CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION
Winterson has won international acclaim for her innovative and lyrical writing that directly and explicitly challenges the conventional novel form. This thesis has predominantly concentrated upon Winterson’s position with respect to different narratives that she deploys so as to reinforce and situate the self within the ambit of a queer dynamics. The aspect of the self has been well located in her writings as well as her own self. Her adoption into a family that was committed to the Pentecostal evangelical Church has been denoted at length, and her novels draw upon her experience as a preacher and missionary protégée, who was expelled from the church as a young adult for her homosexuality. If the fundamentalist practices of Pentecostal evangelism inform the novels’ critique of institutionalized religion, its belief in divinely bestowed charismatic gifts has been reworked in their valorization of subjective, spiritual reality, as well as the divinity of romantic love and the sacred power of language. She denotes in this light “I started writing because I wanted to write sermons, because I was driven to preach to people and convert them … now I do it for art’s sake, and then I did it for God’s”. 1 Subsequently her sexual orientation has been central in determining the self. She has come a long way since the success of her first novel, Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit wherein she introduces both the themes of love and storytelling and the postmodern techniques that characterize her subsequent work. The novel can be read as Jeanette’s journey in trying to find herself and understand her own sexuality. As it merges the experience of discovering one’s sexuality with the struggle to construct a personal identity, the novel perpetrates a ferociously satirical criticism of religious fundamentalist discourses and their cruel methods of manipulation and the treatment meted out to Jeanette. But these very cruel methods to repress her sexuality towards the end of the
novel in fact nurture her own perception of the self and she vindicates and celebrates the existence of the same-sex desire, and clearly rejects heterosexuality as “the only fruit.”

In her second novel The Passion, she moves beyond the autobiographical mode, while adopting a form that Linda Hutcheon has termed as “historiographic metafiction”. This is a mode contained within the postmodern novel which self-consciously explores the relationship between history and fiction and questions what is meant by each. As in Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit, the themes of love and personal integrity are uppermost, but juxtaposed within a narrative of lesbian love, is the tale of a French soldier’s hero-worship of Napoleon in The Passion which is set during the Napoleonic wars of 1804-1815. Ironically, Winterson had enough faith in her own merit, and when she was asked in 1992 to name the best novel of the year, she chose her own novel, Written on the Body. To some, it may seem that she had become insufferable, arrogant, and pretentious, yet she was simply breaking new ground for women writers. When asked about her work she replied:

At college, I was told there were four great women novelists in the nineteenth century, Jane Austen, George Eliot, Charlotte and Emily Bronte. Not one of them led an enviable life; all of them had to sacrifice ludicrously in order to be writers. I wasn’t prepared to do that.²

Her novels are always experimental, straining and stretching language and genre into new forms, frequently with a poetic texture. Religious languages, sexual desire, the quest motif, all of these are prominent, within various guises, throughout Winterson’s subsequent works. Her fiction brings in a play of signifiers that result in a continuous deferral of meaning that suggests a number of alternative readings. While abounding in
experimental narrative techniques and de-centering strategies that have been associated with postmodernist writings, her texts also show a dialogic relationship with the modernist tradition, especially with the modernist writers. As an author she rejects the conventional perception of life. Her work, in particular with the recent (re)turn to an “authentic” account of her traumatic childhood within her fiction acts as symptomatic of trauma culture as she reveals the shallow fulfillment which is inherent in traditional values. It also expands the notion of time and reality, and renders new insight into existing realities. This is apparent through the content of her stories and through her use of unusual and varied narrative structures. Her work is deeply creative as she constantly moves between territories which seem to be uncharted and new. In all her works she re-evaluates female desire as something which is distinct from male desire and as a part of a separate sexual economy. Winterson’s characters refuse to accept the conventional means of living, and these aspects are paralleled by her own refusal to abide by the conventional means of storytelling. Her stories often discard the linearity of basic conventional laws of time and space, especially as reflected in Sexing the Cherry and Art and Lies, embracing instead works of extended reality, she builds realities out of her metaphors, as opposed to using them as tools to describe the literal. Her stories become both allegorical and literal, and seem to uniquely bridge the territory which lies between the two. Her writing exposes the richness of both language and experience and she cautions herself against the “dangers of automatic[ally] writing” oneself towards an unnecessary ending. This seems to be her strategy against needless repetition, which nevertheless cannot be wholly prevented. Of the self she denotes:
Can I speak my mind or am I dumb inside a borrowed language, captive of bastard thoughts? What of me is mine? ³

Susana Onega has described this as:

…the contemporary writer’s awareness that no particular text can be original in the sense that it exists in a discursive space whose pre-existing codes and conventions determine the text’s intelligibility and condition the reader’s and even the writer’s approach to it. This awareness often produces in the writer-to-be a tension that Harold Bloom has described as “the anxiety of influence”, the pressure exerted on him by the bulk of the whole literary tradition which he must absorb, assimilate and recast. ⁴

Winterson disliked the label “the lesbian writer” and does not want it to define her as a person, especially because the label is often used derogatorily in the press. In one of her interviews, she has rightly retorted that the sexuality of a writer is not the business of literary criticism; to make it so is a cheap way out of dealing with the work on its terms and in its own right. She further argues that it is writing “fiction” that matters to her:

My concerns have always been the same: to stretch the possibilities of fiction and to work with language so that it is metaphor as well as meaning. I want words to double and tilt, I want them to shift matter, heavy solid matter, with a lightness that is possible because language itself is light, both not weighed down, and illuminating. ⁵

Thus she explains in an interview with Times Online saying that there are some rotten no-good lesbians and some rotten no-good gay men, but there are rotten no-good heterosexuals too, and that people do not use sexuality as the explanation of whatever it is
they have done. She also gives her reason as to why she keeps doing the gender bending and she states:

Because I’m queer. … Being queer, that is not straight-line, not belonging, tells me that gender is only the beginning of the story, not the last word. I like some ambiguity. … I don’t want a unisex world. … But I think we should have more fun with it, and the fun and the experiment is what Queer Culture is all about. To that extent, my own experience interfaces with my work.  

As such her fiction also poses a problem for lesbian theory, for it operates without reference to a founding assumption grounding many theories of lesbian cultural production and representation: that of the essentially marginal status of lesbianism. Judith Roof, in her book A Lure of Knowledge: Lesbian Sexuality and Theory (1991), states the paradigm this way:

By implicitly challenging the habitual heterosexual paradigm, representing lesbian sexuality conspicuously unmask the ways gender and sexuality normally coalesces to reassert the complementary duality of sexual difference. . . . As a point of failure [of representation], lesbian sexuality is a phenomenon that evades the rules; as a point of return, it is the example that proves the rule and reveals the premises upon which the rules depend.  

In her own way she redefines the concepts of impersonality and emotion as transpersonal and love. To connect love only with gender and thus with sexual orientation limits the scope of human experience and undermines the potential of the human mind to
transcend its physical boundaries. Furthermore, as she herself deduces upon this issue in *Art Objects*:

The Queer world has colluded in the misreading of art as sexuality. Art is difference, but not necessarily sexual difference, and while to be outside of the mainstream of imposed choice is likely to make someone more conscious, it does not automatically make that someone an artist. A great deal of gay writing around the Aids crisis, is therapy, is release, is not art. […] all art, including literature, is much more than its subject matter. ⁸

These are the very assumptions that her fictional world rejects. In the world of her novels, culture does not have to and does not always operate to assure the successful rule of heterosexuality. Representation does not depend upon the centrality of the heterosexual paradigm, nor on the inevitable “duality” of femininity in relation to masculinity just as a lesbian experience can be at the centre and not the margins, not only of postmodern culture but of modernity itself. For her as an author, the rules do not work for anyone (even heterosexual men), and never have. She offers neither a critique of heterosexual culture nor a salvific account of lesbianism, largely because she refuses to accept that conventional distinction in the first place. While she mobilizes certain conventions of lesbian representation, she understand them to produce an identity no less fractured than those (like heterosexuality) produced by other, equally conventional, textual strategies. Instead, she takes a certain lesbian narrative space for granted – a space romantic and postmodern, sincere and ironic. Thus the “virtual lesbianism” of Winterson’s fiction challenges the notion that the fragmentation of the subject also means the end of desire.
Also, from the analysis of her works, as reflected in the previous chapters, none of her texts runs through uninterrupted. The tendency to include small semi-closed units into larger narrative is apparent in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, *Written on the Body*, and is also considerably evident in *Sexing the Cherry*. While *The Passion* fluctuates between narrators but somehow follows a consistent plot scheme, *Art and Lies* loosely binds together the fates of three characters but also more severely incises linearity, a feature which is not appreciated by the author. Her fiction frequently calls into question the assumptions about narratorial identity, fictional artifice, and objective reality. In her texts one finds all kinds of emotions and insistent poetic passages, which are interrupted by encyclopedic quotations, newly moulded fairy tales and myths, time travel and meta-narrativity, parody and the grotesque. Winterson’s early modern settings allow her to make an argument about the inextricability of postmodern unraveling of the subject and the founding moments of modern subjectivity itself. In other words, the regime of the subject and the colonial technologies that produced it can be seen to be historically specific ways of addressing the felt sense, in history and in representation, of the coherence and fragmentation of human life. In 1992, during an interview about *Written on the Body*, she said, “Few writers achieve their own form and open up new landscapes [...] I want to encourage language in all its complexity; that’s what really excites me. Too often it is just sloppy and dirty.”

 Appropriately enough, then, when she was asked to name her favorite writer working in English, she chose herself, because “No one working in the English language now comes close to my exuberance, my passion, my fidelity to words.” This is inherent after analyzing her five novels in this thesis because her achievement is a portrayal of the
interesting possibility of more than everyday reality regarding plot, setting, and mode of expression. A lyricism, especially as connected to fantasy, also represent her way of reinventing language and also plots and even the world itself. Language has the ultimate power in her work because it shapes not only perceptions of events but also the events themselves and the element of fantasy in terms of language, both helps to thicken the intertextual, narrative layers, for instance in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, besides the main plot there are numerous sub-plots that denote the story of *Morte D’Arthur*, *Jane Eyre*, as well as narratives from the Bible. The juxtaposition of legends and myths with the life of the main character, Jeanette, questions the reality of the stories as told by the narrators. The book also contains Winterson’s distinctive storytelling style in fairytale passages where Jeanette conjures up characters such as Sir Percival, a sorcerer and a wise goose. Winterson reveals the fluidity of traditional interpretative patterns and the subjectivity of truth, as she mobilizes all kinds of mythic texts to deconstruct them in a light manner. When she interrupts her storytelling in a book, she often begins to comment on her own authorship, and puts forward proposals concerning the plot, whileaddressessing the reader openly. “I can tell by now that you are wondering whether I can be trusted as a narrator.”

Her reflections on text structure as such emphasize that she uses meta-fiction knowingly, and not accidentally. This becomes clear when she handles biblical material especially in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. In the essay collection *Art Objects*, she paid tribute to her modernist lineage such as Virginia Woolf, Gertrude Stein, T. S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound, among others and delineated her own views on art, contemporary life, culture, writing, and her work. The themes of this collection echo those that she had
developed in her fiction, notably the transformative power of literature, its autonomy from the life of the artist, and its capacity to move human beings to ecstasy. Winterson has been variously compared to Jonathan Swift for her biting satire, to Gabriel Garcia Marquez for her magic realism, to Italo Calvino for her meta-fictional experimentation and adaptation of myth and fairy tale, and to Monty Python for her comic abilities. Scholars have focused upon the purely literary qualities in her work, while noting the endurance of such themes as the nature of love, time, and art, along with the persistent search for self and the perennial presence of outsiders, strangers, and other characters that have been marginalized by society. Reviewers have often commended her ability to cut across cultural barriers with such widely popular works as *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. They also have cited her ability to continually challenge literary and social conventions in all of her works. She weaves together myth, metaphor and allegory skillfully to offer up a narrative that explores some of the central questions of identity and destination. Feminist critics have paid particular attention to postmodern elements of her work, while arguing that her lesbian fiction re-envisions what is “normal,” and validates lesbian life and experience. Her androgynous approach to characterization has prompted many scholars to credit Winterson with successfully deconstructing patriarchal stereotypes and binary sexual oppositions that relegate women and lesbians to “otherness” and cultural subjugation. Such critics praise her tireless experimentation, her commitment to revitalizing language and discovering new possibilities for fiction, and her steadfast belief in the transformative power of literary art. For instance, Jeanette in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* encounters massive resentment and is being exorcised because of her lesbianism. She has to escape her narrow-minded (adoptive) mother and
question all her beliefs and values. Jeanette’s account of her youth with subsidiary narratives of myths and fairy tales are an integral part of the novel and perform a number of important functions. Jeanette instead of uncovering a single, static identity constructs for herself a series of shifting, fluid selves by means of the acts of story telling and fabrication. Jeanette’s account of her youth with subsidiary narratives of myths and fairy tales are an integral part of the novel and perform a number of important functions. Jeanette instead of uncovering a single, static identity constructs for herself a series of shifting, fluid selves by means of the acts of story telling and fabrication. Winterson provide a space for a female self defined not in polar opposition to “man” but in her own “feminine”, postmodernist terms. Winterson’s Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit sets out to explore, redefine and reassert the notion of the individual self from the position of its narrator, Jeanette, who is doubly “ex-centric” 13 because she is a female and also a homosexual, while upholding a perspective that is postmodernist in both formal and ideological terms. Winterson’s treatment of fairytale and fable, as vehicle for representing Jeanette shifting identities and displacements, also has ideological import. It functions as a strategy to question and challenge the patriarchal values associated with fairytales. It questions images of femininity constructed by male-dominated culture. Images of stereotypically feminine attributes are rejected, and the Prince’s search for a flawless woman examines male ideals of femininity and their oppressive effect on women. The story of Red Riding Hood is transformed into a fable illustrating a young girl’s feelings of anxiety about heterosexual relations and male duplicity.

Villanelle and Henri in The Passion are singled out as well. Henri, the fragile and anxious soldier, adores Napoleon and follows him through Europe until the campaign is
shattered in Russia, in the zero winter. Another remarkable figure is the giantess Dog-
Woman in *Sexing the Cherry*. Winterson enacts in her meta-fictional writing practices,
what Butler pioneers theoretically, that is, a sexual politics of heterogeneity and a vision
of hybridized gender constructions outside an either/or proposition, at once political and
postmodern. Fiction, for her, is the site to interrogate trouble, subvert, and tamper with
gender, identity, and sexuality. Her fiction is a serious invitation to readers to imagine the
emancipation of “normal” and “natural” from the exclusive and totalizing domain of
patriarchal and heterosexual authority. The emergence of new paradigms throughout her
work reverses, relativizes, and problematizes notions of normal and natural in order to
“naturalize” cultural oddities, monstrosities, abnormalities, and conformities—from
Jeanette’s love of women, to Villanelle’s masculine webbed feet, to Dog-Woman’s
enormous stature, or to Jordan’s sartorial intuition and biological experimentation. In
*Sexing the Cherry* the image of grafting does not fully address Winterson's continued
reliance on problematic binary distinctions in her depiction of lesbian desire. In fact,
Doan suggests that Winterson continues to rely upon rigid notions of gender identity as
*Sexing the Cherry* begins “to map an alternative social order, one that positions the
lesbian at the center.” 14 Doan here acknowledges that the novel goes beyond simply
challenging existing categories of gender identity. By positioning the lesbian at the
“center” of this alternative social order, the novel inverts the binary logic that posits
heterosexuality as the norm by which lesbianism is judged perverse. What Winterson
attempts to inscribe in *Sexing the Cherry* through the practice of grafting, is a replication
process “whereby a plant, perhaps tender or uncertain, is fused into a hardier member of
its strain, and so the two take advantage of each other and produce a third kind, without
seed or parent”. 15 This astonishing procedure, though simple enough to explain and understand, incurs the wrath of churchmen who declare it, to be almost akin to homosexuality, “unnatural, holding that the Lord who made the world its flora as he wished and in no other way.” 16 It also incurs the frustration of Jordan’s mother who asserts that “such things had no gender and were confusion to themselves.” 17 Despite the disapproving objections of the perplexed populace, Jordan himself solemnly proclaims, in a phrase with scriptural resonances: “But the cherry grew, and we have sexed it and it is female.” 18 Winterson, with this statement, imagines that gender is socially constructed and enforced rather than inherent and, that the hybrid, that is, a third sex, is a fusion of diverse strains, without seed and also the strongest, which illuminates the ways in which the dominant culture opts out of creatively and freely exploring boundless gender options and instead becomes mired in weary boundaries and binaries. The fact that Jordan was himself adopted, like Jeanette in Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit, and was thus in a sense created without seed chooses to experiment upon the cherry, which is an emblem of virginity and an euphemism for the hymen. She anticipates a solution well beyond the fruit metaphor or the superficial “peel” of cross-dressing; and it is a solution as Doan suggests that anticipates a different order to supplant the old. 19 By imagining nascency as emerging from virginity created and sustained outside binaries, outside of the seed, Winterson nips the old order in the bud before it even begins; a liberatory displacement that brims with new gender configurations and enacts a plausible “convergence of multiple sexual discourses,” 20 in Butler’s own terms. In the act of grafting the cherry, she envisions the contours and logic of a lesbian postmodern that collapses binarisms and creates a space not just for lesbians but for productive, dynamic, and fluid gender
pluralities and sexual positioning. Winterson enacts in her metafiction definite writing practices, which is inherently a sexual politics of heterogeneity and a vision of hybridized gender constructions outside an either/or proposition, that is at once political and postmodern. In this manner, she invites readers to accept alternatives to heterosexuality, particularly lesbianism, as natural expressions of the basic human quest for love.

The desire that inspires Jordan's quest finally becomes a new foundation for his essential self in the novel. For much of the novel, Winterson challenges the notion of a singular, self-determining individual as she insists that the characters are multiple and not single, and by depicting modern incarnations of Dog Woman and Jordan, refuses to fix their location in space and time. Even as she mystifies Jordan's pursuit of Fortunata, she makes clear that what he really seeks is access to an inner, ideal self through his narrative, “the Buddhists say there are 149 ways to God,” he claims, “I’m not looking for God, only for myself ...” 21 Jordan has undertaken the arduous attempt to find, not lose his essential self and this is a self which is clearly distinct from his body. By making this ideal self the object of a religious quest, the novel reinforces an essentially romantic drive to locate a ground of being outside time, space, and material existence. Ironically, even as the novel celebrates Jordan's search for his true self, Sexing the Cherry records the painful isolation produced by his narcissistic desire. Both Dog Woman and Jordan suffer in their isolated subjectivity as they misinterpret each other’s motives and doubt each other’s love. Although Dog Woman continually worries about Jordan's future and the possibility that his heart will be broken, she never expresses these concerns to him. For his part, Jordan hopes to emulate Dog Woman, whom he sees as “self-sufficient and without self-doubt.” 22 He does not understand her concern for him or how self-conscious
she is. In fact, her reserve leads him to question her love: “I think she loves me,” he says, “but I don't know.” 21 The novel here registers the human suffering that results as her characters focus upon their internal journeys and turn away from their connection to others. The Sappho section in Art and Lies helps both Handel and Picasso in their quest for self. Sappho has no physical form because she leaves no prints in the snow and states that she cannot see herself. Instead, she is being lugged around by Handel who is carrying her along with him. Sappho observes, “I looked behind [Handel] and saw Time churning the sands in pyramids and river beds. He turned away and I turned with him…The groves and towers were gone…The sea had shrunk away leaving only the blue mist of after-rain. Ignorant of alchemy, they put faith in technology and turned the whole world into gold.” 24 Sappho can see where Handel travels and what he sees along the way. She has been around for centuries and has witnessed all these changes to the world taking place. Sappho further mentions, “Must keep up with the times…Drag me, how he [Handel] drags me, knows the creature that I am. Beg him? He is deaf still. In spite of that I cry out.” 25 This proves that Sappho looks at the “new world” in Handel’s hands and provides him with a new understanding of his own self despite his past failures and loneliness. At the same time we see that the connection between Sappho and Picasso, in terms of understanding her true self, is much more intimate as compared to Handel. In Art and Lies, her aim has been “to test experience against language and language against experience”. 26 In Art and Lies, Winterson expresses a fear that language is moribund – “Delicate words exhausted through overuse” 27 and her work attest to her attempts to resuscitate language.
Fiction, for Winterson, is the site to interrogate, trouble, subvert, and tamper with gender. This aspect is mostly concerned with identity, sexuality and one’s own search for self with an invitation to imagine the emancipation of “normal” and “natural” from the elusive and totalizing domain of patriarchal and heterosexual authority. Some of her characters have to face situations involving ignorance, fanaticism in sects, homophobia, war, assault, the cruel public sphere, rape, or even solitary existence. They react in developing survival strategies that lead out of conventional plots. In her novels, the manner in which the female protagonists present themselves from a first person narrator perspective can be understood as a critique upon the existing patriarchal structures. The female protagonists live their lives on their own terms and they have to accept the drawbacks that come with such attempts in order to challenge social structures. Often the freedom they gain outweighs their loneliness that is founded at the cost of their freedom yet the protagonists simply do not have a choice; their identities simply refuse to accommodate gendered expectations.

Winterson’s passion for “the word” is self-confessedly “evangelical.”  

Her emphasis upon the spiritual role of language and literature in the reinvention of reality is developed in Art Objects, a manifesto for romantic, aesthetic and modernist writing published as a critical compendium to her literary production. Art as she denotes, reveals a new and timeless world and confronts us with other dimensions of emotional and spiritual experience and provides a guiding vision; and elevates one above the mundane. “The true effort [of art]”, says Winterson “is to open to us dimensions of the spirit and of the self that normally lie smothered under the weight of living”.  

The artist is a “prophet” who is endowed with “prescience” and “an immanence that allows him or her to recognize and make articulate the emotional
perplexities of his age”. Such examples are Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit and The Passion which evoke the spiritual dimension of art to counter the effects of institutionalized religion and the consumer culture that “deadens our sensibilities and makes us fear what is not instant, approachable, consumable”. These novels chart a progression which is away from organized religion and panders towards spiritual experience. In their critique of fundamentalist and institutionalized religion and, conversely, their valorization of subjective spirituality, the novels draw upon Winterson’s formative Pentecostal evangelicalism and critical investment in the visionary arts. This division between religion and spirituality equally reflects the shift towards spirituality within the wider cultural context of the late twentieth century.

Winterson’s has always pushed at the boundaries of story telling in order to interrelate the self and nuances that are related to the power of language. Her concern with the transgressive clearly includes crossing and re-crossing the conventional limits of narrative. She highlights the fictionality of her work so she also foregrounds the practices of reading. She is archly aware of the fact that her books only take on existence when read; that is the reading re/creates the text: “When I talk about writing I have to always come back to reading.” Her heroes are sensitive people and are often travelers and searchers who are exploring the world around them. They are on a quest for beauty and will cross boundaries in order to find it. They are, in that sense, revolutionary because they have the desire to go beyond what is already known, and the passion to go beyond what is common. Alongwith that, the protagonists embrace uncertainty and the beauty they hope to find there demands a letting go, as well as an escape from old values, and an openness as well as a passionate determination. On the other hand, the antagonists in her
work display the exact opposite characteristics and they do not seek anything except
stability, order, and law-like certainty and in some cases they are mainly interested in
power or money. Her preference for the first set of characters and characteristics is not
only evident from the passionately poetic language and visionary images with which she
describes them in her fiction, but is confirmed in her non-fiction, essays and journalism.
Throughout her literary career, Winterson has been guided by a strong belief in principles
such as the freedom of speech, the value of art, or the anti-linearity and multi-
dimensionality of reality, and she uses these principles as the wire-frame around which
she models her characters. In her world, female values are predominant and the advocates
of her ideas are females rather than men. Although there are some masculine heroes,
Winterson’s unfavourable idea of men in general is unmistakable in her fictions. Her
rejection of a rationally and technologically conditioned modernity is akin to some of the
romantics’ rejection of the spirit of the enlightenment. Her search for an alternative world
while leaving behind modernity can be seen as a romantic strategy as well as a
specifically postmodern feminist aesthetics. At the same time, Winterson’s aesthetic view
of the world is an instrument for the emancipation of feminine values. She rejects the
traditional univocal and totalitarian concept of history and defends the right of the
individual to contribute her own subjective version of it, insisting at the same time upon
the truth-revealing power of imaginative story-telling and the impossibility of separating
fact from fiction, the real from the unreal, the desired from the actuality lived. From this
stance, Winterson, then redefines reality as complex and many-sided, and situates it in the
realm of the fantastic, that is to say, in that frontier territory of epistemological
uncertainly located between inner and outer reality where the real and the unreal aspects of the self coexist.

Winterson’s novels demonstrate that when critiques of the subject entail an abandonment of passion and desire, they construct new illusions of their own “purity”. For her, the subject can be a fragmented and yet a still obsessed self with all its impossibilities. Crucial to the understanding of the “virtual lesbian” is the acknowledgement of the subject’s necessary implication in conventional narratives of its own origins as well as its implication in the failures of those narratives. She self-consciously questions the mechanisms by which narrative texts are produced and partakes of a clear penchant for fantasy, magical realism, and the fabulous. She deftly combines with a strong political commitment the various aspects that are aimed at subverting socio-cultural power structures and, ultimately, at appropriating traditionally male-defined concepts for her lesbian politics. In her writing she metamorphoses a variety of literary forms such as romance, the gothic mode, and fairytales while raising questions about life, love, boundaries, desire, identity, and individual responsibility. As a writer, her main concern is the exploration of the limitless possibilities the self. She denotes, “I believe that storytelling is a way of navigating our lives.” 33 She then adds “… stories are a way of making sense differently, of enlarging upon what we are and not being afraid of the unruly elements within it.” 34 In her novels, there are recurring themes such as the indissolubility of the inner and the outer self, the quest for love and self-knowledge; the nature and spirit of sexual love, even the pointlessness of separating fact from fiction, and the exploration of the complexities of the human heart. One can find, in Winterson’s writing that, there is a constant subversion of the patriarchal binary
regulation of sexuality that unveils and lays bare the constructedness of a gendered conception of the self, and the restrictiveness of the concept of love within the compulsory heteroerosexual economics. The task for her, as an author, is to create in fiction what Butler argues is “the more insidious and effective strategy”, that is, “a thoroughgoing appropriation and redeployment of the categories of identity themselves, not merely to contest ‘sex’, but to articulate the convergence of multiple sexual discourses at the site of ‘identity’ in order to render that category, in whatever form, permanently problematic.” 35

Winterson’s fiction establishes that there has been an inherent depiction that every novel is clearly embedded within the writer herself and that her commitment to intellectual adventure remains in terms of a quest for the self. All the five novels within the study namely, Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit (1985), The Passion (1987), Sexing the Cherry (1989), Written on the Body (1992), and Art and Lies (1994) demonstrates that anything can be split into its self and it’s opposite. Winterson conveys that advocating plurality of desire as a complex form of consciousness can and will eventually defy binary antitheses and sexual stereotypes. The search for the self, which has been expressed as a personal quest, along with the desire to trespass the rigidly fixed boundaries between fact and fiction, are inherent with the manner in which myth lends itself to hi/story. These aspects are characteristic of Winterson’s narrative art in all of her novels. Most of her work has been devoted to the exploration of the self in its entire multiple and contradictory manifestations. Her characters are a subtle combination of various realms namely; heroic, delicate, insolent, seductive, ingenious, melancholic, and
fervent adventurers who prefer the pleasure of the pursuit to the achievement of the reward, and who believe that “only the impossible is worth the effort.”

From her first novel, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, Winterson’s work has always been critical of heterosexual and male privilege and ferociously anti-marriage. Almost every novel by Winterson is a critique of, if not a diatribe against, the various institutions which she sees as ‘stifling and domesticating love’ and giving a specious state and Church dominion to human relationships and to the quest and liberation of the self. Through *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, Winterson exposes the sanctity of family life as something of a sham; and it illustrates by example that what the Church terms love is actually a psychosis. In *Art and Lies*, Winterson questions women’s “supposed heterosexual orientation” and the basis for it: “She had been told that many women looked at a man and wanted his children. She could understand that but ‘marriage became survival and economics’.” Winterson, presents marriage as a conveyor belt approach to human relationships, and a lemming-like act of conformity: “Down the aisle they went, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health”, “till Death do us part. Death did part them; dead to feeling, dead to beauty, dead to all but the most obvious pleasures ...” Winterson represents “reality” and “identity” as radically unstable concepts, whereby the “self” and the world it inhabits are continually in flux and instable. To Winterson, to love differently emerges as a goal which is achieved by telling stories differently, and by re-imagining and re-mapping life. All this has been rendered because she seeks to find a truly universal mode of expression that speaks to all people who love regardless of gender and sexuality. *Written on the Body*, *Art and Lies*, *Sexing the Cherry* and *The Passion* continue to focus upon the body and the concept of desire in order to
foreground the complexity for one’s own search for self, with an invitation to imagine what it would be, and partly in answer she declares that it is, “the accumulation of parts”, constituting, a series of objects, texts and events that construct “myself”. 39

Significantly, as denoted at the very outset, the thematic concern of the research has been focused upon the aspect of the self, and thus the study has deduced that Winterson is concerned in terms of returning the lost meaning to the self. She is not restricted to what she has experienced or what she knows, and she lets herself loose outside of her own dimension which makes possible “a total escape from Self”. 40 Through her literary art, Winterson opens up a new consciousness which examines the vulnerable and self-doubting intricacies of the self. The study has also concluded that always in her writing there is a constant subversion of the patriarchal binary regulation of sexuality that unveils and exposes the constructedness of a gendered conception of the self, and the restrictiveness of the concept of love within the compulsory heterosexual world. It has also established that, Winterson, through her characters, advocates, and alternative ways to understand the sexual, emotional, and intellectual self. Her characters endure pain and hardship in order to discover the self and explore their sexual identity even as she recognizes that there are characters who have an ambiguous sexual identity that struggle between incompleteness and wholeness. She deconstructs these narrative conventions to illustrate that storytelling need not be subordinated to the constraints of the patriarchal grand narratives. Her corpus demonstrates that it is possible to subvert the constructed binary oppositions between masculine and feminine through innovative and challenging ways of writing.
In conclusion, the study has inferred that Winterson’s works advocate that the struggle for the “construction of the self” is more meaningful than the denial of the true self, the latter being a domain that has often been imposed upon by society and religious doctrine. Thus, she undermines the traditional notion of fantasy as mere escapism and affirms instead its revolutionary capacity to bring about the fulfillment of her lesbian heroine’s innermost desires, and so provides a space for the definition of self. Winterson’s fictions suggest revisions to certain normative assumption in both postmodern and lesbian writing. Her writings also challenge the convention of lesbian theory that lesbians and their point of view are excluded by the normative identity categories of modern culture. Her fiction instead installs a particular lesbian narrative space at the centre of the novels in terms of understanding of history, sexuality and the self.
NOTES


3 Jeanette Winterson, Art and Lies, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994) 22-23


5 Naina Dey, Life & Letters ~ Fiction is stranger than fact, 7 June 2010 <www.thestatesman.net/index.php?option>

6 As elucidated by Jeanette Winterson 2 Aug 2008 <www.jeanettewinterson.com>


16Ibid. 85

17Ibid. 85

18Ibid. 85


21Ibid. 115

22Ibid. 114

23Ibid. 114


25Ibid. 138


30 Ibid. 39

31 Ibid. 15-16

32 Jeanette Winterson, speech, Manchester Metropolitan University, 22 Mar. 2006.


35 Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity, (London: Routledge, 2006) 128


37 Jeanette Winterson, Art and Lies, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994) 82

38 Ibid. 83

39 Ibid. 187

40 As elucidated by Jeanette Winterson in Art Objects (1995) 188
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