourse of heteronormativity. Jeanette's homosexual feelings have been interpreted as "Satan's spell" and "Satan's voice," which are "full of demons" (104). However, Jeanette's queer identity rejects these demonizing attempts. It shows that Jeanette is queering heteronormative discourse of demonizing homosexuality. Moreover, Winterson intrudes into the narrative thread with some stories that function as queer counternarratives. For example, the narrator in the novel tells a story of a prince

searching for a perfect woman: "I want a 'woman' [my emphasis], without blemish inside or out, flawless in every respect. I want a woman who is perfect" (61). Here, the prince's search for a perfect woman is a search for the essential identity of his future wife that reflects his belief in the sexually gendered identity. However, ironically, he cannot find the woman with perfect subjectivity. In this sense, the narrator implies the insights of queer identity; there does not exist any perfect gendered identity of an individual. The story of the prince demonstrates how heterosexual males search for an ideal partner:

> As he walked, he spoke aloud to his faithful companion, an old goose. 'If only I could find a wife,' he sighed. How can I run this whole kingdom without a wife?' 'You could delegate?' suggested the goose, waddling beside as best she could. 'Don't be silly,' snapped the prince. 'I'm a real prince.' The goose blushed. 'The problem is,' continued the prince, 'there's a lot of girls, but no one who's got that special something.' (61)

In the story, the prince cannot see any alternative to a heterosexually perfect wife. However, the fundamental problem implied in these lines is that he seeks a 'special something'. Here, for the prince, that very something is a heteronormative feminine personality, subjectivity, and identity that he seems to presuppose as inborn and intuitive in his would-be wife. At the same time, the prince also believes he has an identity different from that of other ordinary human beings. His expression, "I'm the real prince," is his claim of his stable identity (61). Here, the prince is searching for a female with 'feminine' qualities, presupposing his 'masculine' identity. Ironically enough, the prince cannot find the woman he desperately seeks. He merely gets satisfied by writing a book: "Three years passed, and the prince began to write a book called *The Holy Mystery of Perfection"* (62). The title of the book incorporates the ethos of queer theory. The disillusionment of the prince implies that perfection, truth, and reality are the only products of fictional discourse that the prince is searching for. In the novel, the narrator says that the second chapter of the prince's book accepts "the impossibility of perfection. The restless search in his life, the pain" (62). Finally, the prince realizes that perfection is something constructed: "I had hoped on coming here to find an end to my quest, but I know that perfection is not to be found, but to be 'fashioned' [my emphasis], there is no such thing as flawlessness in this earth" (66). Hence, through this story, Winterson queers the humanist concept of truth and perfection: no absolute heteronormative identity—neither that of a male nor that of a female—can be achieved. Hence, Winterson's *Oranges* demonstrates a tension between what is sought and what is fashioned or constructed wherein the latter is counternarrative to heteronormative identities. In this sense, the prince encounters queer truths because he realizes that what he sought was a discursive construction rather than something out there.

Moreover, according to queer theory if human identities are in the state of flux, so are heteronormative institutions. The discourse of heteronormative marriage has been debunked in Winterson's *Oranges*. For Jeanette's mother, sex in its various forms is a devil and an enemy (3). She also had a belittling attitude toward males and masculinity because "she didn't believe that there were any wise men" (3). It suggests that even though Jeanette's mother wants Jeanette to live a life of a heterosexual missionary, her own relationship with her husband is in question. The marital bond and love between Jeanette's parents are not strong because if her father liked to watch wrestling, her mother liked to wrestle. Additionally, her mother had "a mysterious attitude towards the begetting of children" (3). Hence, her mother's negation of masculine wisdom and mysterious attitude toward giving birth debunks the discourse of marriage and reproduction. Similarly, Jeanette's queer hallucinations counter the discourse of marriage as she has unusual imaginations when her mother talks about the idea of marriage. She narrates her visions in the following way:

> Somehow, I made it to the altar. The priest was very fat and kept getting fatter, like

> bubble gum you blow. Finally, we came to the moment, 'You may kiss the bride.' My new husband turned to me, and there were a number of possibilities. Sometimes he was blind, sometimes a pig, sometimes my mother, sometimes the man from the post office, and once, just a suit of clothes with nothing inside. (72)

In this excerpt, the narrator laughs at the traditional grand narrative of gender and sexuality. In her queer imaginations, her husband is not necessarily a male. In her queer hallucinations, she even envisions the marriage between her mother and herself. In this sense, Winterson's *Oranges* rejects the heteronormative identity; it deconstructs heteronormativity through resistive drives of queer identities. The queer identities, moreover, have been performed as resistive drives.

Queer Performativity as Resistance

Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges*, in addition to queer politics, undoes the discourse of gender and sexuality through queer performance. Queer theorists argue that human identity is the totality of performances "that are culturally and historically specific rather than being something that exist in essential sense" (Nikki 81). For queer theorists, gender and sexuality is constructed discursively and normalized through iteration and reiteration. Therefore, when queer identities perform their non-normal identity, it becomes a resistance, and counter performance. In the novel, Jeanette is the victim of this heteronormative performativity: her adoptive mother thinks of inventing her as "a missionary child, a servant of God, a blessing" (10). It suggests that her mother wanted Jeanette to perform her identity as a Christian missionary and a divine blessing throughout her life. However, Jeanette's queer identity deviates from these expectations. Once, before she was discovered a queer, a pastor talked about Jeanette positively but she did not care about it: "He talked about me for twenty minutes, and I didn't hear a word" (24). Here, Jeanette's act of not hearing a single word shows her resistance to Christian ideology of heteronormativity. When Jeanette has a love affair with Melanie, the pastor of her church demands confession, and she pretends to confess, but never confides in her heart. Jeanette narrates the dialogue between the pastor and herself as follows:

> 'Then go into the vestry with Mrs. White and the elders will come and pray for you. It's not too late who truly repent.'
> He [the pastor] turned to me.
> I love her.
> 'Then you do not love the lord.'
> Yes, I love both of them.
> You cannot.
> I do, I do, let me go. (105)

This dialogue shows that Jeanette's queer drive protests heteronormativity. According to the pastor, one cannot love God if one is a lesbian. However, Jeanette boldly defends herself by asserting that she can do both. Hence, her desire to love both God and a queer partner subverts the traditional idea of heterosexuality: sexual intercourse, for the pastor, is only possible between the two sexed categories—male and female. However, Jeanette envisions the possibility of loving God as well as her queer partner. In this sense, Jeanette's queer desire counters the divinized discourse of heteronormativity.

Moreover, in the novel, there is a reference to a princess that exteriorizes how gender is constructed, thereby claiming that the social constructions can be deconstructed. The princess has been presented as brilliant and beautiful, but "so sensitive the death of a moth could distress her for weeks" (9). At this point, her femininity has been presented; her femininity has been presented as tender and sensitive. However, in the story, the princess's personality transforms along with the lifestyle changes. Later, she meets an old hunchback in the forest who assigns her "to milk the goats, to educate the people and to compose songs for

their festival" (9). The princess, after being assigned these tasks, "agreed to stay and forgot all about the palace and moths" (10). This story avers that the fragile heart of the princess is no other than the construction of her society: she is forbidden from the public sphere. In this sense, the femininity of the princess represents the gender roles normalized in a sexed category, the woman. This can be inferred by her heart problem being solved when she becomes busy with numerous tasks in the forest. Hence, her femininity has been undone by changing her habits of mind and action.

Furthermore, the novel shows how sexuality is performatively constructed. Traditional gender and sexuality discourses dictate different roles between the two sexed categories: male and female. When the normative discourses have been challenged, it becomes a matter of criticism. In the novel, the homosexual affair between Jeanette, Melanie, Miss Jewsbury, and Katy is criticized vehemently. Jeanette's affair with Melanie has been defined negatively and as "unnatural passions and the mark of the demon" (105). After such negative criticism, Melanie agrees "give up the sin and beg the Lord to forgive" (105). Later, she gets married abiding by the heteronormative social rules. However, Jeanette begins another queer affair with Miss Jewsbury, running away from the church. At this point, the novel simultaneously presents the performative aspect of gender and sexuality and its deconstruction. After the revelation of her affair with Jewsbury, the heterosexual society again tries to repress her queer feelings through an oppressive performance, a punishment. Jeanette writes: "My mother nodded, nodded, nodded and locked me in. She did give me a blanket, but took away the light bulb. Over the thirty-six hours that followed, I thought about the demon and some other things besides" (108). It proves that the discourse of gender and sexuality pertains due to the fear of punishment. In the novel, if Melanie is treated normally after she curbs lesbianism and incorporates heterosexuality, Jeanette suffers a lot. However, Jeanette's lesbian drive appears to be more compelling than the punishment drive. She narrates, "I knew that demons entered wherever there was a weak point. If I had a demon my weak point was Melanie, but she was beautiful and good and had loved me" (108). If there is any mistake in Jeanette, it is none other than to have a female sexual organ upon which society has invented plenty of discursive practices that she cannot escape easily. In the novel, Jeanette is finally excommunicated when she is in love with Katy. In other words, punishing a lesbian is an oppressive social performance as well as its construction at the same time. Therefore, Jeanette's disobedience of heteronormative norms critiques the constructiveness of gender and sexuality.

In addition, Winterson's *Oranges* subverts the heteronormative performance of gendered sexuality through lesbian transsexuality. In the very beginning of the lesbian affair of Jeanette with Melanie, she rejects the gender and sexuality definitions of the pastor of the Church, for whom sexual intercourse is only possible between the two gendered categories—male and female. Therefore, he asks Jeanette, "Do you deny you love this woman [Melanie] with a love reserved for man and wife?" and Jeanette replies, "No, yes, I mean of course I love her … To the pure all things are pure' (105). According to the pastor, there can be a sexual relationship only between a male and a female. However, Jeanette rejects that her love is not preserved for a man. For Jeanette, her love can be performed to satisfy her bodily desires. This sort of argument of the narrator leads her beyond the boundary of gender and sexuality; she can be neither categorized as feminine nor masculine; she is a counter-discourse. Later, when Jennette begins queer affair with Jewsbury and is punished severely by her mother. she has the queer dialogue with the 'demon' and herself:

> 'What sex are you?'
> 'Doesn't matter does it? After all that's your problem.' 'If I keep
> you, what will happen?'

> 'You will have a difficult, different time.' 'Is it
> worth it?'
> 'That's up to you.' 'Will I
> keep Melanie?'
> But the demon vanished. (109)

In the dialogue, Jeanette laughs at the gender role. Here, the demon is no other than the demonized lesbian self of the protagonist, but it hardly makes any difference for her. Moreover, Jeanette also hates the heterosexual marriage of Melanie: "I objected to her getting married to *him*" (124). At this point, Jeanette pours her disdain upon the gender and sexuality roles. She even hates Melanie because of her involvement in the practice of heterosexuality. A homosexual is beyond the category for Jeanette: "I knew that a homosexual is further away from a woman" (128). Moreover, after being in love with Katy she is further rejected by her mother and the community. In this context, she narrates: "So there I was, my success in the pulpit being the reason for my downfall. The devil had attacked me at my weakest point: my inability to realize the limitations of my sex" (134). Here, she means to say that her fundamental mistake, if there is any, is no other than the transgression of gender and sexuality roles created based on her biological difference. Hence, queer performativity subverts heteronormative discourses of gender and sexuality in the novel. Additionally, such queer performativity becomes a way to release the repressed but liberating desires of queer bodies.

Queer Desires/Body as Liberating Drive

Winterson's *Oranges* centers around the desire and body of queer identities. Bodily desires take an important part of human identity in queer performance. Queer theory counters the sickness model of heteronormativity that interprets queer desires as biological accident and anomaly (Nikki 24). Queer theorists believe that homosexual desires are natural and are to be accepted a form of sexuality. In the novel, the conversation between queer identities, Jeanette and Melanie, reject the idea that lesbian desires are unnatural: "Do you think this is Unnatural Passion?' I [Jeanette] asked her [Melanies] once. 'Don't' feel like it. According to Pastor Finch, that's awful.' She must be right, I thought" (89). In this conversation the binary between natural heteronormative passion and unnatural queer passion has been deconstructed. The queer identities, even though the pastor sees queer desires awful, do not feel so. They take it naturally. Additionally, when Jeanette is in a state of tension, her mother offers her oranges. Believing that only oranges can bring consolation. When Jeanette is seriously ill, her mother meets her with oranges: "My mother came to see to me quite a lot in the end, bit it was the busy season at church. They were planning the Christmas campaign. When she couldn't come herself she sent my father usually with a letter and a couple of oranges. 'The only fruit,' she always said. Fruit salad, fruit of fools, fruited punch. Demon fruit, rotten fruit, fruit on Sunday" (29). Here, oranges represent heteronormativity.

Nevertheless, Jeanette is irritated by the fruit her mother sent. She does not want to be defined as female based on the consumption of oranges; 'oranges are not the only fruit' for her. When Jeanette is having an affair with other characters, the community continually castigates her as a deviant, and her mother regularly offers her oranges, but Jeanette rejects them. When Jeanette is suggested by her mother to be married to a male, she hates this idea, relating it to the imagined uniform she must wear if she gets married. She imaginatively decorates herself with the bridal uniform and hates it: "It was spring, the ground still had traces of snow, and I was about to be married. My dress was pure white and a golden crown. As I walked up the aisle the crown got heavier and heavier and the dress more and more difficult to walk in. I thought everyone would point at me, but no one noticed. . . . My new husband turned to me and there were a number of possibilities" (71). Jennette imagines performing drag in this particular context of the imagined

incident. She rejects dresses that are exclusively heterosexual. As oranges are hateful to her, gorgeous clothes are also uncomfortable for Jeanette. The dress is not appropriate to the desires that she has in her heart; she is a lesbian. Even though she feels uncomfortable wearing the dress, no one notices it. That is, society is habituated to using dress to indicate gendered sexuality. Moreover, her mother informs her to wear the hat, which she criticizes: "I wondered whether to drop my hat in it, but I knew she'd make me wear it just the same" (80). Hence, the rejection of the hat is the counter practice of the performative gender. In addition, Jeanette never wears the skirt: "I had never shown the slightest feeling for them, apart from my never wearing a skirt" (127). Hence, the desires of Jeanette are her liberating drives which are antithetical to heteronormativity.

In addition, Winterson's *Oranges* depicts the subversive dynamics of a queer body. The lesbian characters in the novel are solely concerned with the bodily pleasures rather than the heteronormative social prescriptions. Jeanette, the protagonist and her queer partners prioritize their bodily desires over the desires of society; they perform what their bodies need, irrespective of social restrictions. On the contrary, their Christian community prescribes the discursive rules and regulations on the lesbian characters in relation to the bodily definitions. At the beginning of the narrative, Jeanette narrates that an old woman predicts her future just by touching her body (palm): "Once, when I was collecting the black peas, about to go home, the old woman got hold of my hand. I thought she was going to bite me. She looked at my palm and laughed a bit. 'You'll never marry,' she said, and not you, and you'll never be still" (7). At this point, the woman who touched Jeanette's arm indicates that her body is a vehicle for her lesbian feelings. No sooner did she touch the body of the protagonist than she came to know the hidden desires or the homosexual desires of Jeanette. Moreover, the prediction of the woman comes to be true when Jeanette later involves herself in homosexuality without being married to a male. Hence, Jeanette's body carries her identity; her body is more important in guiding her future. Here, her queer body is performing her aspirations and possibly her future. Heteronormative discourse of sexuality believes in the second-ness of women, which presupposes the female existence as the bodily existence; women do not have intellectual capacity in a patriarchal society. But in the novel, the existence of the female characters is primarily guided by their bodily existence rather than the exercise of the mind. The female body is more important in defining the female identity than the heteronormative discourse of society. Jeanette, the protagonist, dramatizes the body performance in the novel. One of the characters in the novel, Elsie Norris, also believes in defining women in relation to their bodily parts, like Jeanette. Jeanette presents her conversation with Elsie as follows:

> 'Some people say I'm a fool, but there's more to this world than meets the eye.' I waited quietly. 'There's this world,' she banged the wall graphically, 'and there's this world,' she thumped her chest. 'If you want to make sense of either, you have to take notice of both.' 'I don't understand,' she sighed, thinking what to ask next, to make it clearer, but she had fallen asleep with her mouth open. (32)

This conversation is an epitome of body performance that questions the discourse of defining human identity on the basis of the mind rather than bodily desires. Here, defining oneself with the body or 'breast' is equally essential for Norris. Hence, human identity and subjectivity are not only rational but also bodily. In this manner, the lines present an argument in favor of utilizing the body for defining oneself and resisting heteronormative ideology. In addition, Jeanette is attracted to other female characters because of their bodily organs. The protagonist interprets Melanie based on her eyes: "She looked up, and I noticed her eyes were a lovely grey, like the cat Next Door" (80). Here, the body is more important than the other aspects of Melanie for Jeanette.

In the same vein, despite the severe punishment offered to Jeanette by the Church community for her homosexual love, Jeanette never distances herself from society. She legitimizes her lesbianism in relation to her desires that cannot be repressed. Nevertheless, the problem is that her society never reads the bodily desires of women while constructing the discourse of gender and sexuality. Jeanette's narration on her bodily desires in the novel runs as follows:

> I had a feeling she [her mother] wouldn't really understand. Besides, I wasn't quite certain what was happening myself, it was the second time in my life that I had experienced uncertainty. . . . The feeling I now had in my head and stomach was the same as on that Awful Occasion, and that time, as I stood by the tea urn in the vestry, I had heard Miss Jewsbury say, 'Of course she must feel very uncertain. (99-100)

Here, Jeanette expresses her hidden desires that can never find an outlet in heterosexual society. Jeanette is a character who goes beyond the boundaries of gender and sexuality. In this sense, the narrator is challenging the discursive formation that seriously excludes the inner desires of the physical body. The queer bodies and desires, thus, are the transgressive forces that can liberate queer identities. When the queer desires and bodies have been accepted and celebrated, there dwells the culmination of lesbian love which becomes a counter-performance to gendered but normalized heterosexual love.

Lesbian Love as Counter-Performance

Jeanette's body desires culminate in her lesbian love. Lesbian love and feelings are one of the possibilities of sexuality within queer theory. Queer theory imagines the possibility of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, and many other gender and sexual identities. In Winterson's *Oranges*, lesbian love is foregrounded through the protagonist Jeanette. She loves her queer body and the bodies of other queer characters that constantly attract her to make love. When Jeanette is involved in a homosexual love with Miss Jewsbury, she primarily narrates the dynamism queer love. She expresses her performance of queer love as follows:

> And she began to stroke my head and shoulders. I turned over so that she could reach my back. Her hand crept lower and lower. She bent over me; I could feel her breath on my neck. Quite suddenly I turned and kissed her. We made love and I hated it and hated it, but would not stop. . . . I still couldn't think, could only see Melanie face and Melanie's body, and every so often the outline of Miss Jewsbury bending over me. (106-07).

Here, the lesbian body performance is apparent; lesbian characters are playing with their bodily organs. Jeanette and the other characters do not have the bond defined by society; their relationship is essentially the relationship of the body. What makes lesbianism possible is the bodily performance. Hence, Jeanette's lesbianism is lively because of her collective celebration of the body with the other characters. Moreover, Jeanette also defines body in relation to the soul; the soul and the body are interdependent for her. She writes: "A wall for the body, a circle for the soul" (113). Jeanette's mother represents the Western discourse of gender and sexuality that regards the female body as a significant aspect of identity. She threatens Jeanette to be aware of her sexual organs. The sexual organ is not to be played with for her; she tries to restrict and repress the feelings that a female has. Jeanette narrates the suggestion of her mother in the following manner:

> 'So just you take care, what you think is the heart might well be another organ.' It might, mother, it might, I thought. She got up and told me to go and to find something to do. I decided to go and see Melanie, but just as I reached the door she called me back with a word of warning. 'Don't let anyone touch you down there,' and she pointed to somewhere at the level of her apron pocket. (88)

It suggests that women's sexual organs have added value in heterosexual society since it is regarded as a treasure for heterosexuality. Jeanette's mother, here, suggests that her daughter be more careful about her breasts and other bodily parts. In this sense, women are defined in relation to those bodily parts which, after repeated practice, are the essential premises of discourse. However, Jeanette's lesbian desire shatters the discourses built on the female body. She freely enjoys her body organs despite the social restrictions. She narrates the lovemaking between Melanie and herself: "she stroked my head for a long time, and then we hugged and it felt like drowning" (88). It shows Jeanette disobeys her mother's teachings of not allowing anyone to touch a sexual organ. Hence, the lesbian love transgresses heteronormativity.

Conclusion

Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* dramatizes the subversive potential of lesbian body performance by challenging the heteronormative grand narratives of gender and sexuality. Through Jeanette, the lesbian protagonist, Winterson critiques Christian orthodoxy and patriarchal authority, portraying lesbian desire not as deviance but as a legitimate mode of being. Jeanette's relationships with Melanie, Miss Jewsbury, and Katy reflect a bold rejection of compulsory heterosexuality, as she embraces bodily autonomy despite facing social and religious condemnation. Jeanette occupies a liminal space that resonates with drag and trans performance, embodying a gender-fluid identity that resists heteronormative labels.

Therefore, Winterson's *Oranges* challenges normalized and essentializing notions of human identity and truth, presenting them as socially constructed and ideologically driven discourses. Through the protagonist's as well as her queer partners' subversive acts, the novel portrays queer performativity as a form of resistance against religious and heteronormative social constraints. It further positions queer desire, the body, and lesbian love as liberating forces that counter mainstream narratives of gender and sexuality. Hence, *Oranges* subverts heteronormative discourses on gender and sexuality through the subversive performances of queer identities.

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