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## Dialectic of Gender and Desire in Shaping the Female Identity in *Pope Joan* and *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*

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### Abstract

The present study examines the picture of women in Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* and Woolfolk Cross's *Pope Joan* and shows how the writers redefine what makes femininity and the notion of female subjectivity in their novels. To do so, Judith Butler's theory of performativity is used to provide a clear portrait of the female characters in these works. In addition to an in-depth analysis of the relationship between the opposite sexes, the study explores how women from different perspectives are related to each other. The two authors cry against any notion of masculine and feminine relations that justify and fixate on female subjugation and play down female characteristics and focus mainly on what contributes to shaping the female identity. Through the lens of Butlerian performativity, it is revealed that Winterson and Woolfolk unanimously depict a different feminine identity that crosses the boundary of typical female figures and renders a new persona for them that fits with no usual portrait of women in male-centered societies.

**Keywords:** Feminine subjectivity, gender roles, identity, masculine domination

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### INTRODUCTION

According to many modern philosophers, identity turns out to be a controversial issue in contemporary culture and literature, and the female identity, as a distinctive feature of women in contrast to men, is of great importance in the cultural writings of our time. Despite the widespread use of the concept of identity, it remains an ambiguous and vague notion and this adds to the complexity of the matter. This complexity is felt both in the real world as well as in the world of fiction where characters seem to suffer more and struggle to establish a true self for themselves in the chaotic world of alienation in the modern era. However, the quest for self-realization and self-discovery is

stronger for women than men and has triggered great works of art in 20<sup>th</sup>-century literature. This notion of subjectivity and one's identity is a central theme in modern thought, and different schools of thought, adopting a special viewpoint, have given only a fragment of what constitutes a human being's true identity. The postmodern novel is characterized by breaking away from the traditional narrative structure of meaning-making within which characters enact a unified stable identity. On the other hand, it shows to be a site for the uprising of some marginalized groups like women and colored skins against power. Most importantly, women writers of the time seek to subvert female decentralization and do away with established norms that justify their conception of subjectivity to men in androcentric communities.

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Relying on Butler's ideas on female identity, this study shows how mechanisms of female disempowerment work together to rip women off their independent existence and make them follow predetermined gender roles defined by ruling men. The study shows how Joan and Jeanette are transferred from a naive girl into maturity in the face of all hardships and problems on their way to adulthood. Moreover, it is revealed through their actions that male-dominated society defines norms of humanity and those who are not fitting these standards are not accepted as normal people and are rejected. It is against all these external forces that these female protagonists try to establish their own independent identities and finally come to an understanding that a female character needs to be like men to be successful in society.

## LITERATURE

Donna Woolfolk Cross examines social factors that determine the human relationship with each other and the way one's being is defined in a social setting built and defined by men in *Pope Joan*. She focuses on the way men and the male-dominated society set rules on masculinity and femininity and bestow each with a certain lifestyle, restrictions, and incongruent roles. We learn that women are not given the freedom and gender roles to freely pursue their desires and a life of their own.

Marti Roberts (2005) argues in "Pope Joan: a book by Donna Woolfolk Cross" that Woolfolk Cross attributes the scarcity of current facts about Pope Joan to the male papacy's refusal to recognize women as candidates for the highest position. Even now, the Catholic Church denies the existence of Pope Joan, blaming the legend on Protestant reformers. Nonetheless, there is substantial proof to the contrary. Doan believes that while the author was initially uninterested in whether the true Pope Joan was a figure of fact or fiction, she grew to accept that Joan did actually exist and served as Pope in her time. As a result, she presented substantial evidence in favor of her life. Cross' depiction of the Catholic Church is unflattering. She is swift to point out that her book cannot be read as paganistic, but rather as

anti-organized religion. She states that she dislikes any system that places people against one another and makes everyone the Other.

Exploration of sexual desire and the quest for one's self lies at the heart of Winterson's novel, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. The author portrays Jeannette disrupting the gender-constructed system and seeks to reestablish a new mold of femininity in the face of old-established roles for women to build up and ascertain an identity for themselves and fulfill their prohibited desire against the restricted heterosexual model of love in the patriarchal order. Jeannette, as the main character of the story, struggles against religious, cultural, patriarchal, and gender-related dogmas that repress her sexual desire and restrain her being in a closed system of the church and its teachings.

In "Jeanette Winterson's Sexing the Post-modern" Laura Doan (1994) argues that Winterson's novels usually drive in and out of academic debates about female and male sexuality. Her books address sex and gender issues by the use of language, the protagonists that appear in them, the views expressed by the characters, plot constructs, and specific philosophical points. The essence of Winterson's feminist outlook can be shown by contrasting it to the three viewpoints that are commonly differentiated within women's studies. There are three types of feminism: sameness feminism, difference feminism, and deconstruction feminism. These positions are usually mutually exclusive. Winterson's novel, paradoxically, reflects views drawn from all of these positions. Her work, as we can see, is notable for its integration of postmodernist notions of selfhood, formal experimentation, and political engagement from the periphery of patriarchal society.

## Theoretical Framework

Butler's (1993) perspectives on gender identity and post-feminist and queer studies have been identified as revolutionary and pioneering and should therefore be recognized in social work practice and education, notably when we consider the effect of social structure on humans (Lloyd, 2007). Her popular texts on gender and subversion, *Gender Trouble*:

*Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990, 1999) and *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (1993), discuss valuable ideas about social justice and respect the identity and integrity and value of every individual in society, which are ethical concepts in accordance with social notions of social positioning. Butler provides a post-structural understanding of the socio-historical origins of gender socialization for anyone concerned with the feminine, and how it may affect the intimate lives of women and other disadvantaged communities. She has theories on various psychosocial problems women experience in our societies, including identity, self-esteem, and media communication, and offers helpful ideas for recognizing the socio-political context of many of the presenting concerns of the female population, and how current society and prevailing rhetoric may influence them. Many consider her ideas helpful and relevant in explaining how women and men are socialized in different cultures, and how dominant social discourses about normal behavior and gender roles of women may influence their identity, picture, and self-conception (Kirby, 2006).

To Butler (1993), gender identification is a mechanism of agentic accomplishment that we come to establish and internalize as a consequence of social influences. The repetition and reproduction of these gender performances are what allow a person to gain social status from forced social norms. The recitation of gender roles, attitudes, dress code, and behavior is deemed important, according to Butler, when an individual wants to continue as a respectable gendered subject in society (Lloyd, 2007). Therefore, in order to become relevant in culture, one is required to perform the established and desired gender roles. Such conceptualization of identity varies from the conventional theories of identity creation, as it incorporates both organization and social structure in their account of the performative and repeated essence of identity that is essentially driven and manipulated by social law and discourse. Indeed, the conventional definition of identification to be is too static and too secure for Butler.

Butler believes that gender is created and, in effect, practiced by people who have originally made it, and maintained by prevailing discourses, and societal structures transmitted by family arrangements, mainstream media, and ordinary social ties. Therefore, it may be claimed that gender identification is often unwittingly conveyed by prevailing rhetoric to the person, and as a consequence, the person acts out or performs the correct, socially accepted positions. Butler also suggests that over time, men and women tend to unconsciously demonstrate and enact their societal norms and positions by gender performances and actions that are internalized under the strain of a social system, and come to repress or deny certain incentives for self-expression and desire with respect to the heterosexuality melancholy.

## DISCUSSION

### *Mechanisms of Female Disempowerment in Poe Joan*

Joan has an avaricious desire to learn and nothing seems to stop her. Even her father can't block her way as she acts so astonishingly in front of the reverend Aesculapius that he undertakes to visit the house once a week and tutor John as well as Joan, though, in fact, he comes mostly to teach Joan. However, she feels a strong attachment to her mother and can't study with Aesculapius while her mother is busy doing hard household chores. The more she engages in learning Christian texts, the more she feels detached from her mother and her feminine world. She knows that binding herself with Christianity will cost her the loss of her mother's feminine support:

Her studies were a betrayal, a violation of the private world she shared with her mother, a world of Saxon gods and Saxon secrets. By learning Latin and studying Christian texts, Joan aligned herself with the things her mother most detested—with the Christian God who had destroyed Gudrun's homeland and, more to the point, with the canon, her husband (p. 66).

Knowledge for women is prohibited and is not accepted by men. The canon would never bring himself to accept that his daughter is knowledgeable and has the ability to read and

write. Once he discovers the book given by Aesculapius, he goes mad and wants to kill his daughter. As he himself cannot read Greek, he accuses his daughter of being possessed and practicing witchcraft. The Canon betas the young girl to death and it becomes the talk of the village as he showed no control over his emotions and three strong men struggled to drag him away from the child. But interestingly, people do not talk about the nature of domestic violence against women, because it is a norm in the masculine society:

But it wasn't the savagery of the beating that caused people to talk. Such things were common enough. Hadn't the blacksmith knocked his wife down and kicked her in the face until all her bones were broken because he was tired of her nagging? The poor creature was disfigured for life, but there was nothing to do about it. A man was master in his own home, no one questioned that. The only law governing his absolute right to dispense punishment as he saw it was one that limited the size of the club he could use. The canon had not used a club, in any case. (p. 85)

What intensifies and worsens everything is the fact that even women themselves partake in the general idea on women and their wickedness. As we discussed Butler's idea of performativity, women reproduce the ongoing masculine system and oppression against themselves by accepting their own weaknesses and abiding within the boundaries set up for them as a result of their gender roles. When Joan is badly hurt by her father's beating, her mother nurses her and tries to cure her. In the meantime, the mother criticizes her daughter for trespassing on her gender roles. She strongly believes that her daughter is responsible for what she receives because she is a girl and is not made to do male-specific acts like reading and learning and gaining knowledge: "She was a girl, and therefore not meant for the book study. The child was meant to be with her, to share the hidden secrets and the language of her people, to be the comfort and balm of her old age. Evil the hour the Greek entered this house. May the wrath of all the gods descend upon him" (PJ, 86).

The question is why strong women like Gudrun yield to such a disgraceful and ignoble status and easily give in to masculine domination. The narrative gives clues to how she transforms from a rebellious girl into a seemingly obedient and domestic wife that is concerned with nothing but keeping her man satisfied with her. That is to say, a lifestyle of cruelty both at father's house and husband's company makes a woman finally yield to social standards, cruel as they might be. In other words, the environment is responsible for taming and turning her into a traditional woman whose identity is defined by what men desire.

It seems that Gudrun never intends to make her daughter follow her way and make a miserable creature out of herself. She tells her daughter the story of her refuge and acceptance of Christianity and her marriage with the Canon. She never talks about her husband with good words because resentment has deep roots in her heart as the Canon symbolizes the cruel social system that justifies feminine inferiority. She advises her daughter to stay away from men if she wants to be happy: "You must learn from my mistake, so you do not repeat it. To marry is to surrender everything—not only your body but your pride, your independence, even your life. Do you understand? Do you? She gripped Joan's arm, fixing her with an urgent look. Heed my words, daughter, if you ever mean to be happy: Never give yourself to a man" (PJ, 89). This is an important piece of advice for Joan because she learns from her mother the secret of connubial life and the female destiny in a hostile society. Society is so cruel to women that they have no hope to turn things around and make things the way they like.

Joan is in no way content with her position as a woman and seeks every chance to prove her excellence to everyone, particularly to men of power. It is her nature as "she sought to violate the God-given order of the universe by usurping men's rightful authority over her" (PJ, 124). Maybe the best part of the novel, asserting feminine greatness, takes place in the Bishop's palace where Joan cannot stop her anger with Odo's degrading statements about women and

starts to defend her gender. She compares men with women and the act of creation to reason how women are not inferior, if not superior, to men. In response to Odo's idea that women are inferior in conception, place, and will, Joan argues:

Why is a woman inferior in conception? For though she was created second, she was made from Adam's side, while Adam was made from common clay. In place, a woman should be referred to as a man, because Eve was created inside Paradise, but Adam was created outside. As for the will, a woman should be considered superior to a man—this was bold, but there was no going back now—for Eve ate of the apple for love of knowledge and learning, but Adam ate of it merely because she asked him. (p. 114)

Joan is against any form of contract that bonds women to the patronage of men as she has always tried to be a free and independent person, no matter what her gender roles predetermine for her. Because she has always been mistreated by men of all kinds, except for some educated men like her brother Matthew, Aesculapius, and Gerold, for no good reason than her gender, Joan decides never to marry and yield to a man to seize upon her life. Joan wonders about the enthusiastic desire of girls her age in getting married. She, nevertheless, decides never to commit herself to such a humiliating thing: "It was incredible to her that girls her age were so eager for marriage, for it immediately plunged a woman into a state of serf-like bondage. A husband had absolute control of his wife's goods and property, her children, and even her life. Having endured her father's tyranny, Joan meant never to give any man such power over her again" (p. 169).

Joan always lingers and alternates between two poles of her being: on the one hand, she is very tender-hearted and keen on people and emotions and cannot see people suffer before her eyes. She is not the one to hurt people for no reason and always seeks to be helpful, particularly to the needy. But, on the other hand, she listens to what her mind dictates to her, logical as she is. Therefore, she always oscillates between her mind and her heart and mostly sacrifices her heart in the name of the

big dream she has set for herself: to be a free human. That is why she never marries and exposes her true identity as a woman since she knows that, as a woman, she cannot have a free and independent life the way she desires. Once she notices in the church a symbol of the Magna Mater, the ancient goddess of earth, worshiped by heathen tribes in old times. As a pagan goddess, her presence in the church is out of the question but because most of the clergymen are illiterate and have no knowledge of ancient Greek theology, the symbol is unknowingly transferred to the church. It bears great similarity to Joan and her sense of belonging to a community of Christian believers that share with her neither the belief nor the lifestyle she has chosen for herself. In fact, the statue is the symbol of her own unfitting presence in the Christian society of Rome, showing her inner as well as outer conflict with herself and others:

The incongruity of the sacred altar and its pagan base seemed to Joan a perfect symbol of herself: a Christian priest, she still dreamed of her mother's heathen gods; a man in the eyes of the world, she was tormented by her secret woman's heart; a seeker of faith, she was torn between her desire to know God and her fear that He might not exist. Mind and heart, faith and doubt, will and desire. Would the painful contradictions of her nature ever be reconciled? (p. 454)

As a woman, Joan proves to be different from what other women practice in reality. One significant difference between her and other women is that they are beguiled by the hypocrisy and deceitfulness of men but she never trusts any man fully as she believes that men are vile and prove to be insincere when they feel threatened. Once her chastity is put to test and she encounters a prostitute who is paid by a man to discredit her chastity. Joan feels pity for the woman and tries to enlighten her about the follies of men: "I don't know why you've done this, or for whom, but I warn you, Marioza: do not pin your fortunes on the favors of men, for they will prove as fleeting as your beauty" (PJ, 342). Joan's advice here is twofold. On the one hand, she shows her contempt and disapproval of men in general.

On the other hand, she seems to echo Butler's idea that by doing what men ask of them, women rebuild their gender roles imposed on them. The prostitute is paid by a man to use her bodily beauty and sexual attractiveness in an attempt to entice Joan. This is, in effect, a sort of slavery in the eye of Joan as she warns the prostitute that by giving herself to the demands of a man, she can never run out of her humility and, moreover, her identity will be what the men demand: sexual attractiveness. This gives a shock to the woman in service.

### ***The Matter of Femininity in Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit***

Winterson's novel is undoubtedly a chaotic one, creating a world out of the struggle between two opposite poles of order and chaos. This way of dealing with reality seems to be a reaction to the patriarchal rule of associating order with man and chaos with woman. Indeed, Jeannette in the *Oranges* is a rebel that shakes the order in the masculine world of society. The author seems to achieve a sort of success in picturing a young girl who challenges the religious patriarchal system of thought in establishing her lesbian identity. The narrative is reinforced by layers of stories in parallel to her passage from narrow religious doctrines of heterosexuality into the maturity of self-realization that ends in self-discovery.

*Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* is modeled on the traditional Bildungsroman. The autobiographical events are arranged into a structure that has much in common with the novel of formation, in which the female hero's growth into maturity entails a separation from home and from the female nurturing figure that is usually her mother. *Oranges* "is primarily the story of young Jeanette and how she learns to discover and welcome her desire, which in turn allows her to construct her subjectivity beyond the impositions from external agents" (Lopez, 2007: 135).

The Bible is undeniably the basic structural framework for Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. Chapter titles and the course of events correspond with character development in the novel. The author uses Biblical material as suits her writing to present a new form of

femininity and sexual identity. Her mother plays a significant foil role for Jeannette and makes it easier for the reader to grasp a better understanding of the main character and her development. She is obsessed with the duality of things. There are either enemies or friends, and she can't mix the two. She is never fair; she loves and hates. This stems from the strong concept of binary opposition in the novel where everything is interpreted according to a predefined system of the good and evil stratum. The idea of struggling for something, no matter what is established from the very beginning of the story, "Like most people I lived for a long time with my mother and father. My father liked to watch wrestling; my mother liked to wrestle; it didn't matter what. She was in the white corner and that was that. She had never heard of *mixed feelings*. There were friends and there were enemies" (*Oranges*, 1).

Louie is a woman in the service of God, having Him in her mind while doing everything. Consequently, her real purpose in adopting Jeanette is to raise a missionary and to create a servant to God, like the one she herself is. Out of her strong desire to intimate Virgin Mary, she adopts Jeannette since the Immaculate Conception is thought to be the paradigm of female independence. On the other hand, Jeanette as a child sees herself as the chosen one, elected by both her mother and by God to become a missionary, and the narrative of the story draws a parallel between her and Christ. Jeanette attempts to deconstruct her fictionality and to discard gender roles imposed on her before all else by her castrating and comminatory mother and then by the matriarchal and threateningly religious community she inhabits. Her desire to mate with Melanie is a blow against the heterosexual tradition of the bible.

The conflict with her mother starts when Jeanette makes her first experience of mixed feelings which is overtly rejected by her mother. Little by little, an emotional distance arises from their cold relationship. However, her initiation into life necessitates precisely the exploration of those denied and contradictory emotions. Jeanette's acceptance of mixed feelings is central to her acceptance of lesbianism since

a lesbian by definition cannot fit comfortably into a binary view of the world. In the end, Jeannette recognizes that she must separate herself from her mother to gain a deeper understanding of reality and acquire a true sexual identity. Finally, she rejects the concept of unitary subjectivity in favor of having multiple selves and this shows the nature of sexual and gender relationships. Throughout the story, Jeannette takes up different narrative identities, representing herself as a male character or giving the role of her mother to a male wizard. This gender displacement shows “the theme of power-relations between parent and child. It also illustrates Winterson’s refusal to be tied to biological assumptions” (Palmer, 2002: 191). Therefore, by constructing a series of alternative narrative identities, Jeannette manages to become a fluid subject whose identity is not limited to the social construction of gender roles.

The novel is a criticism of the duality of masculinity and femininity. However, a deeper analysis of characters reveals that it is also a sharp attack on the very idea of feminine identity as defined by female characters in the story. Society is divided into male and female sexes as two poles of sexual entities, and good and evil as driving forces of life, and, consequently, female characters are subdivided into those who conform and those who defy this twofold system. Jeannette stands in the second subdivision that seeks to redefine this dualistic perspective. For Jeannette’s mother, sexuality is defined only as being a man or a woman and she can imagine no other identity beyond this gendered union. Louise is the representative of all those women who stick to heterosexual logic where no alternative possibility is accepted and desire is suppressed.

Overall, it isn’t wrong to claim that Winterson sets to create a feminine world in the face of the masculine world of the Bible and presents a female heroine to perform the mission of awakening women about their individual wishes to pursue what they really like to be or to do. Biblical stories narrated by Louise are employed by the author to cast normative gender roles on Jeannette and juxtapose them with the contemporary reality of

transgender identities. Louise plays foil to Jeannette to show a true picture of feminine optimal being in the story. Unlike her mother who keeps a superficial thoughtless religion, Jeannette sets on a journey to find her true self because she can’t live with someone she really is not.

Jeannette doesn’t think in any way that lesbianism is a false rendering of the heterosexual pattern of relationship reserved for a man and a woman. The community, which is mainly based on a patriarchal system of heterosexuality, interprets her rebellion as a fall from gender roles, breaking away from what is defined as femininity and masculinity and the roles given to each sex. However, she oscillates between these poles of masculinity and femininity by trying to break the boundaries of gendered identity and challenging long-established normative understanding of sexuality. Her final capitulation to lesbianism is a daring act against patriarchy and male-centrism.

It may be argued that Winterson’s modification of certain Biblical themes and structural notions is that she finds fault with the holy book as leaving no room for a female heroine to fully grow a feminine subject of her own. This is further emphasized as we notice that, unlike in the Bible, men have a subordinate role compared to the domineering presence of women in this novel. Jeannette’s mother is so authoritative that she drives her husband into passivity and conveys the idea that men are of little importance in the act of creation, which is implied to be a feminine feature. This, along with the idea that there are no wise men in the story, accounts for the female-centered atmosphere of the work.

The central conflict of the story is not only with men and women but also with women and women. The story reorganizes the patriarchal system by subverting gender roles and giving priority to women as leading figures in the book. This is in sharp contrast to what heterosexual societies have used to see as masculine and feminine roles. Men are almost completely driven out to delegate their God-bestowing responsibility of headship to women. The author’s intentional reversal of the male and

female relationships in the Bible reveals the postmodern complexity of transgender roles that is known for trespassing traditional bonds of manhood and womanhood. Fundamental cultural binary oppositions in the society are eradicated by some rebellious characters like Jeannette who follows her desire in defining her identity despite all forces that block her way. Jeannette questions the credibility of other women's assumption that men are beasts.

The novel instigates that masculinity is subsidiary to femininity and the domineering presence of female characters adds to the intensity of this implication. She feels panic about the true nature of man in the guise of a beast and wonders how a beast may turn into a man by a simple kiss. Then, she doubts the fictionality of the story and feels that all women suffer from a kind of oppression by living with beasts that never tend to change. Thus, marriage for Jeannette is not a relationship of love. She thinks that marriage is not a sensible act but a dangerous one that may bring about more patriarchal power impositions. Therefore, she seems to defy the traditional approach to the relationship between the two sexes and seeks to reshape social structures. As Rubinson truly puts it, "Winterson's fiction focuses particularly on refusing lies related to sex and gender roles, she attacks various artificial sources of sexism which disseminate and perpetuate lies about what is a natural behavior for men and women, religion and scripture, androcentric political, economic, familial hegemony, romance novels; and scientific discourses about bodies (2005: 115)".

By all means, indeed, Jeannette doesn't perform her femininity and, instead, performs lesbian identity and triggers the anger of her mother and church members. The hold of social structures on individual destiny is reflected in the fact that Louise and the church tend to punish Jeannette not for saving her soul from the so-called demonic state, but rather to release the church from the threat of such a rebellious performative which may stimulate more deviating acts against the androcentric heterosexual normativity. When walls of faith in her mother and the church fall, Jeannette moves further towards developing

her own identity and enacts her own reading of the Bible. She looks for other alternatives because Jeannette cannot internalize categories constraining her, as a result of which she comes up with her own reading of religion by inserting fairy tales and biblical allusions into her narration. As a matter of fact, the novel can be regarded as a subversive reading of the Bible and the fairy tales to problematize the myth of origin, and eventually, the patriarchal discourse engendering and sustaining normative categories, and presenting them as congenital/natural.

### CONCLUSION

In essence, the general social atmosphere is against women and never lets them have an independent identity of their own. This is because women are thought to be inferior to men in terms of logical reasoning and having self-control over emotions. On the other hand, since men have always set themselves in superior positions and held themselves in positions of power, they define the ideal female and judge women based on their own standards. Despite the fact that major characters in *Pope Joan* and *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* are self-made and always try to challenge social norms on human identity, they finally yield to masculine domination and have to come in terms with them to be accepted and respected by other people in society. It is only then that they gain the chance to live in peace and acquire what they desire in the world: a feminine identity.

Both writers in *Pope Joan* and *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* attempt to subvert the binary organization of gender roles held through centuries in male-defined orders of society. Their manipulation of the conventional linear narrative and presenting a multilayer story is a blow to the established structure of narration and a quest for individual experimentalism, which is reflected in the search for the identity of their heroines. The novels inspire different feelings in readers with different perspectives. But everyone agrees on the point that they are centered on a young girl's desire to find her true self beyond the normative binary roles of men and women.

Based on Butlerian's theory of performativity, it can be concluded that Jannette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* and Donna Woolfolk Cross's *Poe Joan* are a challenge to heterosexual normativity. The characters try to make a new feminine being out of the cultural framework of a religious understanding of the relationship between men and women, and their identity is defined in the binary notion of gender and sex. However, in the course of the story, they recognize the role of society and social institutions in making their identity. They realize the conventional association of women with female performatives and refuse to act out what is prescribed by the dominant male discourse. According to patriarchal tradition, Jeannette is a woman doomed to perform feminine acts but she breaks the link between her biological sex and her socially-determined gender roles by following her desire for lesbianism in an attempt to discover her true self. Similarly, Joan finally succeeds in stepping out of her gender roles despite all problems she faced in the hostile society and obstacles that men put in her way, but her success comes at a price and she pays for that by a liberal death.

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