The Subversion of Patriarchy and the Shaping of Female Sexuality in the works of Jeanette Winterson and Emma Donoghue

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Sveučilište u Zadru

Odjel za anglistiku

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Izjava o akademskoj čestitosti

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Zadar, 30. listopada 2024.

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1. Introduction

The late 20th century marked a pivotal moment for the LGBTQ community in the United Kingdom and Ireland. During this time, various political and social changes significantly influenced how society viewed queer communities. One significant milestone was the decriminalization of homosexuality in the UK in 1967, which subsequently happened in Ireland in 1993 (B. D. Kelly 209). These legal changes marked a turning point, leading to a gradual shift in the societal attitude towards the LGBT community. Furthermore, they also contributed to the improved visibility and acceptance of queer identities, consequently influencing the literary exploration of queer topics and issues.

In order to examine these topics, the paper sets out to analyze the following novels: Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985) and *Written on the Body* (1992), alongside Emma Donoghue's *Stir-Fry* (1994) and *Hood* (1995). The selected works of Jeanette Winterson and Emma Donoghue are examined within the genre of contemporary lesbian fiction for their nuanced portrayals of female sexuality and their active subversion of patriarchal norms, achieved through distinct cultural and social perspectives. Writing within the context of British society, Winterson delves into the challenges her queer characters face while navigating a predominantly conservative environment. Likewise, Donoghue's work examines the repression of female sexuality under the rigid Catholic framework of Irish society. Both perspectives will be thoroughly analyzed to see how the authors explore patriarchal norms and deal with the values shaping female sexuality and gender identity.

The paper will explore issues of patriarchy and religion, and how they influence female sexuality and identity – homosexuality in particular. It will also examine different ways in which these themes are connected to the expression and acceptance of non-normative sexual

identities in contemporary lesbian fiction. Theoretical frameworks, including feminist theory, gender studies, and queer studies, will be employed to analyze how Winterson's and Donoghue's narratives challenge and redefine notions of gender and sexuality.

The emphasis will be put on the subversion of patriarchy and the role it plays in the shaping of one's sense of self when it comes to sexuality. By examining these themes, the paper aims to showcase how Winterson's and Donoghue's works contribute to the broader discourse on gender and sexuality, as well as the strategies the authors employ to subvert the dominant social and heteronormative structures.

2. Catholic Influence on Sexuality and Gender in 20th-Century Ireland

Before the themes of female sexuality and gender can be explored within the context of the selected works, it is essential to first place these themes in a historical context. Regarding Emma Donoghue's works, it is crucial to understand the norms and values of late 20th-century Ireland and how they were dictated by religion. The Catholic church's influence significantly shaped and controlled Irish culture and society. According to Fuller, religious authority made its way into all spheres of life in Irish society, influencing education, social norms, and politics (41). As reported by Meehan and O'Connell, more than three-quarters of Ireland's population identified as Roman Catholics during the 20th century (6). Taking this information into account, it is no wonder that religion made a significant impact on the culture and personal beliefs of Irish society.

Moreover, during this time, the Catholic Church directed and censored discourse in the community regarding sexuality, with the emphasis being put on sexual morality. Sexual and gender identity were not allowed to be discussed openly due to their controversial nature. The Church and priests educated the public on such matters, but only in reference to the Bible and religious laws. Inglis reported that the Catholic clergy emphasized the importance of sexual

purity, deeming desire and lust as sinful, prompting the members of the community to steer clear of such immoral and inappropriate topics (6).

In addition, Inglis points out that the pope, theologians, and bishops preselected information regarding sexuality that was suitable to be shared with the public (5). At the same time, priests and families were tasked with implementing this knowledge into their communities. As a result, ignorance was widespread among the public regarding human sexuality, especially when it comes to women and queer individuals. According to Brangan, unmarried women, homosexuals, promiscuous individuals, and others who did not conform to societal standards were excluded from society and even forced into convents, Magdalen laundries, and asylums (395).

As previously mentioned, Catholic influence dominated all spheres of life in Ireland throughout the 20th century, as evidenced by the 1937 Constitution of Ireland. Article 41.2 reinforced patriarchal definitions of gender roles by defining the family as a “natural primary and fundamental unit group of Society and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights “(Casey 1). The article also emphasizes the importance of women's role as homemakers by stating that women should not be forced to work to prevent them from neglecting their household duties.

According to the report published by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, by enacting Article 41.2, women were further forced to assume servile roles, while their attempts to join the workforce and gain financial freedom were frowned upon (6). This Constitution reflects the ideas published in the encyclical Rerum Novarum by Pope Leo XIII, who stated that a woman is naturally fitted for domestic work and motherhood (24). He also emphasized the importance of submission and modesty in women who must set an example for their children (24). The Church and the State policed female bodies and sexuality. Consequently, it can be concluded that their sole essential purpose was reproduction.

As stated by Inglis, the control of sexuality largely took place through the control of marriage (9). Women were expected to be homemakers and take care of their families, so it can be argued that their whole identity was diminished to a single role they performed: the one of a mother, a housekeeper, and a wife. A woman's desire for independence and work was deemed unnatural. According to Rich, women were seen as the emotional and sexual property of men, who should not be allowed freedom and autonomy because “the autonomy and equality of women threaten the family, religion, and state” (11).

Furthermore, more than 90% of state-funded primary schools adopted Catholic ideology in their classrooms allowing the Catholic Church to influence children from a young age (Mehaan and O'Connell 199). Given the Catholic Church's substantial role in Irish citizens' upbringing and identity formation, it is unsurprising that the Catholic Church shaped the values and worldview of the Irish. In her research article, Brangan theorizes that purity and chastity were the most valued traits in a woman, which is why women who became pregnant outside of marriage became fallen women (394).

To control female sexuality, the Church of Ireland and the Irish State sent many defiant young women to institutions, the most notorious of them being the Magdalene Laundries. In Magdalene Laundries, they were humiliated and forced to work to atone for their "sins". Women were sent to these institutions for various transgressions, many of which were sexual. The teachings of the Catholic Church portrayed female sexuality as impure and fallible to sin, which is why it needed to be controlled. According to Brangan, some of these transgressions included having a child out of wedlock, engaging in promiscuous behavior, and being a burden to their families. Brangan also states that women were even sent to Magdalene Laundries for being sexually abused, as they were thought to be the source of temptation that led men to sin (397).

The Catholic Church was focused on enforcing its strict moral code regarding sexuality among young Irish citizens. According to L. Kelly, it influenced laws that led to a contraception ban in Ireland lasting from 1935 to 1979 (3). Due to a lack of sexual education and the inaccessibility of contraception, women risked unwanted pregnancies. In the eyes of the Church, preventing a pregnancy was considered immoral and even equated to murder. According to Inglis, the Catholic Church fostered a culture of fear surrounding sexuality in Irish society, discouraging any questioning of Christian teachings on the matter (14).

During the 1960s, Irish politicians and the Church protested against establishing family planning centers. According to Senia Pašeta, the Catholic Church remained the leading authority when it came to reproductive issues by intimidating the public with its narrative that by taking any form of birth control, they were committing a deadly sin (qtd. in L. Kelly 4). Even when birth control pills became available in Ireland, they were prescribed exclusively to married couples with a doctor's note (L. Kelly 296). This illustrates that female sexuality was only tolerated within the confines of marriage.

In the second half of the 20th century, the existence of homosexuality in Irish society was not openly discussed. The Catholic Church portrayed homosexuality as a sin that directly attacked the family, while the Irish laws did not acknowledge the queer individuals' existence. Therefore, the queer individuals were often marginalized and persecuted in society prompting them to hide their true identity.

Despite the moral liberal climate during the 1960s and 1970s in Ireland, openly identifying as queer was still considered unsafe (L. Kelly 127). As reported by Falk, many homosexual men and women lived in fear of losing their status, jobs, homes, and families should their sexual identity be discovered (qtd. in Eliason 131). Furthermore, same-sex sexual activity remained criminalized in Ireland until 1993 (L. Kelly 209).

3. Female and Queer Sexuality in Irish Literature

Given the political climate during the time, themes of female and queer sexuality were not openly discussed in Ireland. However, as Charczun notes, “at the turn of the twentieth century, there begins to be more suggestive implicit references to lesbian desire” (5). Western influences spread to Ireland during this period, encouraging writers to explore the female desire in their work. Elizabeth Bowen, Molly Keane, and Kate O’Brien emerged as key figures throughout the first half and the middle of the 20th century, laying the foundations for future authors.

The Catholic Church strongly objected to literary works exploring such controversial topics dealing with female desire and sexuality. According to Howes, the Catholic Church even associated “sexual passion with sexual immorality “(qtd. in Ukić Košta 52). This resistance eventually led to the formation of the Censorship of Publications Board in 1929, which was tasked with examining books and periodicals for any offensive material. The Board had the support of President Eamon De Valera, who stated during his speech that: “the arts were to be encouraged when they observed the ‘holiest traditions'” (Kennedy 23). This again illustrates the Catholic Church's hold and control over Irish society and culture. According to Ukić Košta, the Censorship Board not only enforced Catholic values when evaluating literary works but also targeted those where female characters did not conform to their “natural” servile and submissive roles (55).

According to Charczun, although female same-sex relationships were becoming increasingly portrayed in literature, they often remained in the background, with a primary focus on heterosexuality to avoid censorship and persecution (6-7). This was especially a concern following the introduction of the 1937 Irish Constitution, which defined acceptable female societal roles. Works such as Molly Keane’s *Devoted Ladies* (1938), Kate O’Brien’s *The Land of Spices* (1941), and Elizabeth Bowen’s *The Hotel* (1927) courageously explored themes of female sexuality and lesbianism in a rigid and deeply religious 20th-century Ireland.

Their characters were often faced with a judgmental and prejudiced society, compelling them to hide their sexual identities.

Charczun suggests that Molly Keane's portrayals of queer women helped revolutionize the literary world when "she shifts the focus from the heterosexually-concentrated plot onto the intricacies of female love" (81). By doing so she was setting the groundwork which eventually led to female passion being put at the center of the plot. The fear of ostracism and the pressure to conform many queer women faced during this time became notable themes in the novels of Bowen, Kean, and O'Brien. The Catholic church influenced not only the queer novels' plot but also how those novels were received by the general public. For instance, Kate O'Brien's *The Land of Spices* (1941) was one of many novels banned due to the conflict with Catholic Church doctrine.

According to Charzun, in the first half of the 20th century, Ireland experienced a period of stagnation in Irish Women's writing, with very few works being published (7). This stagnation ended with the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and the 1970s. The societal changes that followed allowed authors "to write about same-sex female attraction in a more open manner"(6). Among the first to challenge the stereotypes that depicted lesbians s butch and masculine was Elizabeth Bowen. She played a significant role in mid-20th-century literature with her 1964 novel *The Little Girls,* in which she introduces "the term "lesbian" into the discourse", becoming the first Irish-born writer to reach this milestone (6).

Another key literary figure that defined the 1960s women's writing in Ireland was Edna O'Brien, best known for her *Country Girls Trilogy—The Country Girls* (1960), *Lonely Girl* (1962), and *Girls in Their Married Bliss* (1964). In her work, she explored topics such as female sexual desire and critiqued the social and religious norms. As a consequence, her novels were immediately censored and even publicly burned.

The 1970s marked the beginning of the Sexual Liberation Movement in Ireland. In 1973, members of the movement in Dublin began protesting traditional norms that promoted heterosexuality. This started to reflect in literature in the 1980s, which was a crucial period for queer representation in literature. “The stage of Irish lesbian fiction during this time period, therefore, is invariably one of tolerance” (Charczun 128). Charczun also adds that the following decade saw a rise of another important literary figure, Mary Dorcey, whose short story collection *A Noise from the Woodshed* (1988) marked the start of contemporary lesbian fiction -with lesbian desire undeniably at the center of the plot (131).

One of the figureheads of Irish contemporary lesbian fiction and one of the two authors central to this paper is Emma Donoghue. Like Dorcey, Donoghue grew up in an atmosphere where discussions of female and queer sexuality were strongly disapproved. This environment reflects greatly in their work, particularly in the usage of themes regarding the coming-of-age journey and the struggle to hide or repress one's sexual identity. Donoghue debuted with her novel *Stir-Fry* in 1994, only a year after homosexuality was officially decriminalized in Ireland. As an important representative of contemporary lesbian fiction, Donoghue’s work addresses critical issues faced by women and the queer community in Ireland. Religion is a prominent theme in her work, promoting patriarchal values. Both prescribe socially acceptable rules for living and emphasize the importance of the nuclear family.

4. Exploring Female Sexuality in Contemporary Ireland: Emma Donoghue’s *Stir-Fry* and *Hood*

Stir-fry is Emma Donoghue's debut novel, which explores themes of sexual identity and social expectations. The central protagonist, Maria, a 17-year-old girl, undergoes a significant life transition as she relocates from a conservative, small town to a large and bustling city of Dublin. This move prompts her to confront her sexuality for the first time, challenging the

beliefs instilled in her since childhood within the confines of her conservative religious upbringing. Not recognizing the subtle signs, Maria responds to an ad by two young women searching for a roommate. Unbeknownst to her, she is about to move in with 24-year-old Ruth and 29-year-old Jael, who happen to be lesbian lovers. Young Maria is caught between two worlds: the familiar heteronormative environment of college and her family and this new, unexplored world that challenges societal norms within the home of two queer women.

Donoghue critiques the imposition of traditional gender roles and challenges them in the process. In her novel, *Stir-Fry*, the influence of patriarchal norms and values is evident in how the protagonist, Maria, perceives her role in society as a young woman. Growing up in a Catholic family in a small town, Maria always assumed there was only one path a woman could take: getting married and starting a family. She categorized all the women she knew into three distinct groups: the first consisted of wives and mothers, the second consisted of students, librarians, and teachers, while the third group, named after a local, mentally disturbed woman, was referred to as “Nelly the Nutter”.

Niedda points out how women are generally portrayed as emotional and passive individuals, confined to their predefined roles, such as mothers, wives, and daughters. This robs women of personality and individuality, illustrated by how Maria sees her role in society. She is to conform and become a wife and a mother. Otherwise, she faces potential social isolation and loneliness living as a spinster. This also coincided with the nature of Irish society at the time, when women’s domestic roles were even included in the 1937 Irish Constitution, which was still relevant several decades later. Maria was convinced these were the only options available for a woman, reflecting the limited and rigid expectations imposed on her during her upbringing.

Nonetheless, Maria's character consistently felt resistance toward those expectations. In the public, she is nothing but a respectable young woman enjoying her college years with

her friends. But once she passes through the colorful beads hanging at the entrance of Ruth's and Jael's apartment, she enters a safe space that allows her to think about her identity outside the dominant cultural norms and values. The concept of closets plays a significant role in both *Stir-Fry* and *Hood.* Young notes that the closet in Ruth and Jael's bedroom is an important space where we first see Maria coming to terms with her sexuality. She also states that as Maria explores the contents of their closet, she explores her sexual identity (4).

Even though society was becoming more liberal in the nineties when *Stir-Fry* takes place, conservative views on sexual identity persisted. Homosexuality was not openly discussed or accepted, particularly by older generations. It was still seen as something to be ashamed of, which may seem unsurprising, considering that religion still remained an essential part of Irish identity. According to Borges, such beliefs were ingrained in Maria since childhood, leaving her in the dark regarding her own identity (86). This is highlighted by the experience of Maria's queer roommate Jael, who was shunned by her family and paid off to stay away and not contact them.

Maria's friend Yvonne cannot see past the labels and even tends to dehumanize Jael and Ruth: "I wish you wouldn't call them Them, like they're Martians or something" (Donoghue, *Stir-Fry* 78). According to Charczun, Yvonne "is the voice of homogenous and homophobic Irish society", and her statements reflect societal attitudes (141). She thinks that homosexuality is something to be ashamed of, a deviant behavior that needs to be concealed from the world. Yvonne even warned Maria about the possibility of people jumping to wrong conclusions about her, which is a label she certainly must not want. Consequently, Maria further represses her own feelings and desires out of fear of being ostracized by her peers.

After spending time with Jael and Ruth and observing their daily routines such as cooking, going out for drinks, and engaging in conversations, Maria realizes these women are no different from others: "They didn't quarrel any more than ordinary couples. Most of the time

she could just think of them as friends" (Donoghue, *Stir-Fry* 106). Through these ordinary interactions, the author elicits empathy from the audience and sheds light on societal misconceptions. The once-intimidating notion of homosexuality becomes humanized as Maria sets to discover what lies beyond the labels and prejudice. According to Borges, living with Ruth and Jael helped Maria open her mind and realize that their sexuality is not something inherently negative (86).

As mentioned, religion played a significant role in Maria's upbringing, shaping her worldview and that of her family. The rigid Christian teachings she was raised on depicted only one acceptable form of intimacy: between a man and a woman. Maria's attendance of a convent school further solidified these views, influencing her perspectives on relationships, gender roles, and sexuality. Maria even mentions her frustration with the nuns' refusal to discuss such topics: "Oh, damn and blast it, why couldn't they teach this sort of thing at school?" (*Stir-Fry* 83). However, upon enrolling in Dublin College, Maria begins to questions these beliefs. After moving to Dublin, Maria stops attending mass every Sunday. Maria is finally beginning to embrace different viewpoints and move away from traditional ideas previously imposed on her by the patriarchal structures that are the Catholic Church and a rural environment which "have the power to make one see and experience themselves as "Other" – leading Maria to have a feeling of estrangement and dislocation" (Borges 97).

Before moving to Dublin, Maria had only encountered discussions about homosexuality a few times. She recalls conversations with fellow students at the convent school she attended. However, these discussions were rare, and the information was limited to theories and rumors, since open discourse about sexuality was highly uncommon and avoided. Maria tells her friend Galway about the sex education she had received from nuns during her time in school:

> Look, in my school, we were given one hour's class per year,
>
> called Preparation for Life. At fifteen it was on thrush, the

> next year the nurse talked about praying with your husband,
> and last year the nuns finally allowed her to mention the
> rhythm method of contraception. By which time most of my
> classmates were on the Pill anyway, having told the doctor
> they needed it as a period regulator. (Donoghue, *Stir-Fry* 109)

We can observe how discussions about sexuality were heavily censored, with nuns using euphemisms such as “Preparations for Life” to describe sex education. Alongside the lack of proper terminology, Maria's school avoided discussing such topics by allocating only one hour per school year to educate students. The discussions about intercourse were strictly from a religious perspective, evident in the way the nuns emphasized the importance of praying with one's husband instead of providing essential information. It was not until the final year of school that birth control was mentioned, and even then, only in the context of methods permitted by the Catholic Church. This limited education on sexuality restricted Maria's views of herself and her own identity. This leads to the conclusion that religion strongly shapes Maria's outlook and affects how she considers or perhaps avoids considering her sexuality.

Hood is another novel by Donoghue that will be discussed in this paper. The novel revolves around Penelope (Pen), a young woman mourning the loss of her lover Cara in early 1990s Ireland. Pen's grief is amplified by the necessity to hide her sexual identity, forcing her to present herself as Cara's “friend”, which in turn makes it harder for her to process the loss. The novel takes place over seven days, during which Pen goes through all stages of grief, filled with flashbacks of her upbringing, falling in love, and exploring her sexuality. Pen is portrayed as any ordinary woman grieving the loss of a loved one would be. The novel follows her as she works as a teacher in a Catholic school she once attended, lives in Cara's home, and spends most of her days doing chores and watching TV. In *Hood,* the readers witness the portrayal of societal issues surrounding lesbian invisibility.

Donoghue's novel *Hood* also touches upon expectations imposed by Irish society, which, as previously mentioned, had a rigorous stance towards women concerning their roles as wives and mothers. Female sexuality was repressed and controlled by the Catholic church through mass, confessionals, and family structures that reinforced Catholic teachings. The premise of these teachings was that a woman's duty is to become a wife, and therefore implied that her sexuality belongs to her husband. Consequently, it is to no surprise that the mother of the protagonist remains unaware of her daughter's sexual orientation and still expects her to marry despite being 30 years old and having never dated a man.

The most significant influence of the patriarchal structure in the novel *Hood* is evident in how the protagonist is compelled to hide her sexual identity. Best shown in Pen's frustration for being forced to hide her relationship with Cara for over a decade. When she speaks to a nun about taking a day off work for Cara's funeral, she considers lying and saying it was her fiancé who died, hoping to receive the sympathy and understanding she so desperately needs. Despite the profound loss she feels, she is forced to minimize her pain by referring to Cara as "my friend", which greatly understates the depth of their relationship.

This aligns with the premise of Terry Castle's work *The Apparitional Lesbian* (1995) where the author addresses the erasure of lesbians in both public life and literature. Castle argues that lesbian identity is often hidden or downplayed, describing it as "ghostly" and "impalpable" (28). This notion is apparent in the way Pen was forced to hide the extent of her grief to avoid drawing unwanted attention and making people suspicious. Donoghue uses these accounts to criticize the Church and Irish society that continually oppress and marginalize LGBTQ+ individuals, attempting to erase their sexual identity and deny its existence. This is evident in the omission of queer terminology by non-queer characters: "'It doesn't affect the vocal cords, you know.' 'What doesn't?' I let the consonants roll. 'Lesbianism.'" (Donoghue, *Hood* 153).

Additionally, Pen's fear of coming out to Cara's family and her broader community emphasizes the societal taboo surrounding homosexuality. She is acutely aware of the potential consequences of revealing her sexual identity, fearing the loss of her home and job. Her fear demonstrates what it is like for queer individuals forced to hide their sexual identity to avoid being prosecuted and isolated by their community. Donoghue humanizes queer characters, emphasizing that sexual identity is not the sole defining trait of any individual. Pen is presented as an ordinary woman, free of stereotypes associated with lesbianism. She is portrayed just as any other widow, which allows readers to connect with her experience. For the most part, Pen abides by cultural traditions and norms. She is concerned with maintaining appearances, which is especially evident in her preparations for Cara's funeral. She carefully considers her clothes and how to present herself in front of Cara's family to avoid suspicions about their relationship.

This behavior emphasizes the influence of patriarchal norms on Pen, as she is acutely aware of societal expectations and values, which is why she tries to abide by them to protect her lover and herself. Another way Pen conceals her sexuality is by stashing the most intimate parts of herself in her bedroom closet. This is especially evident in a scene where Pen finds a present from Cara - a badge with *Technically a virgin* written on it. According to Young, “emphasising Pen’s use of the physical wardrobe to conceal certain objects… The badge symbolizes Pen’s homosexuality and by closeting it, Pen is metaphorically closeting her own sexuality” (4).

On the other hand, Cara is a more audacious character; she accepts her sexuality and openly battles traditional norms and values. She reads feminist newsletters, wears badges with abortion information, openly rebels during the sermon about sexual morality, and rejects social norms such as traditional marriage and monogamy. The protagonist Pen tends to be more subtle in her rebellion, avoiding unwanted attention and concealing her sexuality due to pressure from the church, her traditional family, and her community. Despite the novel taking place in the

nineties during the great changes in society regarding LGBT acceptance, homosexuality is still viewed as a deviant behavior. This is illustrated in a scene when Pen's work friend asks her whether she would like to be normal, indirectly implying that homosexuality is indeed abnormal.

We can also see how Pen herself refers to lesbianism as a perversion: "…as I danced to three songs in a row by David Bowie, who had one eye blue and one eye green and was living proof that a perv could win fame and glory" (Donoghue, *Hood* 192). This quote underlines how Pen's upbringing in heteronormative surroundings influenced the way she sees herself. She is aware that her sexual identity is deemed unnatural and incidentally refers to herself as a "pervert". This passage indicates how prevailing norms and values can profoundly influence an individual's sense of self. According to Charczun, both *Hood* and *Stir-Fry* portray "a transparent lack of acceptance within Irish society towards lesbians, thus creating particularly difficult circumstances for the characters to not only be accepted, but also to accept their own and, as in case of *Stir-Fry*, newly discovered sexualities" (140).

Donoghue also critiques the male-dominated society for its lack of understanding and acknowledgment of female sexuality. The societal taboo surrounding discussions about female sexuality is evident from Pen's early age, as she knew it was inappropriate to mention her period in front of men. Furthermore, Cara's father admits his lack of knowledge about raising girls, and Pen notices while reading Cara's newsletter that there is a lack of research on sexually transmitted diseases related to woman-to-woman transmission. Overall, Donoghue portrays a male-centered society where women and their issues are disregarded and minimized.

Patriarchal ideas are also manifested through religion. One example of this is the way society views female sexuality, tying it directly to a woman's worth. Pen and her lover grew up attending a convent school, having their personalities and identities shaped by religious ideas. This is illustrated in Cara's rebellious character, who defies the church's teachings on sexual

morality and monogamy. However, the perspective she had in her youth was influenced by the rigidly defined gender constructs taught by the church. This contrast draws attention to the significant impact religion can have on shaping one's sexual identity. Cara stated that the significance of her first intimate experience was not about the physical pain or the loss of a piece of skin but rather what it symbolized, which is an impact deeply rooted in the religious teachings she grew up with.

Pen's upbringing reflects the social climate in Ireland in the 1970s. During this time, the Catholic Church's presence and influence are evident, as seen in her confession to a priest:

'Have you a boyfriend tell me now?'

'No.'

'If you had a boyfriend, would you do bad stuff with him?'

'No.'

'Aren't you the great girl. You have the conscience of a

saint. Say a nice act of contrition now. (Donoghue, *Hood* 189)

In this passage, the priest asks a series of inappropriate questions to Pen, an adolescent girl, in an attempt to exert control over her behavior and identity during her most impressionable years. The quote illustrates the church's concerted efforts to regulate and repress female sexuality by intruding into their private and most intimate experiences. After her conversation with the priest, Pen contemplates the irony and absurdity of the compliments she received, realizing that the church had purposefully omitted any mention of her sexual inclinations in their inquiries. This further emphasizes the church's rejection of homosexuality and its attempts to repress and erase LGBT identities.

5. Controlling and Repressing Female Sexuality in 20th-Century Great Britain

Although the influence of Protestantism was not as dominant as the Catholic Church's in Ireland, the patriarchal views on female sexuality and the need to control it remained widespread throughout the 20th century. Just like in Ireland, female sexuality in Britain was only considered acceptable within the institution of marriage. Moreover, female sexuality was reduced to a marital duty owed to men upon getting married: “In the case of married women, there was a powerful customary belief that a woman had no right to deny her husband regular sexual intercourse” (Cook 3). Women were frequently expected to conform to standards set by men, with their bodies and desires subjected to control and scrutiny. Great Britain further perpetuated patriarchal norms regarding female sexuality, as evidenced by the fact that the “United Kingdom did not criminalize marital rape until 1991” (Davis and Johnstonbaugh 126). This delay highlights how deeply embedded these norms were, showing a legal and societal disregard for women's autonomy and rights, which persisted until the very end of the 20th century.

According to Cook, women had no autonomy over their sexuality in 20th-century Britain. She argues that the introduction of birth control pills in the 1960s was not solely for the benefit of women. Instead, it made women more available to men by eliminating the fear of pregnancy while placing responsibility for preventing it entirely on women (1). Similarly to Ireland, female sexuality in Britain was monitored and managed by patriarchal structures such as schools, religious institutions, and even their own families. Social norms during the 20th century condemned the sexual behaviour of women outside of marriage and commended purity and virginity.

However, journalist Margaret Drabble opposes Cook and states that “we face the certainty of a sexual revolution, and [this] … is caused largely by the development of contraceptive techniques.” (Cook 271). According to her, unmarried women gaining access to

contraception and abortion was partly responsible for the shift in British society in the 1960s. This era marked the beginning of the sexual revolution. These events were followed by the 1967 bill that partially decriminalized homosexuality, something the Catholic Church vehemently opposed. These changes enabled more open discussions about sexuality and homosexuality, leading to a more accepting and tolerant society.

Stonewall riots from 1969 marked a pivotal moment in gay history and literature which led to greater recognition of queer community worldwide. The incident occurred in the early hours of June 28th when the police once again raided a famous gay club in New York City and began arresting customers. For the first time, the queer community rebelled and resisted the police, sparking a riot that lasted for five days. This resistance by the LGBT community marked the beginning of a movement that led to queer visibility, greater acceptance, and increased political activism. More progress soon followed, with the *American Psychiatric Association's* 1973 decision to "remove homosexuality from its *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*" (Stevens 18). However, attempts at the conversion of homosexual people were still prevalent during the 1960s and 1970s, causing years of trauma to affected men and women (Bartlett et al.).

Nevertheless, it did not take long for the Conservatives to openly oppose these changes and advocate for restoring traditional values. The Conservative Party was re-elected in the late 70s, with Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher emerging as one of its key figures. According to Bruley, this led to great changes in British society: "Thatcher's authoritarian populism politicized the family as never before in its attempt to restore so-called 'family values' and reverse the progressive tide, particularly equality for women and the growth of the single-parent family" (147).

In 1988, Great Britain took a step back with the introduction of Section 28 by Prime Minister Thatcher. This new legislation rigorously banned any promotion of homosexuality, extending

its prohibition beyond published materials to all forms of public discourse. It was introduced as a response to the rising AIDS crises, and homosexuality was associated with moral degeneration or disease. According to Thomson, it influenced sex education in schools where it promoted heterosexuality: “Sex education both constructs and confirms the categories of ‘normal’ and ‘deviant’ which it regulates, monitors and controls” (qtd. in Moran 77). It indirectly influenced schools by fostering a culture of fear and the emergence of self-censorship among queer individuals.

Cook, in her work *The Long Sexual Revolution* (2004), investigated the repression of female sexuality by dominant cultural norms in the mid and late-20th century in Britain. She pointed out how these views often idealized women as passive and innocent, catering to a male-centric notion of femininity that prioritized docility and chastity. This preference for submissive and demure women not only reinforced traditional gender roles but also perpetuated a culture of oppression where female sexuality was often silenced or marginalized. During this time, lesbians were seen as a group of women who defied conventional gender roles and societal norms, primarily because mainstream society promoted and revolved around heterosexual relationships. According to Wittig, lesbians were often marginalized because of their experiences and identities, which challenge the dominant and normalized male-female relationships (Wen Quian 56). Lesbians defy traditional notions of female sex and gender, which lead to their behaviour being historically labelled as deviant, which was also reflected in their representation in literature.

Rich suggests that lesbian women, not deemed sexually or socially relevant to men, face erasure and misrepresentation: “The possibility of a woman who does not exist sexually for men—the lesbian possibility—is buried, erased, obscured, misrepresented, misnamed, and driven underground' ”(40). The invisibility of lesbians in society was also evident in the lack of study and research on lesbian experiences. Moreover, lesbians are also often perceived as a

threat to patriarchal norms due to their irrelevance in traditionally male-dominated spheres of life. Heterosexuality is the preferred norm promoted by the dominant culture. As stated by Eliason et al, lesbianism is seen as a direct attack against this norm, perpetuating numerous negative stereotypes and attitudes (132).

6. Queer Censorship and the Rise of Lesbian Fiction in 20th-Century Britain

In the early to mid-20th century, homosexuality and female sexuality were not a part of open discourse or literature in Great Britain. Despite being more progressive compared to the rest of the world, queer topics were still considered taboo in Western society. During this time, lesbian and gay characters were seldom featured in literature. Stevens mentions that when authors dared to write about these topics, they faced the danger of persecution or risked their novels being dropped from publication (85-86). One such author was D.H. Lawrence, whose works *The Rainbow* (1915) and *Women in Love* (1920) described women in romantic relationships. These works were immediately censored by the British government and burned (Stevens 85). Another prominent author who faced a similar fate was Marguerite Antonia Radclyffe Hall with her novel *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), which also explored sexual desire between two women. The novel caused outrage since British society viewed same-sex attraction between women as "heinously unnatural, sinful, and disgusting" (Doan 3). The novel came under attack by James Douglas, a journalist for the popular paper *Sunday Express*, who compared lesbianism to a disease and persuaded the Department of Public Prosecutions to take action against the novel, which was eventually banned (Doan 1).

During the mid-20th century, lesbian fiction was still not embraced by British society. Authors remained fearful of censorship and persecution. Lesbian fiction author Mary Renault, for example, relocated to South Africa, where society held more liberal views (Moore 26). McEwan claims that for the first time since pre-Christianity, homosexuality was gradually

gaining more acceptance in society, though the level of acceptance varied significantly across the world (59).

As previously mentioned, the Stonewall riots from 1969 shook the world, bringing greater recognition to the queer community and to the introduction of the first British gay magazine, *Gay News*, in 1972 (Stevens 18). Another key figure who influenced lesbian fiction worldwide was the American author Rita Mae Brown. Her 1973 novel *Rubyfruit Jungle* was notable for its explicit scenes and its candid depiction of lesbian characters, which was unprecedented at the time. According to Stevens, the novel also allowed readers to accept their identity and come out of the closet, illustrating that the change in the political climate of the 1970s shifted significantly toward greater acceptance of queerness in society (68).

This brings us to the 1980s when Jeanette Winterson emerged as one of the most prominent lesbian voices with her debut novel, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985). Her work challenges the hetero-patriarchal norms and the political agenda of Margaret Thatcher, which, as noted, caused Britain to regress in terms of the queer community. Winterson's writings critique the political climate of Great Britain by depicting queer characters oppressed by a conservative and rigid society. According to Parker, Winterson uses her work to directly respond to Thatcher and her policies by using her as inspiration for some of her conservative characters (307). Given her significant influence on contemporary lesbian fiction, her works will be central to analyzing the relationship between female sexuality and patriarchy.

7. Exploring Female Sexuality in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* and *Written on the Body*

Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit is a coming-of-age novel that follows the story of Jeanette, a young English girl growing up as a queer individual in a heteronormative and religious community. Adopted by a religious zealot, Jeanette is subjected to her adoptive mother's strict beliefs since early childhood. Jeanette is taught to read using texts from the Bible and is forbidden from engaging with any content not previously approved by her mother. This

strict upbringing influences Jeanette's worldview, instilling a rigid framework of religious beliefs. Despite her mother's attempts to control her, Jeanette develops romantic feelings for another girl in the church. She begins questioning her reality and challenging the traditional norms and values she was raised with.

At the very beginning of the novel Winterson foreshadows Jeanette's rebellion against patriarchal norms with a moment where an old woman grabs the protagonist's hand and, as if prophesying, tells her that she will “never marry,' she said, `not you, and you'll never be still'” (Winterson, *Oranges…* 4). Throughout the novel, Winterson uses dreams and fairytales to depict Jeanette's inner turmoil and conflicts regarding her sexual identity, conventional gender roles, and expectations. She dreams about getting married and walking up to an altar where each step feels heavier. When the priest says, "You may kiss the bride," she sees her husband, who takes a different form in each dream:

> Sometimes he was blind, sometimes a pig, sometimes my mother, sometimes the man from the post office, and once, just a suit of clothes with nothing inside. I told my mother about it, and she said it was because I ate sardines for supper. The next night I ate sausages, but I still had the dream. (Winterson, *Oranges…* 71).

This dream represents Jeanette's subconscious defiance against her mother's and society's expectations regarding her life and sexuality: “Jeanette’s reluctance to be tamed by the family dynamic, in particular her mother, challenges the power of the institution of family and the compulsory heterosexuality it attempts to enforce” (Delaney 3). Her struggle with each step toward the altar symbolizes her reluctance toward traditional marriage. The image of an empty suit at the end of the aisle “alludes to a hallow and empty institution which has no credibility”. (Delaney 2). On the other hand, Winterson further challenges patriarchal structures by depicting a traditional marriage between Jeanette's mother and father in *Oranges.* By doing so, she aims to confront conventional institutions such as family and church. The marriage between her

mother and father is estranged, with very little interaction. They are in a loveless marriage and do not sleep in the same bed or show affection towards each other. Winterson presents this dysfunctional relationship as the "ideal" union Jeanette is taught to strive for.

One of the central themes explored in the novel is the impact of religion on personal development. Jeanette's upbringing was significantly influenced by the strict religious teachings of her devout, fanatic mother who taught Jeanette to read using the Bible and refused to provide her with any reading material that the church did not previously approve. Winterson illustrates the extent of Jeanette's mother's control by portraying her efforts to instill her own version of morality onto Jeanette. This is shown through her sharing Bible texts and stories about God while deliberately excluding any topics she deemed inappropriate and even altering the ending of "Jane Eyre" to fit her own narrative about the world and relationships. As Jeanette grows up, she starts questioning everything she has been taught about the world and God.

Jeanette's first encounter with non-normative lifestyles happened when she was a child. She visited a paper shop where two women worked and gave her candy. This made Jeanette's mother furious, and she was forbidden from going there again. After the incident, Jeanette overheard her mother talking to a friend about it: "She said they dealt in unnatural passions. I thought she meant they put chemicals in their sweets" (Winterson, Oranges… 4). The two shop owners were lesbians ostracized by their community, which was the reason for Jeanette's mother's anger and disapproval. To her, homosexuality is "unnatural," and she refuses even to teach Jeanette about the existence of such relationships.

After sleeping with a girl named Melanie, Jeanette begins to doubt her mother's teachings. In the chapter "Deuteronomy," she addresses the authenticity of historical events to the audience. By doing so, she implies that everything written in the past, including the sacred texts, may not be factual. Jeanette compares history to making a sandwich, suggesting that it can be constructed and interpreted in different ways. Jeanette concludes the chapter by stating

that it is better to make your own sandwich, implying that it is better to discover your own truth rather than blindly accept what others say. She primarily references religious texts and Christian teachings that Jeanette was exposed to during her upbringing: “Winterson treats religious stories, whether Biblical or Quranic as if they are literary texts that can be doubted and deconstructed, denying any center of truth for these religious texts” (Al-Shara 240). These Christian teachings emphasize sexual purity and traditional values, which is why we can conclude that the author also intended to question these values.

The religious community Jeanette grew up in has a strict distinction between right and wrong. Any deviation from the social norm is considered inappropriate and wrong. When Jeanette falls in love for the first time with a girl named Melanie, she decides to tell her mother about her feelings. Her mother initially reacts calmly, but everything changes when Jeanette attends mass with Melanie. The priests publicly confront them, accusing them of falling under Satan's spell. Jeanette undergoes an exorcism after being confronted by her mother and the reverend. While locked up in a room without food, she experiences internal conflict and begins to doubt her faith: “I knew that demons entered wherever there was a weak point. If I had a demon my weak point was Melanie, but she was beautiful and good and had loved me. Can love really belong to the demon?” (Winterson, Oranges… 82). She initially refuses to repent but eventually gives in due to hunger. In contrast, Melanie repents immediately and later completely rejects her sexual identity to gain acceptance within the community. Later in the story, we find out Melanie gets married and has two children.

Although this attempt at conversion fails, and Jeanette embraces her sexuality, her lover, Melanie, completely rejects her own sexual identity as if it never existed. Similarly to Donoghue, Winterson portrays the extent of religious influence in altering one’s sexual identity. Both authors portray religion as a tool of control that polices female sexuality by forcing them to conform to their “natural” role as women. When their characters “step out of line”, religion

serves to punish them and reshape their identity to fit the norm. Donoghue illustrates this control by silencing any discussion of homosexuality, while Winterson takes a more extreme approach, using exorcism—both ultimately striving for the same goal. Winterson also uses Jeanette's experiences growing up in a heteronormative environment to question patriarchal structures and gender norms it imposes. As Rubinson explains: "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 natural behaviour for men and women" (qtd. in Haezi et al 250).

We can see that Jeanette takes on a prominent role in her church, leading missions and sermons. By doing so, she assumes a typically masculine role, which also reinforces stereotypes about lesbians. When her mother and the reverend discover her affair with a girl named Katy, they attribute it to her new responsibilities in the church. In their view, her assumption of a male role led her to behave as if she were a man, further reinforcing their belief that deviating from traditional gender roles disrupts the natural order: "She ended by saying that having taken on a man's world in other ways, I had flouted God's law and tried to do it sexually." (Winterson, *Oranges…* 102)

Despite being raised by a strict mother who expected her to conform to social and gender norms, Jeanette defied these expectations. According to Delaney, Winterson portrays "the power of the church as male and heterosexual" (3). Jeanette is only allowed to exercise some of that power while obeying Christian and heteronormative teachings. She is urged to conform by being rewarded and punished based on her choices. We again notice how traditional structures try to correct and control female sexuality. Jeanette's mother embodies the social and religious norms at the time, which helps to illustrate the damaging effect religion and patriarchal society can have on a queer individual. We see through Jeanette's eyes the rejection and oppression she goes through due to having a part of herself she cannot change, her sexual

identity. Parker notes that the character of Jeanette's mother was used as a direct response to the policies of then-contemporary Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher:

> the mother of the protagonist named Jeanette spreads the word of God and dogmatically insists that oranges are "the only fruit" in a manner reminiscent of Thatcher, a former preacher famed for the inflexibility epitomized by her insistence that "there is no alternative" to her policies (306).

Written on the Body is another novel written by Jeanette Winterson that offers a distinctive approach to exploring themes of gender and female sexuality. It is a tragic love story between the protagonist and Louise, a woman married to a cancer specialist. Their love story ends abruptly due to Louise's illness. Upon discovering Louise's cancer diagnosis, the protagonist accepts her husband's ultimatum to remove herself from Louise's life so he can attempt to cure her. Winterson captivates the audience by omitting gender markers from the descriptions of the novel's main protagonist by avoiding physical descriptions and pronouns. The non-linear storytelling includes flashbacks to the protagonist's past lovers, both male and female. Winterson continues to break down gender boundaries by often juxtaposing masculinity and femininity.

To thoroughly analyze this novel, it is vital to first examine the distinction between the concepts of gender and sex. American philosopher and scholar Judith Butler offered a comprehensive examination of this topic in *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory* (1988). She infers that gender identity is affirmed through repeated performative acts claiming that "if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity "(520). Another scholar, Amy M. Blackstone, builds upon these ideas by highlighting the distinction between sex and gender, describing sex as a biological concept and gender as the meanings, values, and characteristics society attributes to each sex (335).

Wittig argues that not all women can be put into these categories made by heteronormative society and proposes a revision of the pre-established definitions (qtd. in Wen Quian 56). This challenges the traditional binary framework that assigns specific roles and expectations based on gender and sexual orientation. She claims that gender roles are predominantly dictated by men, resulting in the continued subordination of women within society, and emphasizes the socially constructed nature of the category "women" (qtd. in Wen Quian 56). Furthermore, in Wen Quian's analysis, it is seen that Wittig asserts that lesbians cannot be classified as "true" women, lacking the traditional virtues of passivity and docility. She also states that they do not align with the category of men due to the absence of physical markers associated with masculinity (56).

Unlike other novels analyzed in the paper, *Written on the Body* by Jeanette Winterson offers a unique perspective on identity and gender. She subverts traditional gender roles by deliberately hiding the gender of her protagonist from the reader. Due to the absence of labels, the protagonist is liberated from societal gender expectations. This narrative choice highlights a departure from patriarchal influences, where traditional family dynamics are rendered irrelevant. Age, gender, beliefs, and even the protagonist's name are omitted from the story.

Winterson urges readers to analyze the story and its characters and fill in the gaps left by the author. We can observe Winterson's deliberate use of language when describing characters in the story. She refuses to conform to gender norms, instead focusing on her characters' individual personalities and traits. Sinclair notes that the author avoids using pronouns, placing that choice and responsibility onto the reader. According to her, the author only uses first and second-person pronouns, which shows how the protagonist creates his/her existence and identity. The author combines feminine and masculine features, implying that they can coexist and are not mutually exclusive: "I was as shy as an unbroken colt. I had Mercutio's swagger" (Winterson, *Written*… 51). This quote combines feminine reservation and

timidness with masculine confidence, both existing in a single character, further debunking gender stereotypes. We can conclude that Winterson refuses to lay stress on the gender of her characters. Instead, she invites readers to observe the significance of rigid categorizations, such as social constructs of gender, and to challenge their assumptions about these concepts.

Winterson chose to address the importance of gender and sexual identity by not addressing it at all. Throughout the story, the reader is left to speculate about the protagonist's gender. There were no distinctive gender markers throughout the book, as if the author did not find it important and wanted the readers to focus on the story itself. The unnamed protagonist is the narrator of the story, who addresses the reader about his/her turbulent love life. Winterson chooses her words carefully to leave the protagonist's gender as ambiguous as possible, avoiding any major stereotypes associated with either gender: "The narrator makes the readers examine, question and deconstruct their impressions, assumptions, clichés and binaries about love, gender, and behaviour" (Bosch, 26).

Carolina Sánchez-Palencia and Antje Lindenmeyer speculate that the reason why the author refused to disclose the narrator's gender "is Winterson's deliberate attempt to unsettle and erase gender distinctions" (qtd. in Bosch 6). Only descriptions of the narrator and his/her appearance and gender that the reader gets are very unspecific and vague: "When I saw you two years ago I thought you were the most beautiful creature male or female I had ever seen" (Winterson, *Written*… 84). We see how effortlessly Winterson circumvents any opportunity to mention gender indicators. By doing so, she breaks down gender stereotypes, showing how unnecessary they really are. She shows us how trivial gender distinctions can be focusing on her protagonist's complete identity rather than labeling them as male or female.

Winterson even puzzled readers by mentioning that the narrator had dated both women and men, which officially confirms that the protagonist is indeed a queer individual. Throughout the story, we hear about her former lovers Inge, Catherine, Bathsheba, Judith, Estelle,

Jacqueline, Carlo, Bruno, and finally, Louise. The reader interprets the main character's gender through the lens of traditional patriarchal norms.

Male characters are usually portrayed as more dominant and aggressive in contrast to passive and agreeable female characters. Abdulquadir and Dizayi claim that by avoiding assigning gender to her protagonist, Winterson liberated him/her from these constrictions and expectations (697). However, the protagonist in the story can be seen displaying both feminine and masculine traits. The narrator's 'feminine' side primarily emerges through the expression of his/her emotions, particularly evident in their descriptions of love and their strong feelings and concern for Louise: “I was drained of my manic energy and also of my tears. I fell into dead sleeps and woke unrested. When my heart hurt I could no longer cry” (Winterson, *Written*… 134).

Meanwhile, the narrator's 'masculine' traits manifest through their actions, logical thinking, and sometimes even lack of emotions in certain situations. The most stereotypical masculine behavior that the narrator exhibits is during the physical confrontation with Lousie’s husband. Van De Winckle observes the gender fluidity of characters in *Written on the Body*, pointing out the characters of Louise and Elgin, and stating how they demonstrate both masculine and feminine traits (12). Louise is dominant and assertive, while Elgin is portrayed as having a submissive side. Winterson uses their characters to subvert gender constructs further and show the fluidity of gender. Furthermore, Winterson provides explicit details about female anatomy and sexuality, portraying women as active initiators of desire rather than passive participants. Louise, for instance, pursues the protagonist despite being a married woman, a behavior that challenges patriarchal views of appropriate female behavior and subverts traditional gender roles.

Winterson further subverted the gender norms using common stereotypes: “Jeanette allows the narrator to exist as a human being without the encumbrance of gender stereotypes

that automatically limit the spectrum of emotions and actions expected of literary figures“ (Abdulquadir and Dizayi 699). As a result, the reader is urged to rethink the importance of gender constructs, providing a unique experience: “Winterson's decision to obscure gender and sexuality of her narrator deliberately forces the reader to go beyond the surface of analysis in addressing gender and sexual constructs as put forth by society” (Abdulquadir and Dizay 700).

Winterson also criticizes monogamy and traditional marriage. She finds that every marriage is doomed to fail:

> The most reliable Securicor, church sanctioned and state approved, is
> marriage. Swear you’ll cleave only unto him or her and magically
> that’s what will happen. Adultery is as much about disillusionment
> as it is about sex. The charm didn’t work. You paid all that money,
> ate the cake and it didn’t work. It’s not your fault is it. (Winterson, *Written…* 65)

In this passage, the protagonist talks about the inevitable disappointment of marriage due to unrealistic expectations made by patriarchal society. He/she calls the traditional family an 'easy home assembly kit.' However, he/she rejects those expectations about marriage and children and strives for something more. Winterson here, just like in *Oranges*, portrays a traditional marriage without love or intimacy. Elgin and Louise are both unfaithful and no longer share their bed. This portrayal serves as a powerful tool to challenge and subvert the patriarchal and heteronormative constructs deeply embedded in society. The author uses this dysfunctional marriage to dismantle the conventional notions of marriage, exposing its flaws and the oppressive structures it upholds.

8. Conclusion

The paper has attempted to explore how Jeanette Winterson and Emma Donoghue articulate issues of female sexuality and patriarchy in their novels. Both authors challenged patriarchal norms within the context of their cultural background and raised awareness of contemporary issues faced by marginalized groups. We notice recurring themes of control of female sexuality, the imposition of traditional gender roles, and the erasure of alternative sexualities in both British and Irish society. Both societies place a strong emphasis on the importance of marriage and family values, which simultaneously represses any attempts to explore sexuality outside the accepted norms.

Throughout the 20th century, Ireland and Great Britain promoted traditional values, although the influences came from different sources. The Catholic Church and its teachings predominantly shaped Ireland, while Great Britain was influenced by the conservative government that held power towards the end of the century. This is reflected in the selected works of Emma Donoghue and Jeanette Winterson: *Hood, Stir-Fry, Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit,* and *Written on the Body,* who used their writing to critique the political climate of the late 20th century.

We also notice parallels in Donoghue's and Winterson's works where religion is used as a tool to control and subdue female sexuality. Characters in the novels that I have discussed, Jeanette, Pen, and Maria, were all raised to believe that sexuality is a sin prompting them to hide and repress their identity. We observe how confessionals, peer pressure, and traditional values promoted at home, at church and at school, influence the way they perceive themselves. Some characters, like Pen, even refer to their proclivities as perversion, while others, such as Jeanette actively defy the social norms and refuse to see love as a sin.

Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit, *Hood*, and *Stir-Fry* highlight the influence religion has on shaping one's sexuality and promoting patriarchal values. The protagonists of these novels

all grew up in strict religious environments that taught them the importance of gender roles. The authors used these characters to illustrate the Church's intrusion into young women's lives, pushing them onto paths deemed appropriate by societal standards. Jeanette, Maria, and Pen were all compelled to repress and control their sexuality in order to be accepted by their families and communities.

The institution of marriage is undermined in all of the analyzed works. This is not surprising since most patriarchal control is exerted through making a male-female relationship the only acceptable form of love. Winterson highlights the hypocrisy of the church and society by exposing their undeniable flaws, while Donoghue humanizes her characters, emphasizing that same-sex love is no different from heterosexual love. However, it can be seen how damaging this control can be in the example of Jeanette's girlfriend Melanie who decided to forsake her sexual identity due to pressure. This is a clear example of how religion and traditional society can shape one's sexuality, especially when it comes to women who were targeted most by these institutions.

Written on the Body offers an interesting contrast to the other works mentioned in this paper. It presents a perspective free from the constraints of social norms governing sexuality, redefining the significance of gender. The novel also portrays women with masculine traits and desires thought inappropriate by society Winterson also uses a creative and unique method to challenge the inherent order and perceived differences between men and women. By concealing the gender of her protagonist, Winterson effectively deconstructs these roles. By juxtaposing both male and female traits in her characters, she demonstrates how sexuality is not fixed and how an individual can possess traits not necessarily associated with their gender.

What distinguishes these narratives is their commitment to portraying queer characters as ordinary individuals facing everyday challenges rather than reducing them to mere stereotypes. Donoghue and Winterson both emphasize the struggles of queer women exploring

their sexuality in a society that keeps urging them to do the opposite. Consequently, the reader is urged to rethink the norms imposed by patriarchal structures and to become aware of the constraints put on young women exploring their identity.

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10. Summary

THE SUBVERSION OF PATRIARCHY AND THE SHAPING OF FEMALE SEXUALITY IN THE WORKS OF JEANETTE WINTERSON AND EMMA DONOGHUE

This diploma paper sets out to analyze how patriarchy and patriarchal norms influence and shape female sexuality in the following novels: Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* and *Written on the Body*, Emma Donoghue's *Stir-Fry* and *Hood*. The emphasis is placed on how patriarchal structures and religious institutions in Ireland and Great Britain influenced the social setting in the late 20th century which shaped the sexual identities of queer protagonists. This paper compares how Winterson and Donoghue approach and subvert traditional norms and views affecting female sexuality and gender identity. The paper explores how the selected authors undermine traditional structures and how they shed light on issues faced by the queer community.

Key words: female sexuality, gender identity, lesbian fiction, patriarchy, religion

11. Sažetak

SUBVERZIJA PATRIJARHATA I OBLIKOVANJE ŽENSKE SEKSUALNOSTI U DJELIMA JEANETTE WINTERSON I EMME DONOGHUE

Tema ovog diplomskog rada je analiza utjecaja patrijarhata i patrijarhalnih normi na žensku seksualnost u romanima *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* i *Written on the Body* autorice Jeanette Winterson, kao i u romanima *Hood* i *Stir-Fry* autorice Emme Donoghue. Fokus će biti stavljen na patrijarhalne strukture i vjerske institucije u Irskoj i Velikoj Britaniji i način na koji su oblikovale društveni kontekst krajem 20. stoljeća, a koji je utjecao na seksualne identitete queer likova. U radu će se usporediti pristupi koje koriste Winterson i Donoghue u subverziji tradicionalnih normi i pogleda koji se tiču ženske seksualnosti i rodnog identiteta. Također će se analizirati strategije koje obje autorice koriste za dekonstrukciju tradicionalnih struktura i raspraviti o problemima s kojima se suočava queer zajednica.

Ključne riječi: ženska seksualnost, rodni identitet, lezbijska fikcija, patrijarhat, religija