
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Human Being Identity Protection in Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, *Sexing the Cherry*, and *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal*?

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the human identity protection in Jeanette Winterson's novels, focusing on *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, *Sexing the Cherry*, and *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal*?. Through a combination of narratological, deconstructive, and psychocritical approaches, the research analyzes how Winterson constructs literary strategies to defend marginal identities, particularly queer and female. The narrative structures of her works, often non-linear and symbolic, reflect a deliberate disruption of normative frameworks that threaten selfhood. Her deconstruction of love, sexuality, and social happiness challenges traditional binaries and reclaims emotional and psychological space for the rejected self. Writing becomes a site of resistance, where trauma is not only represented but transformed into a tool of empowerment. The study concludes that Winterson's fiction functions as a literary sanctuary for endangered identities, using metaphor, myth, and autobiographical resonance to protect and assert the human being's right to define and narrate their own existence.

Résumé

Cette étude analyse la protection de l'identité humaine dans les romans de Jeanette Winterson, notamment *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, *Sexing the Cherry* et *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal*?. À travers une approche croisée, narratologique, déconstructiviste et psychocritique, le mémoire montre comment l'autrice met en place des stratégies littéraires pour défendre les identités marginalisées, en particulier queer et féminines. Les structures narratives non linéaires et symboliques déconstruisent les cadres normatifs oppressifs et permettent une réappropriation de soi. L'amour, la sexualité et le bonheur social sont déconstruits pour libérer des identités exclues des récits dominants. L'écriture devient un espace de résistance et de survie, où le traumatisme est sublimé en force créatrice. L'étude conclut que l'œuvre de Winterson agit comme un sanctuaire littéraire, protégeant l'individu contre l'effacement social et lui offrant les moyens symboliques de reconstruire et d'affirmer sa propre identité.

KEYWORDS

Identity, protection, love, social happiness, self

Mots clé : Identité, protection, amour, bonheur social, soi.

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1. Introduction

The concept of identity has long stood at the center of both philosophical and literary debates. In an era increasingly defined by fluidity of gender, sexuality, culture, and personal experience, the protection of one's identity, particularly when it stands in contrast to socially constructed norms, is no longer a marginal issue but a core existential concern. In this regard, the literary production of Jeanette Winterson emerges as a compelling body of work that relentlessly interrogates and defends the integrity of human identity, especially within the LGBTQ+ community. Through her fiction and autobiographical narratives, Winterson

erects a defiant literary sanctuary in which individuality, emotional truth, and self-authorship are not only explored but fiercely safeguarded.

The very fabric of Winterson's novels is woven from her personal encounters with social rejection, religious orthodoxy, and psychological trauma, particularly those stemming from her childhood experiences of adoption, religious indoctrination, and sexual otherness. Yet, rather than presenting a passive chronicle of victimization, her works project a dynamic narrative resistance aimed at asserting self-recognition and reclaiming personal sovereignty. Her voice, bold, poetic, and iconoclastic, disrupts conventional storytelling forms and gender binaries, and reclaims the space of identity for those cast aside by the heteronormative, patriarchal mainstream. In *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, *Sexing The Cherry*, and *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?*, Winterson stages a literary rebellion, where human beings do not merely seek to define themselves but to protect the integrity of who they are in a world that repeatedly attempts to erase them.

In Winterson's narratives, identity is not a given; it is something carved out through pain, displacement, and persistent reflection. The protagonist of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, for instance, experiences early alienation from both her family and her Pentecostal religious community once her lesbian identity begins to emerge. This schism does not simply mark a break with her environment, it initiates a journey toward self-definition in defiance of the oppressive frameworks designed to nullify her. Similarly, *Sexing the Cherry* deploys magical realism and gender fluidity to rupture temporal and sexual binaries, while *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* offers a raw, autobiographical examination of trauma, mental breakdown, and the need to locate the self amid emotional chaos. Across all three works, identity emerges not as a static label but as a vulnerable, evolving construct that demands both protection and liberation.

To analyze the protection of identity in Winterson's fiction, this study adopts an interdisciplinary approach, combining narratology, deconstruction, and psychocriticism. First, Freytag's Pyramid is used as a narratological tool to map the plot structures of the selected novels, allowing us to identify how narrative arcs reinforce the protagonist's journey toward identity. Second, Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory provides the conceptual lens through which to dissect binary oppositions, such as heterosexual/homosexual, normal/abnormal, man/woman, that seek to marginalize or delegitimize non-conforming identities. Lastly, Charles Mauron's psychocriticism enables a psychological reading of the text, aiming to uncover the author's 'personal myth', that is, the emotional and psychic templates recurring across her works which give shape to her literary identity.

At the heart of this research lies a central thesis: Jeanette Winterson's literary production functions as a vehicle for the protection and affirmation of human identity, especially those identities deemed deviant by dominant societal structures. The author's identity, as an adoptee, a lesbian, and a woman writer resisting patriarchal norms, functions not only as the content of her novels but as their structuring principle. Her fiction becomes a space where identity is contested, narrated, and ultimately claimed.

This exploration is particularly significant given the socio-cultural implications it raises. Literature, as a cultural mirror, plays a pivotal role in shaping perceptions and constructing narratives of what is "normal" or "acceptable." By foregrounding stories that center on marginalized individuals, Winterson's texts help expand the boundaries of literary and social imagination. They encourage readers, particularly those from LGBTQ+ backgrounds, to see their lives reflected, validated, and intellectually engaged. In doing so, her works operate not merely as stories, but as acts of symbolic resistance and identity preservation.

Moreover, Winterson's stylistic techniques, her use of metafiction, non-linear timelines, and intertextuality, further reinforce the central theme of identity protection. Her prose resists conventional forms, much like her characters resist imposed definitions. Through myth, metaphor, and experimental narrative forms, she grants her characters the imaginative space to reconstruct their identities on their own terms. For Winterson, the act of storytelling itself becomes a sanctuary, a site where selfhood is not only expressed but protected against the forces of erasure.

This research does not only aim at literary analysis; it also seeks to underline broader societal implications. The narratives under study shed light on the psychological effects of social exclusion, the trauma associated with adoption and familial rejection, and the emotional labour involved in asserting a queer identity. They invite readers and scholars alike to question how society legitimizes certain identities while pathologizing others. By doing so, this study contributes to contemporary debates surrounding gender, sexuality, mental health, and literary representation.

In summary, this paper explores the protection of human identity in Jeanette Winterson's selected novels as both a literary and socio-political act. It investigates how her unique narrative strategies and thematic concerns construct a resistant self, one that insists on its right to exist, to love, and to narrate its own truth. Through an intersection of literary theory and close textual analysis, it demonstrates how Winterson's fiction serves not only as a mirror of her personal struggles but as a broader advocacy for the sanctity of human individuality in a world too often hostile to difference. In a nutshell, this research posits the theoretical background in the section 1. In the section 2, it explores narrative structures as Tools for Identity Protection in Jeanette

Winterson's Novels. The third section exposes the narrative features and writing Style as Strategies for Identity Protection and finally, the last section deconstructs Love, Sex, and Social Happiness as Identity Strategies.

2. Theoretical Background of the Study

2.1. Introduction and Research Background

Literature, beyond its artistic function, is often a vehicle for personal expression and social resistance. It serves as a powerful medium through which writers project their innermost conflicts, aspirations, and traumas. For writers like Jeanette Winterson, the act of writing becomes a form of identity reclamation—a battle for visibility and truth in a world that has repeatedly sought to erase or distort her selfhood. In the context of her novels, the protection of human identity emerges as a central motif, one that reflects both her lived experiences and her literary mission.

Winterson's fiction draws heavily from her own life: a childhood marked by adoption, strict Pentecostal beliefs, emotional repression, and a sense of alienation due to her sexual orientation. As a result, her literary output is deeply intertwined with themes of rejection, identity crisis, and the search for a sanctuary where one's authentic self might be preserved. From *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* to *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?*, and *Sexing the Cherry*, identity is not a mere theme but the lifeblood of the narratives. These stories reflect a dual necessity: to understand the self and to protect it from the hostile mechanisms of conformity, dogma, and heteronormative expectations.

This chapter explores the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings that inform such an inquiry into identity protection in Winterson's novels. It begins by defining the research problem and objectives, then introduces the chosen methodologies and literary frameworks that will structure the rest of the analysis.

2.1.1. Research Problem

The protection of human identity, particularly queer, female, and non-conforming identities, has become increasingly urgent in literary and cultural studies. Jeanette Winterson's works offer a compelling site of investigation because they intersect autobiography, fiction, and political resistance. Her writing emerges from a space of rupture, trauma, and transformation. As such, her literary identity becomes both a mirror of her personal struggle and a symbolic act of resistance.

The research problem tackled in this paper lies in understanding how Winterson uses fiction to preserve the wholeness of identity in a world intent on fragmentation. How does her narrative style, her use of metaphor and myth, her engagement with biblical allegory and queer desire, contribute to the protection of the self? What psychological mechanisms are at play when an author turns personal pain into aesthetic construction?

2.2. Scope and Limitations

The study concentrates on three major works by Jeanette Winterson: *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* and *Sexing the Cherry*. Each of these novels offers a different dimension of the identity protection narrative: *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* reflects the rejection of heteronormativity and religious fundamentalism. *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* provides autobiographical insight into psychological breakdown and the rebirth of the self through literature. *Sexing the Cherry* uses fantastical storytelling to deconstruct fixed gender roles and sexual binaries. The limitation of this study lies in its focus on a single author, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. However, Winterson's case offers rich material for a deep analysis of literary identity construction and protection.

2.3. Methodological Framework

To ensure a robust and multi-layered understanding of identity protection, this study employs the following three critical approaches. Using Narratology (Freytag's Pyramid), this framework allows for the structural dissection of the novels. Plotlines are mapped according to the five classic narrative stages: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. This helps in locating the moments in the narrative where the protagonist's identity is formed, threatened, and reclaimed. Deconstruction (Jacques Derrida) is crucial for identifying and breaking apart binary oppositions that govern traditional understandings of identity, such as male/female, normal/abnormal, heterosexual/homosexual. Winterson's novels are rich in such oppositions, and deconstruction allows us to interrogate the hidden ideologies that make them function. Psychocriticism (Charles Mauron) seeks to identify the unconscious elements of an author's work by analyzing recurring metaphors, obsessions, and emotional patterns. It reveals the 'personal myth' behind the fiction, a symbolic structure that represents the author's unresolved conflicts. This will be essential in analyzing how Winterson's traumatic experiences, particularly those related to rejection and abandonment, shape her literary identity.

3. Narrative Structures as Tools for Identity Protection in Jeanette Winterson's Novels

3.1. Identity and Narrative Structure: A Functional Approach

Understanding the construction of identity in literature requires a close look at narrative structures. In Jeanette Winterson's works, the very form of storytelling becomes an act of resistance, a tool through which the integrity of the self is defended.

Rather than adopting linear or conventional structures, Winterson fragments, reorders, and interweaves her narratives to reflect the fractured but resilient nature of the human being, especially one navigating marginalization and trauma. Each novel, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, *Sexing the Cherry*, and *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal*? employs a distinct structural logic, which not only tells a story but also preserves the selfhood of the protagonist against forces of religious oppression, parental rejection, and societal alienation.

3.2. *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*: Biblical Schemas and Identity Negotiation

Winterson's debut novel is divided into eight sections named after the books of the Old Testament. This biblical framework is not simply stylistic, it is a parody and subversion of religious authority that seeks to repress queer identities. Jeanette, the protagonist, must navigate the contradictions between her inner truth and the evangelical dogma of her community. The structure of the novel mirrors her gradual awakening and rebellion.

Genesis and Exodus serve as the exposition. They introduce Jeanette's adoption, religious indoctrination, and early life under the absolute rule of her mother, whose vision for Jeanette is to become a servant of God. This section functions as the narrative foundation for Jeanette's future resistance by presenting the initial framework imposed on her identity.

Leviticus and Numbers chart Jeanette's internal conflict as she begins to understand her sexuality. The community's harsh judgment of fornication and deviation becomes a mirror of the social codes designed to erase queer identity. Through this narrative rising action, Jeanette's sense of self begins to crystallize in defiance of those norms. Deuteronomy and Joshua represent Jeanette's confrontation with her community. Her lesbian identity is exposed and condemned. This marks the climax: the moment when the protagonist chooses authenticity over obedience, even at the cost of familial and communal exile. Judges and Ruth, finally, bring Jeanette to a stage of self-reflection and symbolic reconstruction. She is isolated but self-aware. The fragmented fairy tales and interludes that appear throughout the novel take on greater significance here, they are the alternative narratives Jeanette constructs to protect her truth.

In this novel, the biblical structure serves to reverse the power of the sacred texts. The protagonist retells her life through the same symbolic register used to condemn her, but now as a means of self-validation and identity protection.

3.3. *Sexing the Cherry*: Temporal Disruption and Gender Fluidity as Resistance

Sexing the Cherry presents a dual narrative: the fantastical adventures of Jordan and the larger-than-life Dog Woman during the 17th century, juxtaposed with their echoes in the contemporary world. This novel is less bound by plot than by philosophical inquiry, which makes its narrative structure particularly apt for exploring identity beyond fixed definitions. The text defies linear time, moving between past and present, myth and history. This fragmentation enables the characters, particularly Jordan, to transcend fixed identities. As Jordan travels through time and across oceans, his quest is existential rather than geographic. His search for meaning mirrors the queer subject's search for a place to exist outside rigid norms.

The story of the Twelve Dancing Princesses, woven through the chapters, becomes a metafictional allegory of women fleeing patriarchal control. Each princess tells a tale of self-liberation, whether from forced marriage, body objectification, or male violence. These interpolated stories function as protective shields, texts within the text that assert identity through speech.

The Dog Woman, meanwhile, with her grotesque body and radical independence, upends traditional femininity. She protects her adopted son Jordan not only physically but ontologically. She models a version of womanhood that refuses reduction to beauty, compliance, or domesticity.

Winterson's narrative strategy here protects identity by refusing realism. Magical realism, hyperbole, and time disruption all contribute to a literary universe where queer, hybrid, and feminist identities can survive and flourish without apology.

3.4. *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal*? Autobiography as Testimony and Healing

In this autobiographical account, Winterson revisits the traumas fictionalized in *Oranges*. However, this time, the narrative assumes the form of a memoir, and the stakes are not just identity formation but survival. The novel is structured in short, titled chapters that reflect psychological fragments, moments of pain, realization, and defiance.

The early chapters (*The Wrong Crib*, *In the Beginning Was the Word*) describe Jeanette's alienation from birth, adopted by a woman who viewed love as dangerous and emotional connection as a threat. The fragmented storytelling mimics the protagonist's shattered sense of origin and belonging.

As the narrative unfolds (*The Trouble With A Book*, *Church*, *Accrington*), Jeanette discovers literature as her refuge. Books become instruments of protection: they provide language, metaphor, and community where her environment offers only silence or rejection. Each chapter is a brick in the wall she builds to keep her identity intact.

The section titled *The Wound* is emblematic of her emotional rupture but also the beginning of her healing. Here, she reconnects with her biological mother and faces the trauma of abandonment. However, she chooses forgiveness, not as absolution but as a way to reclaim agency over her story.

The closing chapter, *Coda*, underscores Winterson's commitment to truth. The narrative does not resolve neatly; identity remains fluid and contested. But by writing the self, by naming the pain, Winterson protects it from distortion or erasure. This memoir affirms that the act of remembering and narrating trauma can itself become an act of protection. Through confession, resistance, and textual self-fashioning, Winterson constructs a literary identity that reclaims what was denied in life: the right to exist authentically.

3.5. Comparative Perspective: Structure as Shield

Across all three texts, Winterson uses narrative structure not only to tell a story but to build a defense. Whether through biblical parody, time-traveling fantasy, or fragmented memoir, her works foreground the idea that identity is constructed, assaulted, and ultimately defended through language. The characters she creates must constantly negotiate between imposed definitions and inner truths.

In *Oranges*, identity is protected through biblical subversion; in *Sexing the Cherry*, through poetic and temporal liberation; and in *Why Be Happy*, through confessional honesty and narrative control. The act of writing becomes synonymous with the act of survival. In this way, Winterson's literature asserts that to narrate is to protect—that each chapter is both a wound and a shield.

4. Narrative Features and Writing Style as Strategies for Identity Protection

4.1. Narrative Features in Service of Identity Protection

Jeanette Winterson's novels are not simply vehicles for telling stories—they are carefully constructed spaces where identity, especially queer and marginalized identity, is sheltered, expressed, and validated. Through narrative features such as setting, character development, plot structure, and thematic tension, Winterson crafts environments where her characters can resist erasure and assert their individuality.

4.1.1. *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*

Set in the conservative context of 1960s Accrington, this novel stages the identity battle of a young girl against religious dogma and societal rejection. The setting is not neutral: it represents an oppressive space where conformity is required and deviation is punished. Jeanette, the protagonist, grows up in a Pentecostal household governed by a mother who acts as both spiritual guide and ideological enforcer. Her mother is the antagonist in both psychological and symbolic terms, she stands for everything that seeks to suppress Jeanette's emerging self.

The major narrative tension lies in the conflict between Jeanette's personal truth (her lesbian identity and intellectual awakening) and the imposed identity from her religious community. This conflict becomes the engine of the plot and the site of resistance. Each narrative progression (e.g., discovering love with Melanie, being exorcised, choosing exile) marks a step in her journey to reclaim her sense of self.

4.1.2. *Sexing the Cherry*

Here, the narrative abandons realism and instead uses fantasy and myth to reflect the fluidity of identity. The dual characters, Jordan and the Dog Woman, exist in a suspended temporality that allows them to rewrite history and reconstruct gender and sexuality. The setting ranges from 17th-century London to imagined worlds, symbolizing the detachment from normative time and space needed to protect non-conforming identities.

Jordan's quest through time and thought mirrors the journey of the queer subject in search of belonging. Meanwhile, the Dog Woman, grotesque and unconventionally maternal, refuses all codes of gender docility. The absence of linear narrative structure and the use of multiple embedded stories (e.g., the tales of the Twelve Dancing Princesses) enable a storytelling mode **where marginal voices are not only heard but central**.

4.1.3. *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?*

This autobiographical narrative exposes the raw processes of identity construction through trauma, breakdown, and rebirth. The setting, again in Northern England, is bleak but realistic. The protagonist navigates between personal despair and social invisibility. Her conflict with her adoptive mother and her search for her biological origins are not only biographical elements but narrative devices illustrating how rejection, familial and societal, damages identity.

Yet, as Winterson reclaims her past, she rewrites her selfhood. Each chapter acts like a memory fragment; a broken mirror reassembled through language. The use of short chapters mimics psychological disorientation while allowing space for reflection and recovery. Through narration, she both revisits and reclaims the parts of herself once deemed unacceptable.

4.2. Freytag's Analysis and its Application to Identity

Freytag's Pyramid, exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution, provides a structural lens to examine how narrative developments in each novel correspond to key moments in identity struggle and affirmation.

4.2.1. *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*

Exposition (Genesis, Exodus): The religious and domestic environment is introduced; Jeanette is socialized into a rigid, binary system.

Rising Action (Leviticus, Numbers): Jeanette encounters otherness—poverty, sex, and the concept of sin—which awakens her critical thinking.

Climax (Deuteronomy, Joshua): Her love is exposed; the community's rejection climaxes in her symbolic and literal exile.

Falling Action (Judges): Jeanette begins to question the faith and systems she once upheld.

Resolution (Ruth): She writes her own story, accepting solitude as a condition of authenticity.

Each stage of this narrative mirrors a step in the development and protection of identity through resistance.

4.2.2. *Sexing the Cherry*

Exposition (Jordan's birth and early curiosity): Identity is not yet fixed.

Rising Action (the twelve princesses and philosophical musings): Jordan learns about alternative ways of being.

Climax (the historical moment of 1649): Jordan confronts state and societal power.

Falling Action (encounters in 1990): A return to contemporary time, where past and present merge.

Resolution (Jordan's reunion with self): The multiplicity of identities is embraced.

This narrative refuses linearity because identity itself is portrayed as non-linear, shifting, and intertextual.

4.2.3. *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal*?

Exposition (The Wrong Crib, In the Beginning Was the Word): Emotional neglect, confusion, and silence.

Rising Action (Church, Accrington): Jeanette begins to rebel internally.

Climax (Art and Lies, The Night Sea Voyage): Identity crisis and psychological breakdown.

Falling Action (Strange Meeting, The Wound): Reconnection with her biological mother, healing begins.

Resolution (Coda): A fragile peace, not based on acceptance by others, but on self-acceptance.

In all three novels, the climax consistently corresponds with moments where the protagonist confronts external definitions of who she should be, and chooses instead to define herself.

4.3. Writing Style and Literary Techniques as Identity Defense

Winterson's writing is singular, experimental, and personal. Her stylistic choices function not only aesthetically but as acts of defiance. Her manipulation of narrative voice, tone, diction, and metaphor all contribute to constructing literary zones of identity protection.

4.3.1. Tone and Voice

In *Oranges*, the tone evolves from playful and ironic to serious and poetic. This tonal shift mirrors the narrator's maturation and deepening awareness of the cost of truth-telling. The authorial voice is deeply embedded in the character, reflecting a semi-autobiographical narration where the personal and fictional blur. The use of first-person homodiegetic narration places the narrator at the center of both conflict and narration, ensuring that her voice cannot be overwritten by others.

4.3.2. Diction and Language

Winterson uses colloquial and poetic diction, shifting register to reflect psychological states. The childlike language early in *Oranges* contrasts with the metaphysical reflections of later chapters. This evolving diction demonstrates the gradual empowerment of the narrator's voice. In *Sexing the Cherry*, fantastical and elevated language constructs alternative realities, while in *Why Be Happy*, the stripped-down, raw prose reflects vulnerability and truth.

4.3.3. Imagery and Metaphor

Metaphor is central to Winterson's identity defense. Biblical metaphors in *Oranges* are repurposed to undermine religious authority. The dancing princesses in *Sexing the Cherry* symbolize the liberation of women's voices. In *Why Be Happy*, wounds, sea voyages, and adoption become symbols of pain but also of rebirth. These images provide symbolic frameworks that transform personal suffering into shared meaning.

4.3.4. Non-linear Structures and Intertextuality

Winterson frequently disrupts temporal and spatial coherence. Spiral narration, nested stories, and fragmentary chapters reflect the psychological truth of those whose identities are constantly questioned. By rejecting conventional realism, she gives form to the complexity of living as "other." Intertextual references to myth, fairy tale, and biblical narrative allow her to rewrite foundational texts in favour of marginalized experiences.

Jeanette Winterson's mastery of narrative structure and literary technique is not merely stylistic brilliance; it is a literary strategy of survival. In each of her novels, the form itself protects what society seeks to destroy: identity in its queer, female, rebellious forms. Through tone, diction, structure, metaphor, and myth, Winterson defends the dignity of the self against social and psychological annihilation.

Thus, her writing becomes a fortress, an imaginative place where human identity is not only expressed but shielded. And in building that fortress, Winterson offers her readers a sanctuary too: a place to recognize themselves and to begin, perhaps, their own work of identity protection.

5. Deconstructing Love, Sex, and Social Happiness as Identity Strategies

5.1. Deconstructing Love: Between Control and Liberation

Love in Jeanette Winterson's fiction is never simply romantic; it is a political and psychological battleground. As a means of control or as a path toward liberation, love plays a crucial role in the construction and protection of identity. Winterson consistently exposes how normative expectations surrounding love often suffocate personal truth and emotional freedom.

In *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, Jeanette's early understanding of love is mediated by religious doctrine and maternal authority. Her mother's conditional affection instills in her a dangerous model: that love is transactional and rooted in obedience. This restrictive model reflects broader societal attempts to define which loves are legitimate. When Jeanette's love for another girl is revealed, it is met not with understanding, but with violence and exorcism. This traumatic experience marks the turning point at which love becomes both the trigger for identity suppression and the motive for resistance. Jeanette chooses love over safety, truth over conformity, thus protecting her identity at great cost.

In *Sexing the Cherry*, love is explored through multiple voices, including the rebellious stories of the Twelve Dancing Princesses. These interludes defy the patriarchal marriage structure and instead offer narratives where women reclaim emotional and bodily autonomy. Each princess resists her forced fate, choosing self-love or alternative partnerships over traditional romantic scripts. These love stories are not about union but about escape, a literary rebellion that dismantles the link between love and submission.

In *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* Winterson revisits the wounds of unrequited love. Her relationships are marked by impermanence and pain, yet each one teaches her something about her own boundaries and values. Her journey becomes less about finding the perfect partner and more about learning to love herself, in defiance of every message that told her she was unlovable. Love, here, is psychically redemptive, a way to rebuild an identity fractured by rejection. Across all three texts, love is not a safe haven but a territory to be reclaimed. It is stripped of illusions, redefined on queer terms, and ultimately used as a tool for affirming one's worth, especially when society refuses to do so.

5.2. Deconstructing Sex: Beyond Binary Constraints

Sexuality in Winterson's novels is inseparable from identity. It is both a source of exclusion and a route to self-empowerment. Through literary deconstruction, she reveals how rigid sexual norms are not natural but constructed to sustain systems of power, especially patriarchy and heteronormativity. In *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, sex is not openly discussed but tightly controlled. Jeanette's lesbian desires are framed as sinful and unnatural within her religious community. This moral condemnation aims to erase her identity by associating her sexuality with spiritual corruption. Winterson challenges this binary opposition, holy versus sinful, by showing that Jeanette's feelings are neither perverse nor abnormal. In fact, her love is the most honest and sacred connection she experiences. By choosing exile rather than repression, Jeanette protects her identity through the very act of embracing her sexuality.

In *Sexing the Cherry*, sexuality takes on surreal and symbolic dimensions. Jordan's non-binary identity and the presence of gender-defiant characters like the Dog Woman rupture any fixed understanding of sex and gender. Drag queens, cross-dressers, and liberated women populate a world where sex is not confined to biology but expands into performance and philosophy. Sex

is no longer a tool of reproduction or possession but a field of fluidity and exploration. This portrayal grants characters the freedom to imagine identity outside of social scripts.

In *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal*? Winterson offers a more autobiographical reflection on sex. She explores her early encounters with desire, the pain of being othered, and the awakening that came with her first sexual experience. Sex becomes the moment she asserts her own agency. Yet this same assertion leads to being thrown out of her home. The loss is devastating, but the act of choosing desire over obedience marks the beginning of self-authorship. Sex, then, is not simply physical, it is existential. It is how Jeanette claims control over her narrative and refuses to be redefined by others.

By portraying sex not as taboo but as transformation, Winterson reclaims it as a domain of self-expression and resistance. Her deconstruction of sex reveals it to be a construct, one that can be rewritten to protect and affirm queer identity.

5.3. Deconstructing Social Happiness: Between Belonging and Selfhood

Happiness, in the traditional sense, is often defined by social conformity: being married, employed, and accepted. Jeanette Winterson problematizes this model by presenting happiness not as a destination but as a byproduct of self-recognition. Her characters do not seek to fit in—they seek to be whole.

In *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, Jeanette initially finds happiness in religious rituals and community life. Singing hymns, attending Bible quizzes, and being praised for her piety give her a sense of belonging. However, as her sexual identity emerges, that happiness proves conditional. The warmth of communal love quickly turns to violence and exclusion. Winterson critiques the fragility of social happiness: it offers comfort only to those who conform.

In *Sexing the Cherry*, happiness is envisioned in dual ways. Jordan seeks purpose, truth, and inner peace. His is a eudaimonic happiness rooted in meaning and knowledge. Meanwhile, the Dog Woman embodies hedonic happiness, pleasure, self-care, and satisfaction. Her crude joy in food, violence, and loyalty creates a space where marginal desires are embraced rather than pathologized. Winterson thus presents happiness not as a single goal, but as plural and relative.

In *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal*? happiness is deconstructed most directly. The very title questions society's obsession with normality as a route to fulfillment. Winterson challenges the belief that one must conform to be happy. Her own journey toward mental healing, self-love, and literary success is achieved not by fitting in but by breaking away. Even as she reconnects with her biological mother, she acknowledges the ambiguity of her emotional state. True happiness, for Winterson, is not perfection, it is the freedom to live authentically, scars and all.

Through this lens, social happiness is shown to be contingent, performative, and often false. Real happiness lies not in being accepted by others, but in being true to oneself, even at the cost of exile or loneliness.

5.4. Binary Oppositions and Identity Politics

Winterson's use of deconstruction reaches its peak in her dismantling of binary oppositions that underpin societal norms. The contrasts she engages, heterosexual vs. homosexual, normal vs. abnormal, longing vs. belonging, are not only literary devices but ideological battlegrounds. These binaries are shown to be constructed and policed, often to the detriment of individual identity.

Heterosexual vs. Homosexual: Winterson critiques the privileging of heterosexuality as "normal." Her characters suffer ostracism for deviating from this standard, but their refusal to conform asserts their right to exist as they are.

Normality vs. Abnormality: Through surreal characters and outlandish scenarios, she suggests that "normal" is a myth sustained by repression. Abnormality, by contrast, offers a site of creative potential and self-reinvention.

Longing vs. Belonging: Jeanette, in her memoir, confesses to always longing but never truly belonging. This distinction encapsulates the queer experience of yearning for inclusion while being perpetually othered. Her resolution is to build a life not around belonging, but around truth.

Winterson's deconstruction of these binaries dismantles the very structures that threaten identity. In doing so, she clears conceptual and narrative space where new forms of subjectivity, queer, fluid, hybrid, can survive and thrive.

Jeanette Winterson's literary deconstruction of love, sex, and social happiness serves a greater purpose than critique: it is an act of identity protection. By exposing and unmaking the discursive structures that endanger marginalized selves, she creates narratives in which queer individuals, especially women, are not only visible but central. Her work reminds us that identity is fragile yet resilient, shaped not only by what we are but by how we are treated, perceived, and remembered. And in Winterson's hands, literature becomes more than expression, it becomes resistance, affirmation, and sanctuary.

6. Conclusion

In contemporary literature, the question of identity has emerged as one of the most urgent and complex inquiries, particularly when considered in relation to gender, sexuality, trauma, and societal exclusion. Among writers who have consistently placed identity at the core of their creative expression, Jeanette Winterson stands out for her fearless exploration of the fractured self and her commitment to preserving its integrity against systems of oppression. Her novels do not merely recount the struggles of marginalized individuals; they actively participate in the protection of human identity, transforming literature into a sanctuary where personal truth is both told and shielded.

The literary universe of Winterson is born from rupture: her adoption by a deeply religious and emotionally repressive mother, her early realization of being “different” due to her sexual orientation, and her experience of psychological and social rejection. Rather than being silenced by these traumas, Winterson uses fiction and autobiography as platforms for reassembling the self. Her characters, often gender-defiant, philosophically curious, and emotionally resilient, embark on journeys of self-reclamation where love, memory, and language become tools of survival.

This research focused on three of Winterson’s most emblematic works: *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, *Sexing the Cherry*, and *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* Through a critical and interdisciplinary lens, it sought to demonstrate how these texts construct narrative and stylistic strategies aimed at defending the human being’s right to self-definition. The analysis was supported by Freytag’s narrative model, Derrida’s deconstruction, and Charles Mauron’s psychocriticism, offering a multi-layered approach to identity protection.

First of all, Section 1 laid the theoretical groundwork, situating Winterson’s literature within the larger discourse of marginality, trauma, and resistance. It framed the study around two major axes: first, how literature serves as a psychic space for identity defense; second, how Winterson’s personal myth, her inner wounds, metaphors, and obsessions, structures her writing. It also established that this study was not simply a literary exercise but a socially relevant intervention in defense of queer and female subjectivities.

Secondly, Section 2 explored the narrative structures of the three novels. It revealed that Winterson employs non-linear, symbolic, and fragmentary frameworks not for stylistic eccentricity but as a protective response to personal and collective trauma. Each novel’s structure corresponds to an identity process, from fragmentation to cohesion, and allows her characters to exist beyond oppressive linearities imposed by society, religion, and gender norms.

Thirdly, Section 3 examined the narrative features and writing style used to protect identity. Through tone, metaphor, biblical parody, and multiple voices, Winterson builds a literary style that does not merely describe identity, it performs and safeguards it. Her prose often oscillates between poetic abstraction and raw confession, offering both distance and intimacy. Her strategic use of metaphor and myth turns storytelling into a shield, allowing readers to engage emotionally while preserving a space of dignity for the wounded self.

Finally, Section 4 focused on the deconstruction of love, sex, and happiness, three domains where identity is most often regulated and endangered. Winterson challenges heteronormative ideals of romantic love, redefines sex as a site of agency rather than sin, and subverts the notion of social happiness as synonymous with conformity. By dismantling these normative constructs, she opens narrative spaces where queer and non-conforming identities can flourish without justification or shame.

Together, these sections affirm a central thesis: Jeanette Winterson’s novels protect human identity by rewriting the rules of storytelling, deconstructing oppressive binaries, and offering symbolic refuge to the excluded self. Her works give voice to those who are often silenced, especially queer women, and transform personal vulnerability into a site of creative and political power.

In a world where identity is still policed, by governments, religions, and cultural norms, Winterson’s literature matters. It reminds us that being human is not about fitting into a mold, but about remaining whole amid fragmentation. Her fiction is an invitation: not only to understand difference, but to defend it.

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