

Femininity and Identity Trouble in Jeanette Winterson's postmodern Novels : The Passion (1987) and Written on the Body (1992)

مشكلة الأنوثة و الهوية في الروايات الحديثة لجانيت وينترسون : العاطفة (1987) و مكتوب على الجسد (1992)

GHERNOUT Soumia

Department of English, University of Abdelhamid Ibn Badis Mostaganem(Algeria)
ghersoumia@hotmail.fr

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Abstract

Identifying Femininity has always been linked to gender roles and responsibilities associated with society's expectations of women. Gender, particularly femininity, has been a central concern to feminist theory which has put a good deal of energy to combat traditional gender ideologies about women's inferiority to men. This research attempts to contribute to the study of femininity and gender identity in postmodern British literature. The Passion (1987) and Written on the Body (1992) by Jeanette Winterson are the materials chosen to investigate troubles of femininity and identity that are triggered by the author's experience. With a vivid feminist consciousness, Winterson presents her main characters in a struggle with their gender putting across their views about their femininity with regard to many different incidents. Evidently, this portrayal is Winterson's revolt against all forms of women suppression.

Keywords: Femininity, trouble ; gender; Jeanette Winterson; identity.

المخلص: يرتبط تعريف الأنوثة دائما بأدوار الجندرة و مسؤوليات المرأة المتوقعة من المجتمع. لطالما كانت مسألة الأنوثة و دور المرأة من بين أبرز اهتمامات النظرية النسوية التي كان لها قدرا كبيرا من الطاقة لمحاربة الإيديولوجيات التقليدية حول قيمة المرأة و دونيتها للرجل. يساهم هذا البحث في دراسة مشكلة الأنوثة و الهوية في الروايات الحديثة : العاطفة (1987) و مكتوب على الجسد (1992) للكاتبة البريطانية جانيت وينترسون. بوعي نسوي جسدت الكاتبة شخصياتها في صراع دائم لإثبات هويتهم كما عرضت وجهات نظرهم في إشكالية الجندرة و الأنوثة فيما يتعلق بالعديد من الحوادث المختلفة. من الواضح أن فكرة تجسيد الشخصيات على هذا النحو ما هي إلا طريقة لإظهار وجهة نظر الكاتبة و تمرداها على جميع أشكال قمع النساء.

كلمات مفتاحية: الأنوثة ؛ مشكلة ؛ الجندرة ؛ جانيت وينترسون؛ الهوية.

Corresponding author: GHERNOUT Soumia, e-mail: ghersoumia@hotmail.fr

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1. INTRODUCTION

Gender, particularly femininity, has been a central issue to feminist theory which has put a good deal of energy to rebel against traditional gender stereotypes about women discrimination and their inferiority to men. The term 'gender' is ever-present in every aspect of life; it is in fact rooted extremely in our beliefs, desires and actions and appears to us to be completely natural. While many assume it has a clear and commonly understood meaning, however, it is much more complex to define. Gender is in fact regarded as an important element of one's identity because it represents the conception of the individual's self (as man or woman/ a boy or a girl/ or some combination of both man /boy and woman/girl) that influences the person's interactions with other people as well as with the environment around him/her.

In the same vein, identity, another prominent term in our age, is a complicated and unclear concept which was in lively debates in every major fields. The question of identity is inextricably linked to human existence. In recent years, identity has been the fields of interests for many researchers who presented different perspectives on the concept and its shifting nature. Since an individual cannot function properly in reality unless they know themselves, the process of discovering and molding one's own identity is critical in understanding "who am I?" Though many people find no trouble in defining their own identity, however, they still struggle to answer this question which seems complex and has puzzled many philosophers. Thus, identity and gender relationship is overlapping. Identity can be defined as the traits that shape one's social, religious or sexual preferences as well as gender and sense of belonging.

Despite the fact that the subject of identity and gender has been a key preoccupation of literature in various forms, it has never been up to date than in today's multicultural world. Jeanette Winterson, one of the most British prominent postmodernist authors, explores a wide range of topics and concepts in her novels, but her primary search focus is on identity and gender trouble. Her works address the theme of lost identity and gender troubled narrator, which is inspired by the author's own personal experience. As an adopted child,

Winterson fought against the constraints of the prejudiced society she lived in, and, most importantly, her own self, which tried to conform to imposed norms on the one hand while aiming to follow personal desires on the other. As a result, the portrayal of gender troubled characters is Winterson's struggle to accepting identity which appears to be a carbon copy of the author's life.

Gendering characters in literary works help the readers to assemble perceptions related to these characters and shape their identity of being males or females. Being aware of the importance of gender in the formation of identity in the eyes of the readers, Jeanette Winterson deliberately ignores the main character's identity allowing him/her to behave as both male and female at the same time. This process of obscuring the narrator's gender and identity is in fact an attempt to challenge any gender assumption and to deconstruct the gender dichotomy that society and culture have constructed.

2. Gender: philosophical inquiry

Most people believe that sex and gender are synonymous: women are human females, and men are human males. In Western societies, gender is a defining and distinguishing aspect of individual identity; from the moment they are born, people are treated differently based on their sex. Male and female babies are dressed differently and in different colors as well as treated differently by their parents; even people describe similar infant actions differently depending on whether the baby is a boy or a girl. It has long been thought that *gender is socially constructed* and this has been described by several authors such as Millet (1971), Haslanger (1995) and Mikkola (2017) to name only a few. This idea has been accepted as a common knowledge for a long time. This raises the question how does the construction of gender work? Gender terminology was originally used in this way by psychologists writing about transsexuality. Gender was widely used to refer to masculine and feminine nouns, such as the common employment of the articles: "le" and "la" in French. Nevertheless, until the 1960s, the psychologist Robert Stoller, coined the term gender to express how much feminine and masculine behavior a person exhibits, the term sex was used to describe a person's biological traits. He coined the terms 'sex' and 'gender' to distinguish between biological characteristics and a person's level of femininity and masculinity. Along with Stoller, Mikkola (2017, p1) offers a similar definition: Gender denotes men and women based on social criteria such as social

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roles, position, behavior, and identity, while sex refers to a person's biological traits.

Over the course of time, ideas and conventions about which characteristics (such as clothes, colors, and sports) are associated with a particular gender evolve. What was considered regular or normal for one gender at one point in time could be considered atypical for the same gender at a later point in time. Parents often unconsciously treat their female and male children differently; they even use a stereotypical language: Boys are described as being strong, attentive, and coordinated, whereas girls are described as being soft and sensitive. For example, a few hundred years ago, pink was considered a traditional/conventional color for boys, but in recent years, the same color has become a popular choice for girls.

We may also see variations in gender roles as we look at other cultures. In Iran, for example, two men walking in public while holding hands is typical, whereas this is not the case in Western Europe. Several scholars have written about the formation of gender roles. Gender differences, according to Rubin, are triggered by social interventions in which people are told not to act in a certain way (Rubin in Mikkola, 2017, p1.2). On a similar note, Millet in common with Mikkola argues that gender has a cultural character. In other words, the behavioral characteristics we relate to men and women are culturally acquired which means femininity and masculinity are socially constructed. According to her, gender is “the sum total of the parents', the peers', and the culture's notions of what is appropriate to each gender by way of temperament, character, interests, status, worth, gesture, and expression” (31). In this sense Millet sees that gender is a process of social learning; women as well as men are socialized into specific roles.

2.1 Gender Socialization

To take de Beauvoir's claim that ‘one is not born, but rather becomes a woman’; we absolutely refer to gender socialization. It means females become women through a process in society whereby they acquire feminine qualities and get feminine behavior. Femininity and masculinity come to exist as a result of how

individuals are raised by their parents; there are some social forces that give birth to gendered individuals and shape the way women and men exist.

Being inspired by J.L. Austin, Judith Butler believes that gender is performative which implies that every act is itself a recitation (Butler, p187). When something is performative, it has a number of different effects. When someone says: "I promise you," for example, they are uttering this phrase while also making a promise and changing your expectations. The repetitiveness of the actions performed is a prominent feature of performativity (Butler, 1990, p xii). For Butler, Gender "is real only to the extent that it is performed, and is formed through a set of repeated acts. To take an example, if young boys would start putting lipstick one day, and they would carry on to do so for the years to come, then our perceptions of what is appropriate for young boys to put lipstick would shift with time. To her, gender "ought not to be construed as a stable identity [...] gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts." (179). With this in mind, we can understand that gender identity is unstable; since gender is performative then it clearly exists only when it is performed. More to the point, Butler insists on the fact that there cannot be a gender identity before doing gendered acts. This is highly reflected in her comment that there "is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler 1999, 33). This obviously means that gender identity occurs while doing gendered acts, not before. On a whole, gender identity is not a prerequisite for gendered acts. Gendered acts and gender identity seem to occur at the same time.

3. Femininity

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

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

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

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

So, all in all identifying femininity has always been linked to gender roles which are practices expected from people merely because of their gender. Women's roles have long been affected by gender roles. Goodman (1996) has also discussed that femininity is considered a package of roles and responsibilities related to the biological sex, and concepts that form around these functions such as motherhood, marriage and childbearing (44). She also confirms that these ideas about women falsely presented them as weak inferior and subordinate which automatically widen the great cultural value of the conception of masculinity. This stereotypical view has always been taken for granted, considered obvious and needs no comments. Patriarchy also emphasizes this stereotype, institutionalizes male's hegemony and adheres societal gender roles. All in all, femininity is the result of disciplinary activities producing a body with a recognizably feminine appearance. As a result, whether we are born male or female, patriarchy's disciplinary methods and rules shape us into masculine or feminine individuals.

4. Identity: A Philosophical Inquiry

Etymologically, the word identity 'is derived from earlier Latin *identitatem* which means sameness. Hence the counterpart of the term identity is "difference", and these are the two concepts that are frequently used together in current discourse. The fundamental paradox is inherent in the term itself. Yet, the meaning attached to it today varies from what it used to be. When it comes to defining the role of identity in contemporary politics, cultural commentator Kobena Mercer correctly emphasizes its contradictory aspect, claiming that, like any other keyword, "identity" requires a variety of "competing definitions" (Mercer, 1992, p424).

“What is identity?” Or “who am I?” are among the most complex basic questions raised in modern philosophy, political and social sciences. It was a highly debated issue which is subjected to many philosophical inquiries. In its widest possible sense, identity usually refers to properties to which we feel a special sense of belongingness, attachment and ownership. Nevertheless, being a knotty term, identity outweighs this meaning. It has, infact, perplexed many philosophers since the time of the ancient Greeks.

As a complicated concept, identity has found application in different fields across centuries. In some contexts identity may denote “the state of being oneself not another” or “the sense of self and unity over time” (Edgerton, 2006, p33). Many theorists such as John Lock, Erik Erikson and Charles Taylor have focused on what makes someone distinct and the characteristics that contribute to developing one's identity. For Taylor, identity is a set of moral aims and ideals that organizes a person's life and allows them to make decisions and stand up for what they believe in. Knowing who you are means being aware of where you are and where you belong, i.e. it is a method of self-awareness. In order to define your identity you need to differentiate between what is good or bad, what is valuable or not and what is primary and secondary.

Consequently, this notion of identity is admittedly a challenging, ambiguous and usually a problematic term when it is used to define or describe. Moreover, the word “identity” is assigned different meanings depending on different context, different users and their purpose. As it is seen there are some diverse assumptions about what identity is. The need for a definition is, therefore, imperative. It is on the one hand, an attribute which is unique to each person, i.e

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something we uniquely possess, yet; on the other hand identity can imply a relationship with a broader social group.

Therefore, it is very essential to consider some basic approaches to define identity. The essentialist view, "the traditional" sees that identity is fixed and transhistorical, however the anti-essentialist considers it as fluid and contingent (Woodward, 2018, p4). In recent decades, the literature of social sciences and studies in general pushed away the traditional connotations, which are considered now outdated, that identity is stable and static. Modernity brought the view that identities can be multiple and subject to change. Hence, the move towards less rigid meanings of identity was the core of interest of many philosophers and scholars in different fields. Bhabha for example in his seminal work on hybridity also challenges consolidating conceptions of identity as static and uniform. For Bhabha, identities are fluid and plural, characterized by hybridity and fragmentation, especially in colonial and postcolonial contexts.

Erick Erikson, a German born American psychoanalyst, whose works center around personality development, views identity as a continuous work of the self. It is a subjective sense and a noticeable quality of a personal sameness and continuity; linked to some beliefs in the sameness and continuity of some shared world image. Although one can have changes in social or personal relationships, they can at the same time experience a sense of the self across time and space. Erickson defends this idea saying:

...Even with all the changes in marriages, family , other relationships and work circumstances, I am still me. I just keep on growing and finding better opinions for self-expression (Hoover, 2004, p62).

Furthermore, in his theory of "stages of psychosocial development" Erikson maintains that the person encounters crisis of his/her identity at adolescent when people struggle between their feeling of identity and their role confusion. This is what he called "identity crisis". These crises are of a psychosocial nature

because they involve psychological needs of the individual (i.e., psycho) conflicting with the needs of society (i.e., social). Erikson defined this phenomenon as the period of a real self examination and self questioning of the individual's principle in this life. In other words, he sees the challenge and the crisis which occurs at the age of adolescence leads to the creation of self-identity. He coins the term "crisis" to show that this challenge is a normal way of development and it leads to the construction of a person's values and beliefs in life. For him, "your identity is your sense of who you are and what you stand for" (Nevid 208).

Therefore, identity becomes important during adolescence when the individual experiences the transition from childhood to adulthood. At this stage of life, instability invades the adolescent's life when he/she meets confusions and struggles. In this temporary period, he/she begins to think and form their own identity relying on the exploration of their selves; therefore identity becomes the highest point of interest at the age of teens. More to the point, Erikson believes that identity is not stable, but fluid; it evolves through a set of changes due to social experience across the whole life. The individual's ego identity is changing because of daily events, news and information they acquire and receive in their everyday interactions.

5. Femininity and Identity trouble in the Passion (1987)

Set in the historical context of the French Revolution (1789) and the Napoleonic War (1803), the *Passion* (1987) by Jeanette Winterson is a metafictional novel that rewrites the story of the War of Napoleon Bonaparte through two main characters: Henry, a mal French soldier cook, and Villanelle, a female who is sold to the French army as a prostitute. The story revolves around the negative effects of the Napoleonic war on a disillusioned young man who decides happily to join the army; however, at the end, he became physically and spiritually destroyed by the tyranny, thirst and patriarchy of Napoleon and the harshness of the military life in general. The female character on the other hand, is represented by Winterson as *unconventional* heroin. She is naturally born with webbed feet, a distinctive feature which is a genetic mistake since this particularity is traditionally masculine attributes (because only men and precisely boatmen can have webbed feet in Villanelle's society). In spite of being a woman, Villanelle trespasses gender stereotypes in the novel: " my feet were

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webbed. There never was a girl whose feet were webbed in the entire history of the boatmen" (51). This female character is therefore, androgynous and dares to go beyond categories of physicality and gender; she becomes as an intruder in her society that dresses as a boy: "her body crosses over the boundaries of binary opposites, too, her identity being fickle for it is a conflation of a man and a woman a human and animal, and the double identification is encoded in her body and sexual orientation" (Front 103)

In the *Passion*, Winterson presents the issue of personal identity as a problem to her female character "Villanelle" and more precisely she scrutinizes a stereotypical approach to gender roles. The author interrogates the discourse of identity and the portrayal of women. Through this approach, she wants to show that human identity is multifold so that many identities can blur. The main character comes to manipulate herself and her identities the way she aims as she changes her physical appearance frequently through different masks. More important still for our discussion, Villanelle "gains... the power to choose gender" as a result of her physical transformation (Front 103). She has two faces and two identities, allowing her to create illusions about her true self. Villanelle deftly switches between costumes and masks because, as she puts it, "dressing as a boy is part of the game" (Winterson, *The Passion* 54). Her dresses serve as a form of disguise, while her body defines contradictions and a denial to her identity that, when combined, form an androgynous harmony. Villanelle's duality restructures her identity, which is caught between both femininity and masculinity. She has numerous affairs while disguised as a boy, both with men who are attracted by her sensual delicacy and physical appearance and with women who are drawn by her obscurity and mystery. Thus, the life of Villanelle is characterized by her quest for identity and gender that are not easily sought and represent a hindrance in the protagonist's path to discovering one's self. In one of the passages, Villanelle asserts:

I looked at my palms trying to see the other life, the parallel life. The point at which my selves broke away and one married a fat man and one stayed here, in this elegant house ... Perhaps our lives spread out around us like a fan and we can only know one life, but

by mistake sense others ... Sometimes, drinking coffee with friends or walking alone by the too salt sea, I have caught myself at that other life, touched it, seen it to be as real as my own ... Perhaps I would never have sensed other lives of mine, having no need of them. (Winterson, *The Passion*, p. 144)

The protagonist tries to question and search for her identity that is hidden under the sophisticated face and smile and among the pile of clothes asking: “what was myself? Was this breech and boots self any less real than my garters?” (Winterson, *the Passion* 65–66). Successfully at the end of the story, Villanelle decides to set up her identity and avoid hiding herself under any appearance. The following quotation illustrates well the protagonist’s decision to take control of herself : “I don’t dress up any more. No borrowed uniforms. Only occasionally do I feel the touch of that other life, the one in the shadows where I do not choose to live” (Winterson, *The Passion*, p.150). All in all, Winterson attempts to question femininity and identity which represent a problem to the character, suggesting a possible approach which usually has not been considered : the idea of embracing the duality. Therefore, the idea of formulating the female protagonist whose femininity is troubled is Winterson’s technique of managing to give way to an enigmatic and full of endless possibilities to femininity. Consequently, The character is given sufficient space to exist as a human being with her weakness, strength and desires without conforming to social stereotypes of gender that naturally limit her actions.

6. Femininity Trouble in *Written on the Body* (1992)

Written on the Body (1992) is a short novel by Winterson whose narrator - protagonist- is anonymous and tells a story of a profound and passionate love affair with an attractive red- haired woman called Louise Rosenthal. The enigmatic narrator, who used to fall in love with married women, finally finds a soul mate in the beautiful Louise. The novel, in fact, presents a pure love tale that confronts all societal obstacles and gets rid of the established stereotypes, leaving in its place the virtue of a true love between people. In *Written on the Body*, Jeanette Winterson calls up the reader to question the issue of gender differences whether it is biological or a social construction. She deconstructs the binary opposition of gender through presenting a story with a non-gendered narrator. Although the story is a first-person narrator, who is highly unreliable because of

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the lack of information, there are moments when the reader may suggest it is either a male or a female. Therefore, "Written on the Body" might be seen as a powerful statement about how society views gender and identity. The extravagant playing with cultural conventions and expectations about sexual interactions and the female body evokes a critical viewpoint that is represented in a passionate love affair. The novel questions the binary gender structure that has been in place for a long time. The reader gets almost no details about the first person narrator such as age, name, sex..., the readers find themselves looking for evidence to recognize aspects of identity that the author purposely sets.

6.1 Problematising the Narrator's Identity in Written on the Body (1992)

As mentioned previously, the novel's narrator is gender ambiguous; this is clearly seen in the narrator's multiple and unstable nature. The author here plays successfully with the reversal of gender roles. She makes her narrator embody roles or traits traditionally settled for men like dominance, power and strength (Instead of obedience, weakness and passivity). Hence, this contradictory nature troubles the readers to assume specific or permanent gender labels. One can say that the most striking theme the novel deals with is gender construction; it brings the reader to question if gender is biological or a social construction. The mysterious narrator's gender might tell the extent to which gender is constructed since an easy categorization is not possible. Winterson employs an -I- narrator who does not reveal his/her sex, and this pushes the reader to shift away from attaching identity with biological sex. With a deep understanding of the narrator's thought, and in a process of interaction with the text itself, the reader finds themselves facing gender clichés of both sexes:

The reader is caught in a net of hints, false assumptions and red herrings concerning the gender of the narrator, counter-acting the hole set of assumptions about the terms 'male' and 'female' (Kauer, 1998, p45)

This intentional use of gender ambiguity not only brings the reader to deconstruct gender stereotypes, but also constructs a narrator who is bisexual. The bisexual narrator is tying male scientific language and female poetic language; as well as feminine crying scenes is juxtaposed with male powerful

and dominant fighting scenes. The idea that sex is the basis of a person's identity is removed away in this context; the narrator's mind and what he thinks about build the ground on discovering his personality. This leads to the conclusion that identity is not based on bodily traits or functions. From this point, we can argue that Winterson's narrator can be considered as a model of Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity in the sense that it evades to be labeled and is judged upon other social aspects.

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

...explicitly by graphic physical description and masculine/feminine gender (pro)nominal expressions (he vs. she; gendered first nouns); implicitly by the paraphernalia of our heavily gendered culture (handsome vs. beautiful; shirt vs. blouse) and by the heterosexual default structure (if A loves B, and A is a man, then B must be a woman) (154).

Different implicit gender signals emerge regularly throughout the novel which help the reader presume whether the narrator is a male or a female. One example is when the narrator and Elgin start a fight over Louise, the narrator hits Elgin and Elgin kicks the narrator in the stomach (170-72). This instance of fight may indicate that the narrator is a male. Another example is when the narrator's beloved, Louise, calls him/her 'Christopher Robin' (61) or when the narrator voiced repeatedly that he/she prefers married women and refers to him/herself as 'Lothario'¹ as a famous womanizer (20). This indication of male gender is added to many previous indications of the narrator's love affairs with women which again conduct the reader to the conclusion that the narrator is a male.

Shortly after these instances, Winterson quite teases the reader to evaluate his/her assumption about the narrator's gender. These masculine interpretations

¹ It is a male given name that came to suggest a seducer of women as it is a character in one of the subplots of *Don Quixote Part One* (1605) which sets to seduce his friend's wife in order to test her loyalty.

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contradict with some feminine terminology in the text like when the genderless narrator says: "I am not beautiful" (85) instead of "I am not handsome". Moreover, at one point, and in the beginning of the novel, the narrator identifies him /herself with Alice in Wonderland saying: "I shall call myself Alice and play golf with the flamingos. In Wonderland everyone cheats and love is Wonderland isn't it?" (10) The assumption that comes in mind after this quotation would be the narrator is a female since he/she refers to him/herself as Alice. Again, the narrator connects him/herself with another feminine figure, Lauren Bacall², stating: "I stared at it [the phone] the way Lauren Bacall does in those films" (41). Likewise, Winterson carries on playing with gender connotations in a more distinct fashion where Winterson created ambiguous gender markers. Whenever the reader makes approximate assumptions about the narrator's gender, he/she is soon forced to think again about their real interpretations. This is exemplified when Louise tells the narrator about the very first time she saw her/him: "When I saw you two years ago I thought you were the most beautiful creature male or female I had ever seen" (84), or when the narrator lists the following expressions related with love: "Still waiting for Mr Right? Miss Right? and maybe all the little Rights?" (10). The use of these mixed expressions of both genders: Mr. Right. Miss Right, male, female is an intentional clever way to make the reader manage to deal with a narrator whose gender is unspecified. Therefore, the ungendered narrator is Winterson's deliberate attempt to erase and abolish gender distinction in the novel (Finney,2002, p48).

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

² Lauren Bacall was an American actress named the 20th century female star of classic Hollywood cinema.

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

7. CONCLUSION

This paper has sought to decipher the notions of identity and gender/femininity from a philosophical point of view, and the way they become a trouble for the characters of Jeanette Winterson's novels: "the passion" (1987) and "written on the Body" (1992). The novels support the theory of gender as a social construction through employing an ungendered narrator. Throughout these narratives, readers have to participate dynamically in the process of reading in order to fill the missing information about the narrator's gender. The author goes to extra lengths to confound the reader on this front by allowing the narrator to behave as both a man and a woman in various and different occasions. The narrator in the early pages of "Written on the body" tells that the novel is "a secret code only visible in certain lights; the accumulations of a lifetime gather there (89). The narrator demonstrates an ambiguous variety of stereotypes, in some cases he/she displays power, dominance and firmness which deduce masculinity; and in other cases, the narrator is portrayed as weak, unsure and having some feminine traits. Therefore, this gender-freed narrator offers a new horizon to identity. His kind of narrator is purposely used to deconstruct gender boundaries aiming to facilitate the rise of an identity liberated from societal rigid stereotypes and constraints leaving a room for changes. In the same fashion, the female character in the passion (1987) manages to search for the true self and attempts to stabilize her identity which is hindered by the imposed norms and societal standards. Winterson's woman character in this piece of work is presented as strong, resourceful, domineering, wise and makes 'assertive choices' trying to challenge the stereotypical image of femininity as the 'other' or the subordinate.

Hence, the character shows her immense desire to pursue a free self that is multiple, diverse and not clear to determine. Consequently, Winterson gives her characters sufficient space to exist as just an ordinary people with human desires, needs and weakness without conforming to any social constructs of

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gender. On the whole, both works might be seen as an evident comment on the established perception of identity and gender.

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