Chapter five

CONCLUSION

In the final pages of this work, it seems not only advisable but also necessary to try and make a complete summary of the main issues which have been raised so far, especially those related to the analysis of Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit, Written On the Body, The Passion and Sexing the Cherry, in order to extract some overall conclusions.

British feminist critics of the 1970s and early 1980s objected to the tendency of some North American critics to find universal or "essential" feminine attributes, arguing that differences of race, class, and culture gave rise to crucial differences among women across space and time. Today’s critics seldom focus on "woman" as a relatively massive category; rather, they view "women" as members of different societies with different concerns. Feminists of colour, Third World (preferably called postcolonial) feminists, and lesbian feminists have stressed that women are not defined solely by the fact that they are female; other characteristics (such as religion, class, and sexual orientation) are also important, making the problems and goals of one group of women different from those of another. Many commentators have argued that feminist criticism is by definition gender criticism because of its focus on the feminine gender. One of the central
assumptions of feminism is that gender and sex are different. Gender is socially constructed. The differences between men and women are not so much biological as social. Sex is biological (male/female), gender is cultural (masculine/feminine). But the relationship between feminist and gender criticism is, in fact, complex; the two approaches are certainly not polar opposites but, rather, exist along a range of attitudes toward sex, sexuality, gender, and language.

Jeanette Winterson, one of the most powerful contemporary novelists also has written in this same direction and has contributed greatly to the field of Feminist or women’s writing. Her writing has strong influence of Virginia Woolf, Gertrude Stein, T.S. Eliot and she is also been excited by European literature, by the playful intertextuality and sensibility of Italo Calvino, Borges, Perec and Rabelais. ‘Self’ is a key term in her texts and Jeanette presents herself always in the process of becoming, never as a finished product. She rejects the notion of the self as single and fixed and advocates instead the adoption of multiple literary personae which relate to one another dialogically. Like the characters in her novels, Winterson uses all kinds of fictional disguises in order to conceal her true self and insists on the fact that there is nothing of her outside language and that it is in her fiction that she is to be found. Her fondness of paradoxical statements and
the clear exposure of the construction-deconstruction of the self are perfectly
in keeping with the socio-cultural context that influences both her lifestyle
and her literary production:

Winterson enjoys dominant position as a feminist writer yet; Jeanette
Winterson in one of her interviews with The Times¹ has vehemently denied
of being feminist and shown strong disapproval on calling her a feminist
writer.
But on analyzing her major and minor literary productions it becomes a
crystal clear that the novelist has been consciously or unconsciously a
staunch feminist and has consistently written on that line. Winterson’s
novels ‘Oranges Are Not the Only Fruits, Written on the Body, The Passion
and ‘Sexing the Cherry’ are greater repositories of various human
conditions, behaviors, and contemporary tendencies to be studied. Her
female protagonists in all the novels are greater sources of studying
Winterson’s ideals and serious concerns about women. The heroines, female
protagonists highlight utmost feminine qualities, consciousness, and their
nature. Feminine consciousness is such a strong aspects of Winterson’s
writing that not only female characters but even the male characters like
Henri in ‘The Passion’ has full of feminine qualities. It is highly encouraging
to study the above novels to be acquainted with the prevalent feminine consciousness in Winterson’s writing.

**What is Feminine?**

Socially excepted views of masculinity and femininity are taught to individuals through a variety of cultural means and from infancy on, they are encouraged to conform to the gender that society prescribes. Gender is a significant issue in our culture, so there are many structures and practices that serve to reinforce the prescriptions for women’s and men’s identities and behaviors. According to Lipman they may be divergent. The first one: people’s gender roles are the entirety of the ways by which they express their gender identities. The second one: they may be defined as socially created expectations about an individual, which are appropriate for him or her as a representative of the sex. Gender roles are social constructions; they contain self-concepts, psychological traits, as well as family, occupational, and political roles assigned dichotomously to members of each sex.

From birth on, we have been living in the society, according to its rules and regulations. Baby-girls are supposed to live in a soft, tender, fragile pink world; baby-boys should be born into a strong, powerful, independent blue
world. As we get through teenage age, get matured, become adults, start working and get older, the stereotypes describing the features of femininity and masculinity accompany us while walking on our life-path.

Femininity describes a set of supposedly typical female qualities associated with a certain attitudes to gender roles; masculinity refers to a totality of characteristic qualities connected to all males.

To femaleness are attributed the adjectives: passive, nurturant, dependent, subversive, frail, soft-spoken, supportive, emotional, sympathetic, intuitive, altruistic, and fearful. When talking about maleness, these attributes are expected: active, hard, independent, dominant, fearless, rational, self-reliant, and ambitious. The stereotyping prescribes not only the features but also body language, gestures, movements, it predicts one’s appropriate way of behaving in, reacting to and solving life-situations, choosing the type of job and career.

According to J. Lipman-Blumen Classical Greek myths, as well as Old and New Testament stories, transformed the powerful and positive images of women and goddesses from earlier civilizations into negative, destructive figures. Nowadays, there exist nine control myths, none of which was scientifically, ethnologically or culturally proven right, preserving the gender-role images emanating from mythology, religion, literature and art:
1. Women are weak, passive, dependent, and fearful; men are strong, aggressive, independent, and fearless.

2. Women think in intuitive, holistic, and contextual terms, men use analytical, abstract, and field-independent thinking, which makes them smarter than women.

3. Women are more altruistic, nurturant, and thus more moral than men.

4. Women’s sexuality is inexhaustible, uncontrollable, and even dangerous to men; male sexuality is more limited and delicate, requiring greater stimulation for arousal and more protection from injury.

5. Women are contaminated and contaminating.

6. Beauty and sexuality are women’s most valuable assets.

7. Women talk too much.

8. Women are manipulative; men are straightforward.

9. Men have women’s best interests at heart; women can trust men to protect their welfare.

These control myths, which are the conscious and unconscious beliefs about the intrinsic nature of the two sexes inspired by ancient images, victimize both women and men in different but equally destructive ways and
we consider them inappropriate, not in accordance with reality and very far from being valid.

These are all the aspects dominantly prevalent in Winteson’s fictional world and time to time reveal her ideas and philosophical views on various sensitive issues, society and feminism.

ORNTOF is the most fascinating contemporary novels. It is widely circulated, hugely read and received considerable attention of the critics. The novel has plethora of autobiographical elements. On asking if it is autobiographical Winterson replied “No not at all, and yes it could be”. The novel revolves around many themes such as Christianity, religion, lesbianism, feminism, and feminine consciousness is prevalent everywhere in them. The attitude of the staunch Christian mother towards religion, Christianity, god, sex, and lesbianity shapes the feminine consciousness of her protagonists. Jeanette, an adolescent girl, is at the centre of the plot of the novel. The experiences of Jeanette in the novel and the novelist’s life in reality closely resemble which creates considerable space to call it to be autobiographical novel.

Jeanette in ORNTOF is consistently conscious of the suppression of her freedom by her mother hence is keen to procure support in Melanie and Katy. Further the adolescent Jeanette develops the lesbian association with
Katy which is her desire to emancipate reflected through feminine consciousness. The historical bias against women is also reflected where the congregation, priest and Jeanette’s mother forces Jeanette to behave according to their ideals and principles which they consider to be right. Similar line is continued in WOTB, where Jeanette Winterson is highly concerned about the gender and inner consciousness of the protagonist. Lothario the ungendered protagonist has abundance of sexual counterparts but his/her inner consciousness is hyperactive when he comes in contact with Louise, a married woman, and gets truer realization of love and then loss. Though initially appeared to be unaffected, dishonest and flamboyant Lothario later becomes extremely tender, fragile, emotional which are feminine qualities attributed woman. In ORNTOF Jeanette grows old and starts thinking about romance. On listening the women’s complaints against men she thinks whether men are beasts and develops fear also. In this sense Jeanette is not different than other women in the novel and she has similar feminine conscious. But on many occasions she behaves as a strong character and shows grit to fight. The novel has many lesbian characters like Jeanette, Katy, and Miss Jewsbury etc. The title of the novel ORNTOF utilizes oranges as a metaphor. Jeanette’s mother, throughout the novel, many times offers oranges as the only fruit, which in the novel indicates
‘heterosexuality’. But Jeanette refuses to accept oranges i.e. ‘heterosexual way of life’ because she believes that it is not the only way to live life, but there are many others that should be equally valued and treated in the same way. In one incident, Jeanette’s mother wants Jeanette to maintain feminity and girlishness by using pink coloured raincoat. This act of the mother highlights the feminine consciousness filled in the novel every now and then.

Winterson’s novel ‘The Passion’ is also highly significant novel in terms of understanding novelist’s feministic views and to study the feminine consciousness in her characters. The story begins with Henry, who works for Napoleons army, and is the Napoleons personal chicken chef. Here begins Winterson’s gender play. She does not immediately let us know that Henry is male and yet winterson gave him feminine qualities so there is scope to believe that he is female. This is the kind of play that runs through the novel. What it is to be male? What it is to be female? In the novel there is a second story if Villanelle who is a daughter of a boatman from Venice. The masculine trait is to be born with webbed feet, the females are not usually afflicted by it, however something goes wrong and she has webbed feet which raises male / female question. Villanelle is also known to dress up as a man for her customers. The two meets and other several interesting
supporting roles like, the cook, the man who is interested in Villanelle, the queen of Hearts and Napoleon are present in the novel.

According to the New York Times Book Review, Winterson’s novels are

“The most enchantingly seductive novel to date from the author of The Passion and Sexing the Cherry. Winterson chronicles the consuming affair between the narrator, who is given neither name nor gender, and the beloved, a complex and confused married woman. "At once love stories and a philosophical meditation."”

Stower Catch argues that Winterson undermines the dominant masculine discourse of history throwing it into relief against feminine narratives; that Winterson goes beyond writing women into history. She offers Henri as a male-narrated non-linear narrative; he is not a “great man”; his life does not take place within the public sphere; he is “homesick”. Henri writes “stories”, rather than history. He emphasizes the subjective and personal nature of his writings. He is, as a result, positioned as feminine within the binary gender traditions; therefore, his tales become lesbian narratives as well.

In “The Passion: Storytelling, Fantasy, Desire,” Paulina Palmer writes that not the only female characters in winterson’s Writing but also the male character are presented as feminine in mental construction. For example,
Henri in The Passion is constructed as feminine and it is he who brings in the lesbian question. It is he who documents and comments on the oppression suffered by the women around him; it is he who gives us the first reference to a lesbian relationship. Villanelle’s all relations with men are a result of necessity rather than desire, which is reserved for women. She is a bold-type example of the oppression of women inherent in the compulsory heterosexuality of Henri’s mother and the prostitutes. Her real passion is reserved for the Queen of Spades, the only depiction of true passion within the text. Villanelle is the representation of lesbianism and not as political as it is romantic and lacks reference to homophobia or other problems, according to Palmer.

WOTB is a painfully intimate first-person account of a Grand Passion, of love won and lost. It is related by an ungendered, unnamed, sexually plural, spatially dislocated, temporally unmoored, and—for a novel called Written on the Body—curiously disembodied narrator. The story told in the novel is a simple, even stereotypical, one. The narrator falls in love with a beautiful married woman, Louise, who, five months into the relationship, is revealed to have cancer. The narrator strikes a bargain with Louise's husband, Elgin, a doctor, who agrees to treat Louise only if the narrator abandons her. The narrator decamps for Yorkshire, without telling Louise, after several months
departs again for London in a futile search for her, and returns north to face an uncertain future.

Winterson here poses the questions what would be the effects of a love story narrated by an ungendered, sexually polymorphous character, and what would are the consequences of such a narrative position for this most ideologically freighted of genres? Her characters are extremely serious about their gender and accordingly do not forget to present the emotions, behaviour and their actions. Winterson subtly reveals the feminine nature of her characters. Though the gender of the protagonist is not revealed in WOTB the feminine characteristic of him/her are consciously or unconsciously reflected throughout the story. The feminineness is tendency, quality, behaviour, conduct of being tender, sympathetic, and loveable attributed to women. In the novel WOTB narrator's sexual identity consistently is unresolved, and because he/she is presented in a series of masks, roles, performances, quotations, and translations it creates the greater vagueness and confusion. At the same time, the intense closeness created by the first person point of view and compounded by the intimate confessional nature of the narrator's descriptions, invite, even demand, more sympathy—if not always the identification or consent.
After recounting his/her failure, remorse and regret, the narrator presents a two-paragraph description of Louise standing in the kitchen door—which may or may not be materially true—and one paragraph describing the emotional impact of her re-embodiment:

"The walls are exploding…I stretch out my hand and reach the corner of the world…I don't know if this is a happy ending but here we are let loose in open fields" (WOTB, 190).  

The language used in the novel on many occasions reflects the feminine touch in it. In one of the novel's most significant scenes the narrator declares, after their first night making love,

“Louise, I love you’’ to which she replies. Don't say that now. Don't say it yet. You might not mean it” (WOTB, 52).

The narrator remembers him/herself "protesting with a stream of superlatives, beginning to sound like an advertisement.

“The more I underlined it the hollower it sounded" (WOTB, 52).

After acknowledging to feeling emotionally out of control (again) Louise reacts
“So you try and gain control by telling me you love me. That's a territory you know, isn't it? That's romance and courtship and whirlwind. I don't believe you [don't want control]” (WOTB, 52).

The narrator, looking back on it from the present (from the physical absence of Louise), has to admit that Louise was right to mistrust him/her at the time—that he/she had been lying

"If in doubt be sincere. That's a pretty little trick of mine….I regretted telling her those stories about my girlfriends. I had wanted to make her laugh and she had laughed at the time [of the early friendship]. Now I had strewn our path with barbs. She didn't trust me. As a friend I had been amusing. As a lover I was lethal" (WOTB, 53).

The language in the above paragraph is a fantastic and impressive to match to the feelings and emotions of the emotionally high-pitch characters. In the relationship with Louise the narrator believes he/she has found both holiday and homecoming. And while some critics deplore the apparently stereotypical nature of the relationship (the allure of the beautiful dying woman, the power imbalance suggested in the narrator's metaphors of
exploration and conquest) in fact, Louise is also insistently bi-gendered in her behaviors. She is the aggressor in initiating the association with the narrator, who states "I wanted you to possess me", and the narrator as often as not refers to her using masculine metaphors as feminine ones. *She is a knight in shining armor* (WOTB, 123), *cocked and ready to fire a Roman Cardinal* (to the narrator's choir boy) (WOTB, 136). *In relation to Louise, the narrator is a child* (WOTB, 80), an anchorite, and, in an amazingly gender indeterminate description, "*Lover and child, virgin and roué....I was as shy as an unbroken colt. I had Mercutio's swagger....I quivered like a schoolgirl*" (WOTB, 81-2).\(^{12}\) The above references indicate careful use of masculine metaphors as feminine.

It is interesting to study, Louise's husband, Elgin, As a man of science and as a powerful and authoritative enough to make the narrator abandon Louise—and feminized ,his tiny physique, his meekness, his desire for masochism and it is also mentioned that Louise marries him because she knows she can control him. The narrator's bond with Elgin—which is at length described—might be read as a power struggle between men for Louise's own good. Or, in leaving Louise, the narrator may possibly be put in a feminized position of selfless renunciation. We come across a wide variety of biblical, mythical and fairy-tale characters: a sorcerer, Sir
Perceval, Arthur, Artemis, Orion, Orpheus, Bathsheba, an orange demon, Zillah, Samson, The Queen of Heaven, The Blessed Virgin, Twelve Dancing Princesses, and so on. These characters always appear to come from a deeper reality, to have knowledge the other characters have no access to. The sorcerer, for instance, already knows the protagonist’s name even though she has not introduced herself; the orange demon knows and travels through all the books ever written. Fortunately, one of the Twelve Dancing Princesses, functions as the protagonist’s guide into a transcendent world. These characters just appear and disappear, dropping an opinion or showing how things ‘really’ are.

Winterson’s narrators show an unmistakable and consistent sympathy for certain characters, a preference connected to the ideas they represent. Redheaded women for instance, are always addressed in such a loving feminine tone that they become emblems of love and passion. ‘Written on the Body’ contains several redheads, among them Bathsheba, one of the narrator’s old loves:

“Our red hair is blazing and you are saying, ‘Make three wishes and they shall all come true. Make three hundred and I will honour every one’ ” (WOB, 19).13
Louise has red hair as well:

“If I were painting Louise I’d paint her hair as a swarm of butterflies. A million Red Admirals in a halo of movement and light” (WOB, 29).\(^\text{14}\)

In *The Passion*, we meet Villanelle, who, when she was born, had

“A fine head with a crop of red hair and a pair of eyes that made up for the sun’s eclipse” (TP, 51).\(^\text{15}\)

In Winterson’s feminist aesthetics the colour red is connected to its connotations in our western culture. Its intensity implies energy and vigour. It destroys optical quietness and thereby suggests radical struggle. Red is associated with fire, warmth and blood, and creates a remarkable effect. Combined with femininity, in Winterson’s work this colour symbolizes an intense passion. In general, Winterson’s heroes are sensitive people, often travellers and searchers, exploring the world around them. They are on a quest for beauty and will cross boundaries to locate it. They are, in that sense, revolutionary because they have the desire to go beyond what is already known, the passion to go beyond what is common. With that, they
embrace uncertainty. The beauty they hope to find there demands a letting go, an escape from old values, as well as openness and a passionate determination.

The Passion and Sexing the Cherry incorporate parody and transform in order to disrupt established discourses and grand narratives. The third and fourth parts of this work have been dedicated, respectively, to the analysis of the way in which Winterson opens up a space for the definition of the self and its gendered identity in the conscious manipulation of the space and time co-ordinates in The Passion and Sexing the Cherry. Winterson’s characters do not necessarily cease to exist on the last page of one of her books. The Dancing Princesses, for instance, fully come to life in Sexing the Cherry, but one of them seems to already appear briefly in the earlier The Passion:

“*One day he saw a young woman flying past, her clothes flying out behind her*” (TP, 97).

Although many women in Winterson’s novels are able to float, only the Dancing Princesses are actually able to fly. This anonymous single flying female might be one of them. The Passion represents history by means of such unequal tools as memory, chance, and desire. Winterson’s text is not conventionally historical, although history occupies a central position and has a distinct function in the text. The Passion is a book about the
importance of telling stories, oral or written, as a successful means of representing the self both in and across history. The chronotopic representation of history in The Passion is then the writing of Henri’s memoirs, to which Villanelle’s discourse is simultaneously subordinated and juxtaposed. *The Passion* also introduces Villanelle, the daughter of a boatman. In *Art & Lies*, she and her linguistic alter ego, the poetic form, briefly return:

> “There is a quatrain at my chin and a sonnet on each breast;
>  
>  Villanelle is the poise of my hands” (*AL*, 63).17

Likewise, Louise, an adult in *Written on the Body*, spends her childhood in *The Passion*:

> “One little girl who always followed me around pulled at my hand, her eyebrows close together with worries. ‘Will you kill people, Henri?’ I dropped down beside her. ‘Not people, Louise, just the enemy.’ ‘What is enemy?’ ‘Someone who’s not on your side’ ” (*TP*, 8 and cf. *TP* 79).18

The appearance of Louise in The Passion is a case in point. In Written on the Body we encounter Louise as the wife of Elgin. She is having an
extramarital affair with the anonymous narrator, whose sex is undeclared. Elgin is aware of his wife’s adulterous relationship. When she appears to be ill, Elgin – who is a cancer specialist – believes that she has cancer of the blood. Indeed, the test results he comes up with back him up in this. Some readers of the book believe that Elgin is trustworthy. The text in Written on the Body, however, contains passages that raise doubts concerning Elgin’s trustworthiness. It is in fact not at all clear if Louise really is ill, or if she is only declared ill. Elgin’s diagnosis might just amount to blackmail. It is no coincidence, then, that in The Passion this theme of ‘knowing the enemy’ is also tied up with the character of Louise. We also see how an existential problem, such as uncertainty, can be experienced by various characters in different novels. Little Jeanette in ‘Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit’ feels uncertain:

“I wasn’t quite certain what was happening myself, it was the second time in my life I had experienced uncertainty” (ORN, 98).

At the end of the novel, she chooses for a life that embraces that feeling, leaving behind the certainties of the black-and-white binary structured world created by her mother.
But in Sexing the Cherry Winterson shatters any gender expectation in the novel. Her female characters are precisely the opposite of what is expected in a woman. While a stereotypical woman is trim, rounded, passive, the Dog Woman is huge and monstrous and active and solves any conflicts with violence. She is totally carefree with her appearance. She is aware of what other people think of her but she does not feel the need to act upon it, to do something to make someone happy. She is independent, unwilling to submit herself to a man. Importantly the very essence of the female character is challenged in the book: instead of giving birth like every other woman, she finds Jordan, her son, on the riverbank. Aware of the way women have been depicted in literature throughout the centuries, Winterson presents us with the ‘antidote’. The Dog Woman is no longer the lower, subordinate woman. Abhorrence for subordination had led her to be overweight for as long as she had been living with her parents:

“I wasn’t fat because I was greedy; I hardly ate at all. I was fat because I wanted to be bigger than all the things that were bigger than me. All the things that had power over me. It was a battle I intended to win. “(STC, 124)\textsuperscript{20}
“In STC the female stands by itself as a positive, assertive and powerful entity.” The two female protagonists in STC represent themselves as powerful women who disobey gender norms and expectations. It is true about Dog-Woman and also applies to the environmentalist: "It is precisely, in her rebellion against this social and cultural imposition of "femininity" that we recognize her as a woman." (Gonzáles 1996: 285). The way in which the female protagonists present themselves from a first person narrator perspective can be understood as a criticism to the existing patriarchal structures. The female protagonists live their lives on their own terms and have to accept the drawbacks that come with such attempts to challenge social structures.

Jordan, a boy from Sexing the Cherry, is confronted with exactly the same turning point in his teens:

"Running away from uncertainty and confusion but most of all running away from myself. (...) And then I saw that the running away was a running towards" (STC, 80).

Different characters seem to converge at similar points, sharing identical insights, which make them not so much owners of personal views, but rather, allegorical personifications of qualities. Falling from rooftops without
dying is another example of an experience shared by many of Winterson’s characters. In Sexing the Cherry, an unnamed person also survives a fall:

‘A young girl coming home along a slippery and frayed line of rope missed her footing and fell into the blank space below. There was a cry of horror from everyone who saw it, but the girl did not drop and crack on the ground, she floated. (STC, 97)’

Fortunately, one of the Twelve Dancing Princesses in Sexing the Cherry, does not fall to her death either.

“Do you remember’, said another sister, ‘how light she was? She was so light that she could climb down a rope, cut it and tie it again in mid-air without plunging to her death. The winds supported her” (STC, 60)”

Liberated by an eccentric alteration, she seizes the opportunity to start another life. These heroes are there for the writer to express the strength of what lies beyond the reality we know, the strength of what cannot be conceived. Winterson’s aestheticisation of the world is a mechanism for the emancipation of feminine values. It helps us to interpret Winterson’s work
form different aspects of her worldview – religious, feminist, scientific, political, technological, and poetical interconnect.

The novel's final pages then are equally about contradiction, defeat, remoteness, and disembodiment and reunion, assertion, presence. While the novel may be impossible to close definitively, the ending nonetheless does act as a "culmination" of sorts for the many kinds of indeterminacy, undecideability, ambiguity and contradiction (strategies of the negative) that encompass the novel, of which the narrator's undecideable gender is only the most notorious. It is difficult not to be seduced and dazzled by the narrator's earnest lyricism, arch self-mockery and sheer linguistic inventiveness, as difficult as it is to disbelieve in Louise's physical re-embodiment at the end of the novel.

Overall the language of Winterson’s novels is embroidered with poetry, main themes are usually love, problems caused by love, love triangles, dilemmas, boundaries vs. desire, present are also allegorical fairytales, feminist myths and romance. As a writer and controversialist, she enjoys a considerable public profile and is seldom afraid, when writing in newspapers, to take a moral view, whether of woman’s rights or global politics. In her fiction she seeks to challenge conventional thinking, to
transgress gender boundaries, all her narrators are androgynous or sometimes even genderless, the style is playful and aphoristic, the form is non-linear and fragmented.

“*I like to look at how people work together when they are put into stressful situations, when life stops being cozy, when it stops being predictable, when there is a chance element which unsettles all the rules, which forces people back onto their own sources, and away from their habits.*”

Winterson’s heroines do not blindly lead the life of suppression and oppression but are guiding figures and establish new social structures, as it happens in case of Jeanette in ORNTOF; the dog-woman in STC, Villanelle in TP and Lothario, Louise in WOTB. Thus the gamut of Winterson’s fictional world provides the genuine hero’s and heroines, each filled with grit to fight back, showing the desire to come out of social prevalent taboos and introducing the striking way of leading life dashingly, yet having, much needed, tender feminine consciousness in them.