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"Mother Earth, Father God": The Binary Power of Religion and Gender Codes
in the Writing of Jeanette Winterson and the Music of Torres

(TITLE)

BY

Hannah M. Wilkes

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Jeanette Winterson and Music of Torres

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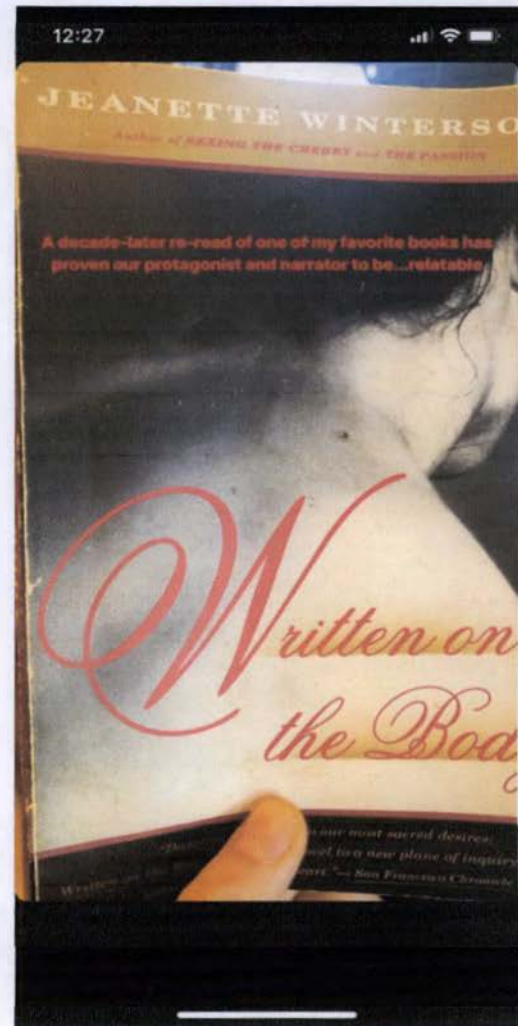
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“Mother Earth, Father God”: The Binary Power of Religion and Gender Codes in the Writing of Jeanette Winterson and Music of Torres

Introduction

“So the past, because it is the past, is only made malleable where once it was flexible...the lens can be tinted, tilted, and smashed” (95), Jeanette Winterson observes in her fictional semi-autobiographical novel, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (hereafter referred to as *Oranges*) published in 1985. Through Winterson’s postmodern take on the bildungsroman, the documented history of a young Jeanette’s life shows how easily words, language, and fact can be manipulated, which enables Winterson to stress how history is a construction of someone else’s perspective, and it is only through experience and reflection that an authentic identity can be built. Witty and sharp with her language, Winterson’s integrative use of the bildungsroman and meta-commentary on narrative intertwined with one another emphasize the growing dissolution of strict adherence to the traditional binary coding of the world, along with deconstructing the conservative traditions that Thatcherism represented in 1980s Britain, best represented through the bootstrap mentality of Jeanette’s mother. In deconstructing the traditional molds associated with femininity, sexuality, and religious upbringing, Winterson begins to challenge the way labels are used to constrain and restrict outward expression, showcasing that the formation of identity is a fluid and ever evolving process, which can be further explored through the relationship between fantasy and fact.

Continuing this resistance to conformity, although through a different medium, Mackenzie Scott, who performs under the musical pseudonym Torres, experiments with the conventions of music and performance altogether. Using atmospheric guitar riffs, lyrical narratives, and using a domineering and manic persona during her live performances, Torres creates a jarring disconnect between projections of gendered performance and assumed sexuality through the juxtaposing lyrics and the physical performance of her work. Her work builds upon the literary thoughts of Sylvia Plath, Virginia Woolf, and Jeanette Winterson, seen through her public Instagram post of Winterson's *Written on the Body*, where she comments "A decade-later re-read of one of my favorite books has proven our protagonist and narrator to be.... Relatable" ("Photo of *Written on the Body*") as well making direct allusions to Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* in her song "To Be Given a Body," (see fig. 1). Winterson and Torres use their art to create a diverse vision of identity unfettered by binary classification and have built momentum in creating intersectional discussions surrounding the arbitrary categorization of identity, directly challenging the preservation of traditional definitions of religion, gender, and sexuality.



(Fig. 1. Instagram Photo of Torres reading Winterson's *Written on the Body*. Caption reads: "A decade-later re-read of one of my favorite books has proven our protagonist and narrator to be.... Relatable.")

Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit: Background

Born in 1959, and adopted into a devoutly Pentecostal Evangelical family, Jeanette Winterson first published her novel, *Oranges*, in 1985, breaking into the contemporary British literary scene, using her fictional semi-autobiography to map out how she faced adversity as a young girl. Dealing with homophobia and resisting the reductive sexual, gendered, and social nature of her religious upbringing, Winterson's creation of young Jeanette embodies the way her writing projects a 'counter-memory', as referred to by Sonya Andermahr, which "speak[s] up on behalf of history's silent majorities and minorities" (16). Writing alongside authors like that of Martin Amis and Angela Carter, Winterson's unique balance of angst-filled rebellion and poignant meditations on the subversion of patriarchal and outdated gender norms marks her own literary contribution, critiquing the intense political and social upheaval occurring in Britain during the 1980s, under Margret Thatcher's rule. Despite Elaine Showalter's claims that "Winterson seemed preoccupied with romantic triangles and 'the journey of the mind' rather than treating social themes and the 'big Balzacian questions of the day'" (Andermahr 15), it is through Winterson's unique and archetypal creations of maternal figures, ironic display of a devout but sinful congregation, and tragically realistic portrayals of toxic standards of femininity and sexuality, that the moral decay of 1980s Britain is criticized. Through her use of fantasy and creation, Winterson implicitly emphasizes that issues surrounding identity politics are 'real' issues, stressing that ignorance and the perpetuation of such authoritarian values is what breeds toxic systematic failure.

It is also of central importance to note the historical impact of the third-wave feminist movement, which Lori Cox Han and Caroline Heldman outline, in their publication *Women, Power, and Politics*, as a redefined focus of individual choice, female empowerment, and

reclamation of language in the 1970s and 1980s (48-49). The revival of interest in women writers, particularly centering around Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, originally published in 1929, was used as a frame to give a radical push for women to define themselves within the public sphere, using their intellect and active political voice to create a physical space of change for female empowerment and autonomy. Pushing back against the ideology that women all have a prescribed sexual and social narrative, all for the sake of amplifying male ego and supremacy, much like the points made in Woolf's work, Winterson strives to expand on the intersectional idea that women are multifaceted, complex, and capable, particularly by using her character, young Jeanette, to expand on how the growing curiosity of adolescence can be manifested into a congruently awakening and liminal experience for an individual.

Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit: Religious Identity

With young Jeanette serving as both the central character and narrator of the novel, the tone of youthful rebellion is ever present, sarcastically subverting the various institutions that dictate her life, showing flawed figures of moral authority, as seen by ethically corrupt clergy members and sexually promiscuous evangelical women. Homeschooled under her mother's authority until she was seven years of age, young Jeanette has the teachings of God integrated into almost every aspect of her life, and is insisted upon to never stray from her mother's word. The binary of right or wrong, virtuous or wicked, is continuously reinforced by her mother and her teachings, causing the young girl to outline her own world view early in the novel, stating "I discovered that everything in the natural world was a symbol of the Great Struggle between good and evil" (Winterson, *Oranges* 16). Quite harshly, young Jeanette's youthful imaginative space is ripped out from under her, demanding that she strives to be pious and devout, no matter the

temptation that she faces in the outside world, voiding any pursuit to look introspectively, and more importantly, to think beyond her mother's projected image.

Through Jeanette's portrayal of her mother, utmost devotion to the church, serving as a savior-like figure to her daughter and the greater community, defines her life worth, giving the mother's character, who remains nameless throughout the entire novel, a one-dimensional purpose. Even when an extreme illness takes over her body, rendering the young girl lethargic and momentarily deaf, her mother and pastor accredited her quiet and modest nature to her being "full of the spirit" (Winterson, *Oranges* 23). It is with incredible apathy that her mother and the priest idealize the young girl's actions, entirely misinterpreting her seclusion and ailment as piety. The disconnect and mistreatment the young girl faces as she continues to be an objectified and moldable figure, isolates her relationship with her mother, and as a result sacrifices any emotional breakthrough with her child for the sake of cementing her status as mother superior.

Interventions from other congregation members, first from the character Miss Jewsbury who admits the girl to the hospital, and then from Elsie Norris who visits her regularly while she is admitted, is the first encounter the young girl has that disrupts the thought that church and prayer will cure all her illnesses. In recognizing that blindly trusting her mother, as well as the Evangelical church, has hindered her physical health, young Jeanette begins to ponder about the legitimacy of absolute omniscient knowledge that these authorities project, which she grows to become critical of as she finds fault with the way these impersonal mantras are used to dictate her every waking thought. As she sits in isolation, waiting for her mother to visit her at the hospital, Jeanette ponders, "Since I was born I had assumed that the world ran on very simple lines, like a larger version of our church. Now I was finding that even the church was sometimes confused. This was a problem" (Winterson, *Oranges* 26). With fact and science, which only

become materialized by women like Miss Jewsbury and Elsie Norris, Jeanette encounters her first intellectual awakening, breaking the conventions that her mother has instilled within her.

Young Jeanette's introduction into the public-school system, which is sharply referred to as the "breeding ground" (Winterson, *Oranges* 18), asserts a new balance of power to the young girl, giving her a larger scope of how the real world perceives her without religion being the only judgment of her character. After being ostracized from her peers and school teachers in reaction to her cross-stitch project that read "The Summer is Ended and We Are Not Yet Saved" (Winterson, *Oranges* 39), she learns that the foreboding messages that her mother and church have ingrained in her do not reflect her own interpretation of faith and spirituality, radically limiting her own creative expression and autonomy of thought. "Some folks say I'm a fool, but there's more to this world than meets the eye...there's this world,' [Elsie] banged the wall graphically, 'and there's this world,' she thumped her chest. 'If you want to make sense of either, you have to take notice of both'" (Winterson, *Oranges* 32). Elsie Norris, a consistent church goer and increasingly positive influence on the young girl's life, makes this remark to Jeanette after the young girl is released from the hospital, exposing her to a new realm of thinking that asserts that a life beyond the theological exists, serving as a crucial step in breaking down her heavily encoded binary perception of the world, which instead roots her existence in both the material world and understanding of individualized expression and thought.

In Peggy Dunn Bailey's article, "Writing 'Herstory,'" the author discusses Jeanette's introduction to the public-school system, noting that "the Breeding Ground engenders doubt in Jeanette as she is exposed to the views of people outside her church family who live by different narratives" (62), creating a striking liminal step in the young girl's narrative, showing her how to manifest resistance and use her outside teachings to create a broader definition of self that is not

purely defined by other's impositions. The destabilizing effect of the characters like Miss Jewsbury, Elsie, and the 'Breeding Ground' shifts young Jeanette's interpretation of morality, particularly under the influence of Elsie, who begins to expose the young girl to imaginative realms of acceptable exploration of self and sexuality. Unlike the mother character, Elsie's piety comes with no agenda, embracing the fluidity of knowledge, fact, and faith. It is through the exposure of Elsie's unique blend of faith and scientific fact that young Jeanette begins to understand that these two realms of thinking can coexist, and that her identity, much like her faith, can evolve with experience and varied perspective.

Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit: Rewriting of History

In the chapter "Deuteronomy", a unique and completely objective voice is asserted into the novel, making no direct connection or reference to Jeanette or her life, and immediately critiques the way language and history can be used to shape and alter the construction of the past. In this very brief chapter, Winterson asserts that power stems from not restoring the past, but claiming and making it one's own. Deuteronomy, a book of the Old Testament, defines the laws of Moses, warning of false prophets, and giving guidance on how to practice pure worship. The construction of moral standards through Winterson's chapter outlines how creation of perspective is personal and ever evolving, pushing back against the idea that one script fits or serves all, and ultimately varies based on the types idol worship or glorification people project onto figures of authority. The tactile and metaphorical language used to construct these assertions from the unnamed and omniscient narrator of this chapter encapsulates a sudden break in the convention of remaining complicit in a society that prescribes every aspect of life onto an individual.

And I am not god. And so when someone tells me what they heard or saw, I believe them, and I believe their friend who also saw, but not in the same way, and I can put these accounts together and I will not have a seamless wonder but a sandwich laced with mustard of my own.

Here is some advice. If you want to keep your own teeth, make your own sandwiches... (Winterson, *Oranges* 97).

Language, enrichment, and understanding of perspective shapes the greater picture of history. The break in this short chapter personifies the creation of history, and literalizes the consumption of the past to create forward progression within a story. Much like the creation of a sandwich, the layers of 'mustard' and additional condiments add depth and substance to the otherwise bland form of nourishment, satisfying individualistic needs based on their palate, all of which is representative of how characteristics of personal histories shape the narrative, altering the end product. Although this chapter stands out in relation to the rest of the personalized novel that follows Jeanette's progression into her young adult life, it radically shapes the way Winterson is using her young character to symbolize more than what is transcribed on the page. Instead, this young figure, fighting against the constraints of strict religious ideology and assumed heteronormative standards, is used to show a new convention that defies the norm for women, particularly of marginalized status, which often seeks to diminish their voices and help perpetuate the status of the dominant culture. Erasure and dismissive attitudes are to be fought against, and through the creation of 'sandwiches,' or new and personally constructed histories, new social limits can be created to broaden the sense of normalcy and accepted truth within a society.

Jeanette's unique upbringing, adopted by a born again evangelical mother, reflects a

realistic portrayal of a fragmented working-class family, suggesting that the romanticized notion of family and establishment of domesticity during Margret Thatcher's conservative reign over Britain was only a façade to further solidify the nation's imperialist roots. Bailey claims, "Under the Law, Jeanette knows only a world of fixed, absolute meaning. She has no room to doubt the rightness of the Law or of Mother" (62), indicating that the militant devotion to the church becomes such an intrinsic part of Jeanette's identity that it all but erases the young girl's capability to think beyond salvation, or beyond the limiting box in which her mother defines for her. For young Jeanette, her mother's view on the world as a zero-sum game echoes the rhetoric used by Margret Thatcher, former UK Prime Minister. After the British victory in the Falklands war, Thatcher remarked that "We have ceased to be a nation in retreat...that confidence comes from the rediscovery of ourselves, and grows with the recovery of our self-respect" (164), asserting that superiority and domination of space are what it takes to be the victor regardless of what, or who, is lost in the process. In a 1978 interview that was televised, Thatcher also remarked that "The British character has done so much for democracy, for law, and done so much throughout the world that if there is any fear that it might be swamped, then people are going to be rather hostile to those coming in" (Gairola 124). With the conservative clampdown of the Thatcher years, using romanticized memories of the colonizing history of Great Britain's past and the preservation of national identity, the realities of marginalized and subjugated groups are entirely voided in her history of the world, and much like young Jeanette, are left unspoken for and cast aside.

This recasting of history, using narratives of the past to create a false story that amplifies the moral righteousness or credibility of an individual, is a tactic that young Jeanette's own mother uses, riffing off of the same orchestration of Thatcher's nostalgic rhetoric and reverence

of the past to find security in her promises to the nation. Almost as an act of condemnation for seeking answers that question the power of authority, the young girl's world is entirely shifted and altered when she learns that her mother had rewritten Charlotte Bronte's novel *Jane Eyre*, stating "I found out, that dreadful day in a back corner of the library, that Jane doesn't marry St. John at all, that she goes back to Mr. Rochester" (Winterson, *Oranges* 76). In this incredibly deceptive and life altering revelation, the young girl learns that her idealized perception of love and marriage are complete constructions of her mother's doing, stressing the absolute lack of power she has over her own narrative and identity. In Bailey's analysis of how the young girl copes with her mother reaffirming the marriage between St. John and Jane Eyre, despite knowing that the novel has been doctored, she states "Jeanette now knows she has been raised on narrative deceptions, and her discovery of this systematic lying prompts her to reexamine her very identity" (70). Despite simply wanting to relive a moment of nostalgia, or indulge in a simple act of playing with a deck of cards, her mother's influence is utterly inescapable, dictating and reminding her every step of the way that straying too far from the path of expectation and attacking the institutional hierarchies set in place, whether it be through questioning religious duty or resisting the preservation of traditional domestic and feminine roles, will lead her to a path that results in isolation and suffering, which follows the prescription of the Evangelical faith and notion that the damned can only be saved through self-sacrifice and strict adherence to the literal word of God.

Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit: Femininity

Settling in to listen to a sermon, a sudden break in young Jeanette's consciousness is disclosed, serving as her first theological disagreement with her pastor who claims that "Perfection...is flawlessness" (Winterson, *Oranges* 62), in which the young girl reinvents a cliché fairytale to critique strict gendered and religious instructions. In Winterson's meta-meditation on narrative, a prince is in search for the perfect woman, unblemished, pure inside and out, and unquestionably loyal to his word. Much to his demise, his quest to find such a woman goes on for three years completely unsuccessful. After his companion, an old goose, reveals to him that "what [he] wants can't exist" (Winterson, *Oranges* 64), he spitefully kills his trusted follower, unyielding to break his ingrained expectation of what a woman serves to provide him. Upon meeting a princess in the woods, he finds a woman that fits every quality he so desires, and pleads for her hand in marriage, only to be met with her deflating rejection and statement that "what does exist lies in your own hands" (Winterson, *Oranges* 69). Young Jeanette's story instead asserts that faults and failed expectations are inherent of human nature, but with the prince's refusal to accept these facts means he is not worthy to take her hand in marriage. To the princess, life is a balancing act, needing symmetry to make it of any value. The prince's wishes are not cause enough for her to reshape her fate, making him face the reality that his decision to kill his follower, the duck, despite his headed warning, was an action done out of ignorance and self-preservation. Despite his desire to rewrite his book, and admit his humility and error to gain the princess hand in marriage, the princess tells him he cannot rewrite the book, or apologize "because [he] is a prince, and as a prince you cannot be seen as wrong" (Winterson, *Oranges* 67), resulting in her death, much to the despair of the love-struck prince. Through

young Jeanette's fantastical creation, she begins to critique the way that toxic masculinity and gendered expectations limit the way individuals can admit or confess their faults.

Winterson's discussion of narrative and gendered identity in this scene shows the influence of Virginia Woolf's meditation on history, empire, and gender identity from her extended essay *A Room's of One's Own*. The connection between Woolf and Winterson is intentional and evoked with a reverence for how modernists use language to sculpt an unconventional and daring definition of norms. Scholar Sonya Andermahr has both discussed and identified the influence of Woolf in Winterson's thought, stating that the impact of Woolf's *Orlando* helped Winterson experiment with "stretching imaginative limits and for the way it crosses borders of both genre and gender" (Andermahr 136). In Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, the metaphor of a mirror is used to articulate how the development of powerful male identity rests upon the subjugation of women as the 'other': "Women have served all these centuries as looking glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size... Whatever may be their use in civilized societies, mirrors are essential to all violent and heroic action" (Woolf 346-347). Much like the framing of Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, the princess acknowledges that her life purpose is to serve as a mirror, glorifying the image of the prince, but reinvents the feminist narrative by using the princesses death as a transformative, and destructive force, as "the blood became a lake, and drowned the advisors and most of the court" (Winterson, *Oranges* 69), quite literally wiping out the community that reinforced and perpetuated such toxic and sexist forms of social hierarchy, which led to the prince's decision to kill his follower, and princess, with such formality. Through the exploration of the imaginative realm of fantasy and writing, the path for liberation for young Jeanette is in the power of being able to transform her own story, becoming the master of her own pen,

creating a language where women speak out of the looking glass that is hung over them by the patriarchy.

Through the introduction of strong independent female congregation members and topics of education that expand young Jeanette's world view, the use of storytelling and fantasy helps the young girl ground her evolving perspective of the world, which are first built upon her mother's creations, then are entirely dismantled to craft her own self-defined narrative. With her emerging sense of efficacy through her education and growing relationships with Elsie and Melanie, her first romantic female interest, her fantastical creations about an unorthodox prince and princess story helps her learn to revere female empowerment and disobedience. In developing a stronger relationship with Elsie, young Jeanette's maturity and growing interest in self-reflection showcases her own internal conflict with the strict binary definition of self, no longer feeling as though she be seen as holy, recognizing that she has deviated from her mother's prescribed image. Meditating over the idea that "once created, the creature was separate from the creator, and needed no seconding to fully exist" (Winterson, *Oranges* 48), young Jeanette begins to free herself from the desire to have her mother's approval, and instead looks inward, becoming motivated to find power in self-determination. Through this construction of objective truth that Jeanette begins unfolding, the "duality of fiction" she uses through her creation of her princess fairytale emphasizes the fluidity and disintegration of binary codes, reversing the assumed gendered expectations of men and women (Reisman, 12).

Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit: Disruptive Queerness

Jeanette's relationship with Melanie, depicted as both innocent infatuation and sinful homosexual lust, is the first time that Jeanette's own thoughts on sexuality and religious

expectations are clearly and originally defined. Jeanette's proclamation that she loves the girl "almost as much as I love the Lord" (Winterson, *Oranges* 104) explains that her sexual orientation and religious ideologies are not isolated beliefs, finding no fault within the intersection of her faith and sexual orientation. As Melanie and Jeanette enter what they think is a routine mass, the priest angrily declares that "These children of God...have fallen under Satan's spell" (Winterson, *Oranges* 104). The exhibition of pious male authority quickly invalidates the young girl's newly defined self, accusing her of being a sinful and undeniably immoral under the eyes of God, despite her own belief that no love can be immoral. The very religion that she has used to define her outlook on the world is quickly ripped out from under her, even though she perceived Melanie as a gift from God, coming to the realization that her deviation from the heteronormative foundations heavily reinforced by the church are irrevocable marks to her image.

With the matriarchal framework of the novel, Winterson's portrayal of young Jeanette and her radical persistence in obtaining her own autonomy reinforces the growing cultural influence of the 3rd wave feminist movement. Responding to fiercely restrictive political institutions set in place during the 1980s and 90s, the movement championed the idea of building a vastly diverse platform for future artists and activists to use to fight against the erasure of marginalized voices, and expanded upon the diverse identification of sexuality and gender.

Written on the Body: Background

Published in 1993, Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body* (hereafter referred to as *Written*) cemented her status in the literary scene, using her unique blend of experimental structure and witty yet unreliable narrations to uncover a collective thought around the idea of

what love, spirituality, and autonomy mean for an individual in a world that likes to reduce and conform identity to a clearly defined singularity. Unlike her first publication, *Oranges* in 1985, the blurred elements of fantasy and the romantics of nostalgia, particularly surrounding the idea of past love and experience, distorts the lens in which the narrator details their descent after a devastating affair with a married woman. The revival of spirit for this unnamed and ungendered narrator stems not from the replaced companionship of another, but rather the eroticism and emotional stimulation of language and desire. As scholar Christy Burns states “Fantasy is at best an unstable term in Winterson’s writing, but she often uses it (and art) to bridge the gap between harsh reality and a more hopeful construction of the social imaginary” (304). In this construction of an altered creative space, the room for alternatives lends itself to those that are left out of, or who attest to following the script of normative expectations.

The genderless narrator uses the structure of the novel to document the life they had before, with, and after the presence of their mistress, Louise. Sexual affairs and rebellious protests against the institutes of monogamy and the patriarchy all dull in comparison to the tactile and sensual memory in which the narrator breaks down every material and metaphysical aspect of their obsessive love for Louise. With Louise’s sudden diagnoses of cancer, the affair is quickly ended, and the narrator retreats to a dreary and run down cabin in the outskirts of Yorkshire, decidedly dedicating their life’s worth to detailing every memory of Louise, stating “I became obsessed with anatomy. If I could not put Louise out of my mind I would drown myself in her...I would recognize her even when her body had long since fallen away” (Winterson, *Written* 111). This reconstruction of memory and history uses elements from the biological and chemical classification of the body, but integrates the clichés of love and eroticism to battle against the spreading and unstable cancer that wrecks their lovers body, creating a fantasy, a

momentary escape, for the narrator to ground themselves in the organic and sensory pleasures in life.

Written on the Body: The Breakaway from Scripted Life

Through the commodification and commercialized projection of love and gendered expectations, Winterson uses her amorphous narrator, the novel's unconventional structure, and emphasis of the consciousness to engender a new perspective regarding the way literature articulates the limitations of logic and objectivity. Pushing back the rigid conformity of what pure fact represents, as well as abandoning culturally prescribed norms, strict categorization and labeling of sexual orientation and gender are disregarded in the narrator's accounts of the novel. In Gregory Rubinson's analysis of the debate between the scientific and aesthetic of Winterson's novel, in his article titled "Body Languages," he claims that "The narrator interacts with many genres of knowledge about love from the lofty to the trivial" (220), asserting that the exploration of gender identity and sexuality is as complex and enforced as the way love and romance is rectified in patriarchal and heteronormative societies. Winterson showcases this concept with the use of the narrator's comments on the commercialization of love and romance, stating "No doubt the magazines know best" (Winterson, *Written* 74). The sarcastic quip digs at the way men and women alike use mass-produced media to affirm their believed mythologies behind deeply personal aspects of their lives, all the while aware that the vague and unspecified material can be applied to any reader. The reverence for such impersonal advice stems from the safety in conformity and perceived comfortability in being seen as the norm. Winterson, in light of these blanket statements used to perpetuate stereotypes and prescriptions surrounding relationships and

love, instead uses the narrator to shatter the expectation of gendered language to project an autonomous and personalized definition of expression.

Much like her earlier work in *Oranges*, the metanarrative break that the central narrators have often criticize the way cultural expectations are imposed upon individuals, which particularly hinders the exploration of sexuality and multifaceted identity. In *Oranges* case, the break from strict religious and heteronormative norms is how Jeanette makes a distinctive difference between her mother's scripted reality and her own vision of what life can be. *Written* picks up on this thread and delves further into dismantling and blurring the lines of the binary, relying instead on the tactility and sensation of language to break free from the reduction of identity and expression. The dichotomy of art versus science ties the narrative of the unknown narrator to their dissection of how the body, language, and art have all been stripped of their true meaning and personalized value, instead finding a cohesion and blend between these elements that integrates what true human emotion can fully articulate and express. The abstraction of the narrator's identity is not meant to distort or complicate the reading, but rather to rebuild and redefine the way language, structure, and emotion can be formed to validate fluidity, creating a metaphorical and literal body of work without the imposition of categorization and enforced identity.

Written on the Body: Aesthetic and Patriarchy

Beyond the vague and mystique identity of the narrator, the relationships and companionships detailed throughout the novel further suggest a more solidified and resonate image of how the intersection of identity is fully fleshed out. A reverence for beauty and aesthetic frame the novel, both in terms of the superficial, cosmetic, as well as the substantive

depth of the individual or object. Inge, a former partner of the narrator, is at odds with the political message of her anti-patriarchal ideologies, with the narrator commenting, “She was a committed romantic and an anarch-feminist. This was hard for her because it meant she couldn’t blow up beautiful buildings” (Winterson, *Written* 21). In the western tradition, the preservation of phallic symbolism and imagery, like the Eiffel tower, coincides with the strict attachment to heteronormative standards of love and romance. The oppressive power that the patriarchy subverts over female voices is what Inge and the narrator seek to dismantle in their heated tryst, but are wholly unable to remove the nostalgia and idealism behind such memorialized symbols of love and passion. “Why didn’t I dump Inge and head for a Singles Bar? The answer is her breasts...I had idolized them simply and unequivocally, not as a mother substitute or a womb trauma, but for themselves. Freud didn’t always get it right. Sometimes a breast is a breast is a breast” (Winterson, *Written* 24) The narrator parallels Inge’s appreciation for the aesthetic, but instead soundly states that the woman’s body is their desire, not her ideological beliefs, normalizing a romantic objectification of the material body.

The oversexualized gaze of love and its surrounding cultural expectations is evoked further through the characterization of Elgin, Louise’s husband, an oncologist that both diagnoses and oversees his wife’s case. Serving as the male model of patriarchal power, depicted purely as a man of science, Elgin’s domination and apathy towards his wife’s diagnosis is recounted in a way that amplifies the narrator’s passion and revitalization of Louise’s being. With the news of Louise’s cancer, the narrator confronts Elgin in seclusion, heated and baffled that he has kept the details of his wife’s health a secret among their close friends and family. In this interaction, Elgin states that Louise’s cancer is “like a game... If we treat her now there is a chance that the disease might be halted. Who knows?’ He shrugged and smiled and jangled a few

keys on his terminal” (Winterson, *Written* 104). Unplugged and seemingly unaffected by the diagnoses of leukemia, Elgin’s manipulation of Louise’s cells and body exhibits the narrator’s greater contempt for the mechanical and disvalued approach to the physical body of their lover. Presented to Elgin like a complex puzzle, which he views to be assembled and fixed, the body of his wife’s body becomes objectified and simplified. The intricacies of Louise’s personality and being are left out of the diagnoses, and leaves her body shelled out to be poked and prodded by the medical analysis of her husband. In response to the sudden breakup of the affair, emotionally crippled by the unavoidable confrontation of decay and death, the narrator retreats to an isolated cottage in Yorkshire, surrounded now only by organic and earthly matter. In Rubinson’s article he continues to draw upon the detached relationship between medical practices and pathos, stating “There, in an attempt to recapture some essence of Louise, the narrator turns to medical textbooks and enters into a dialogue with them. The narrator’s interactions with the texts constitutes an attempt imaginatively to reclaim Louise and her diseased body through language from the exclusive authority of medical discourse (223).” In this modernist approach to language, the refashioning of the body is classified into four separate chapters, written by the narrator through their obsessive analysis of anatomy and biological makeup, first starting with “The Cells, Tissues, Systems and Cavities of the Body,” continuing with “The Skin,” “The Skeleton,” and finally concludes with “The Special Senses.” Despite the textual evidence gathered from medical books and scientific studies, the narrator crafts each chapter with the intent of idolizing Louise’s likeness, infusing a holistic approach to the biological mapping of the human body to naturalize and substantiate connection.

Written on the Body: Language and Truth

Transformation, declassification, and fluidity of identity are what uniquely characterize Winterson's use of the narrator and structure of the novel. As Sonya Andermahr states "The novel undertakes a simultaneous critique and celebration of romantic love, deconstruction and reconstruction the tradition of romance writing in order to remake it both stylistically and ideologically" (80). The gender of the narrator is left undeclared and indistinct to emphasize the malleability of language and perception, with the abstraction of the narrative being literalized through the non-binary narrator, as well as the content and style of the text. Queer affirmation, in terms of its sexual connotation and the way the text is unconventionally structured, is achieved through the rejection of traditionally fixed conventions; male/female no longer are the universal viewpoints, and language is showcased to be unreliable and limiting. Beyond the semantics of romance and love, desire is what fuels the narrator's purpose. Gender, sexuality, and their classification become insignificant and seemingly mocked throughout the progression of the text, particularly highlighted through Louise's appraisal of said narrator, stating "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). Passion and desire pull these figures together, omitting any type of gendered or sexual taboos that would otherwise dilute the immersive feelings of love and attraction, underling the transcendences of connection and the universality of human emotion.

Stereotypes and clichés riddle the pages of the narrator's meditations on love, and underscore the limiting mechanics of linguistics and expression. The obstruction of expectation and performativity of the individual is only liberated when artistic creations or reinventions of self are unveiled. Winterson, in a 2016 interview remarked, "The great thing about creative work is that it goes on teaching you as a person" ("It's Always Some Battle ..."). Through the textual

body of *Written*, the refashioning of identity and self is expanded upon almost infinitely. Melding the scientific with the deeply emotional, the reconstruction of Louise's body through the narrator's anatomical descriptions magnifies the endless possibilities of discovery and understanding. The narrator also states that both "Love demands expression" (Winterson, *Written* 9), and that a "precise emotion seeks a precise expression" (Winterson, *Written* 10). The enriching focus on language and its validation uses the fluidity of words to resuscitate meaning and authenticity into language. With the metaphorical extension of the natural world to the body, and vice versa, seen through the narrator's description of withering trees with the line "The trees are prospecting underground, sending reserves of roots into the dry ground, roots like razors to open any artery water-fat" (Winterson, *Written* 9), Winterson literalizes the way language and nature ground sensation and exhibit an unwavering sense of collective experience. Actualizing the decay and waning composition of the natural world better projects the unstable condition of Louise's body and the narrator's emotional health. Tactility, in the case of the narrator, becomes crucial in rebuilding a narrative that is not caught up in the conventions and construction, but rather the liberation of fluidity.

In an interview with Catherine Bush from BOMB magazine in 1993, Jeanette Winterson stated, "I think the concerns of a writer are how to make things new, how to shock, how to revive the commonplace, how to take the banal, everyday experience and make it into something specific which has resonance." Art validates and substantiates a history and meaning. It defines the experience, but resonates in varying levels based on audience's perspective. The ambiguity of the narrator's gender and sexuality becomes a political and queering message in the sense that it demands for the reader to understand the fluidity of human identity, emotion, and creation, breaking conventions of literary structure and style to heighten the arbitrary nature of

classification. Unlike the factual and detached scientific books that strip Louise of her being, reducing her to the toxic manifestation of cells, Winterson uses language to actualize the impact of true human connection, suggesting that life is not about domination and control, but about reveling in the uncertain and reviving language to expand upon connection and the universality of human emotion.

Torres: The Story So Far

This breakdown of constricting and arbitrary labeling has paved the way for artists that use the distorting discomfort of what remains unlabeled to bridge the gap between unrecognized narratives and disruptive patriarchal expectations, developing a new cultural mythology that reshapes the way the norms are defined. Somber, broody, and experimental, Mackenzie Scott, who performs and records under the name Torres, uses her musical creations to traverse the complex map of her origins and identity through ambient synth landscapes mixed with juxtaposing hand-picked folk-like guitar melodies. Born and raised in Macon, Georgia in 1991 and adopted by her birth mother's bible study teacher, Scott's unique upbringing and family background shapes the lyrical narrative she often reflects on within her songs. Graduating from Belmont University's School of Music in 2013 coincided with the release of her first studio album, *Torres*. That following year came her decision to uproot from the South and move to Brooklyn, creating a definitive split between her identity within her church, and her Southern roots. In a 2017 interview with *Vice*, Scott reveals "I think that New York has made me more of a mystic actually. [In Brooklyn I am] always observing. And what I observe is life being celebrated in every way imaginable, in ways that I had never imagined prior to observing...Life as being fought for" (Ross). Aware of this growing opposition between her new perspective,

which rivals the ideology that the Baptist and Southern culture instilled in her, Torres's three records use a biographical element to unpack and dissect the interference of how her past history intersects with her new perceptions of self. Although reflective in nature, the artist's use of personal storytelling through her sonic landscape also creates an artistic space in which normal conventions, both in appearance and sonic expectation, are pushed to their limits. Literalizing the way dual identities can be infused in one, Scott's shaping of her stage presence has evolved through her album and tour cycles, growing edgier and more fluid in terms of how sexual and gender identities are displayed. Melding the androgyny of make-up and her formal blazer and bra combo (see fig 2. below), Torres shakes the normalized commodification of female sex appeal and uses it to project a domineering and violently emotive gender fluid character on stage.



(Fig. 2. Photographed by Hannah Wilkes; Torres performing at Off Broadway in St. Louis Oct. 24, 2017.)

With musical influences ranging from Kurt Cobain, Johnny Cash, and St. Vincent, Torres's music combines a unique intersect that is rooted in the Southern Gothic style but is clearly seduced and lured by the industrial and mechanic influence of the synth-based alternative scene. In a 2015 interview Scott remarked, "I guess ultimately what I'm trying to do is take these really bizarre influences and create something brand new out of them, so that the influence itself cannot necessarily be pinpointed. I just want the music to be one big, new thing" (Bienstock). The construction of Torres melds the idea of rebellious male sex appeal associated with rock and roll, inspired by figures like Cash and Cobain, but pushes the conventional boundaries of performative sexuality and gender through experimental physical displays as well as her in lyrical narratives to encourage artistic discussions surrounding gendered and sexual politics. By disregarding the classification of genre, the emphasis instead lies within the raw emotional impact of the song's narratives and how queer identity expands upon the multiplicity of identity and breaking of scripted norms.

Torres: "Coming to Terms" with Coming Out

With the artists' first studio released album, *Torres* (2013), darkly haunting and honest lyrics combined with the somber acoustic instrumentation of the ten-song record blatantly lays out the raw emotion of coming to terms with being on the margins, outwardly resisting prescribed cultural expectations through the exploration of clashing religious and sexual identities. With this album serving as Mackenzie Scott's breakthrough introduction into the indie music scene, the singer's juxtaposing Southern roots and progressive lens on the adherence of religious devotion while being an openly gay musician, which emerged more defiantly in her

career, exposes a new light on how intersectionality and representation can be embodied and revered. In an article written by Scott herself, she remarks that,

My plan to ignore the inevitability of my sexual awakening failed spectacularly, and soon I started to test the waters by jokingly suggesting to my closest friends that I might not be the most heterosexual person they knew...I had decided firmly that [my parents] could never know, because it would shatter their hearts into a billion pieces, so I hid in plain sight (“Revisited: The Jar Will Always Lift Again”).

The denial and deflection so strongly attached to this idea of undesirable queerness is rooted in the culture of the strict and ironically merciless church that criticizes those that do not follow its strict gender and sexual scripts. The deflection and resistance to fully proclaiming her differences accentuates how her music was the bolstering force and expressive outlet used to strengthen her personal understanding of self, all the while learning the limits of her artistic voice.

Opening her first album, *Torres* (2013), with the song “Mother Earth, Father God,” an aggressively punctuated guitar riff matched with the “bloody battleground” that Torres paints through her lyrical narrative draws out the overarching warring disassociation of clearly defined morality and female expectation that the entirety of the album encapsulates. Simplistic with the instrumentation, but incredibly technical and experimental with the atmospheric effect of its application, Scott’s distortion of sound uses modern technologies to her benefit, creating a palpable emotional realm for audiences to become immersed in. In her opening song, Torres sings,

I was born on bloody battleground

To the middle men between two realms

The hungry eyes linger as she twirls

Got hands lifted to heaven

And her toes dipped in hell (1-5).

Given the historical context and cultural identity of her Southern heritage, The South's deeply conflicting history associated with the Civil War, where it was brother against brother, blood against blood, Torres symbolizes the great internal divide she faces with her warring conflict of self, divided by the realms of her reality and the opposing righteous path that is outlined by her faith. The narrator is tempted to succumb to the unknown, aware of how their 'hungry eyes' remain fixated on the temptation of a woman who is grounded in sin, yet yearns for the purity and enrichment of God. The song continues to spiral into the cynicism of falling to temptation, pondering,

Should I be held responsible

That it's come to this?

Was I blindsided? After all

I knew beforehand of the kiss

You always warned me of the kiss

I have been betrayed

By the kiss (18-24).

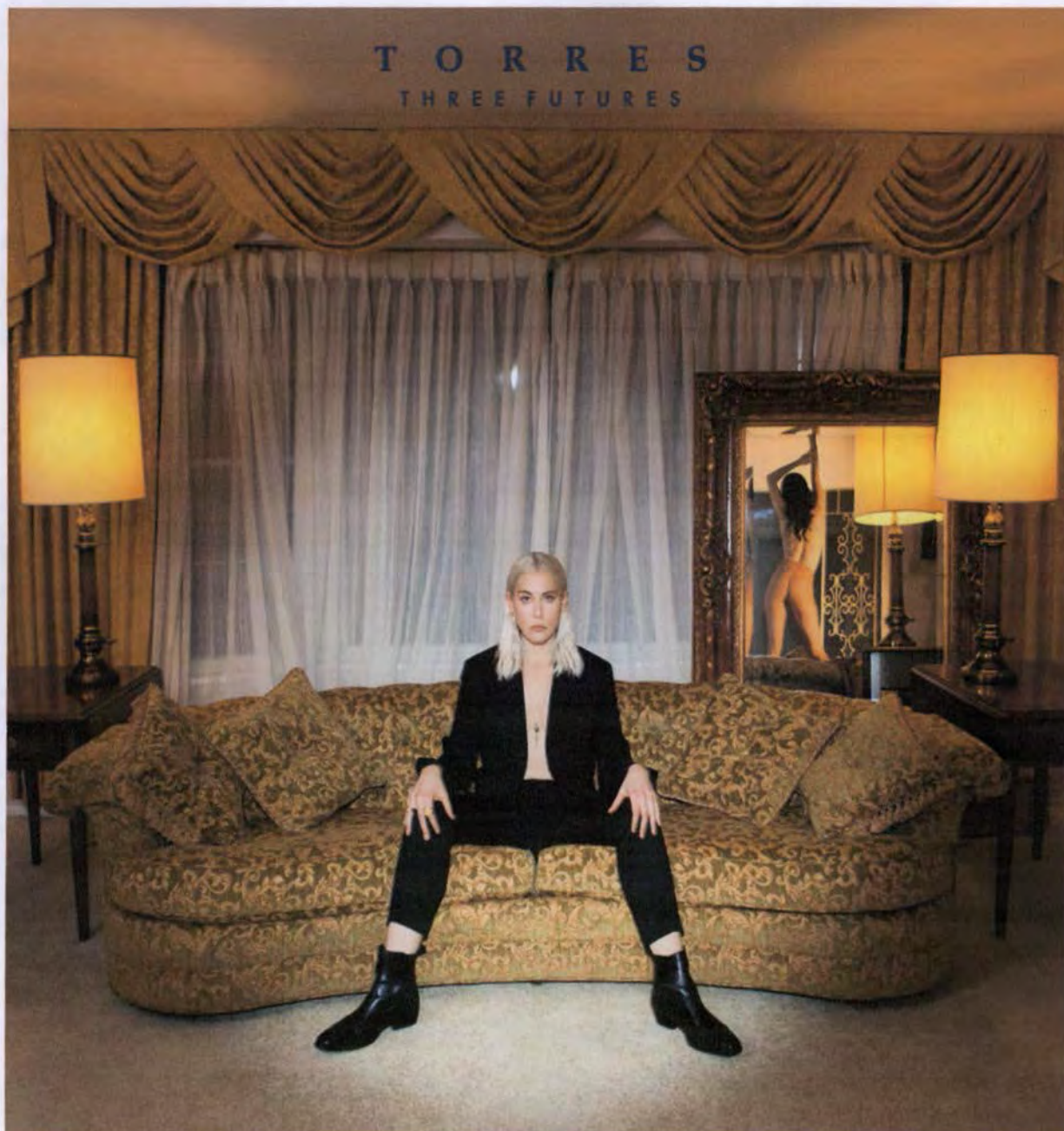
With the call and response of the lyrics "Was I blindsided? / After all I knew beforehand of the kiss", the biblical allusion to the kiss of Judas, also referred to as the Betrayal of Jesus, further enforces the religious code in which Torres had sculpted her worldview. Aware of how this definitive mark on her skin seals her fate, and with the narrator admitting that they are unable to fend off the temptation of skin and lure despite knowing that this kiss will mark them as a target,

a connection to Winterson's *Oranges* arises, where young Jeanette parallels the feeling of descent and rejection for admitting her love for the same sex, claiming that the feeling is honest and pure, and to proclaim that her attraction is false would be contrived, feeling manipulated by the expectations of the Church and its congregation. The tension arising from the clash of religious identity and sexual orientation feeds into the sonic atmosphere created through Torres's works, where the natural hand picking of a guitar is pushed through distorting amplifiers and synthesizers to create hollow melodic lines, stressing that two opposing forces can work together to create a beautiful and cohesive image, subverting the idea that a label or categorization is needed for its meaning to resonate.

Torres: Rebirth

In an interview done with *LADYGUNN* magazine, Scott remarks that her Southern Baptist upbringing instilled an irremovable tinge of disgust with the idea of homosexuality, making it “hard to be strange, sometimes [making] an act as simple as being present and inhabiting your body at best inappropriate and at worst sinful” in reference to being an individual who identifies as queer and avidly detests the notion of normative gender codes. Embracing the tension and leaning heavily into the lyrical and sonic dissonance that her music plays with, Torres's ease with confronting the unconventional subject matter of coping with being perceived as an outsider parallels Winterson's unique meditation on the use of fantasy and other artistic creations to project a safe space of personal exploration of self. It is with this reinvention of self and a rebirth of identity that Scott emerges as Torres, provoking her audiences with a masculine bravado on stage, presented through her attention to dark yet simple make-up and formal

clothing to create an androgynous character that defies the traditional sex appeal typically expected of female performers (see fig. 3 below).



(Fig. 3 Photographed by Ashley Connor; *Three Futures* Album Cover, 2017)

In an interview done with *Aquarium Drunkard*, Scott remarked that, “[I’m] totally prodding, poking fun at this largely male tradition in rock music of not just taking ownership of sex, but kind of doing so in a way that’s really flippant” (Woodbury). Off her most recent album,

Three Futures (2017), the song “Righteous Woman” uses frank sexual language, projecting the image of a clearly defined and dominant character, with the first verse stating,

I am not a righteous woman
 I’m more of an ass man
 And when I go to spread, it’s just to
 Take up all the space I can (1-4).

The brash sexual language, ambiguous nature of the narrator’s gender, and mocking rhetoric used to subvert the dominance often associated with the male gaze and sexual prowess emphasizes the stark contradiction of being a ‘righteous woman.’ This definitive split in character, especially in comparison to earlier records where the fight between queerness and religion divided her, an exertion of ownership of space, place, and identity replaces this hesitancy.

Blurring the line of gender and sexual stereotypes, Torres continues “And when I go to spread, I’m only/ Squinting out a strip to land/ From my panopticon” (13-15). The panopticon referenced is a creation by English philosopher Jeremy Bentham. Chris Witmore, an Archeology professor at Brown University, states that the design consists of a “central tower for the guards, surrounded by a ring-shaped building of prison cells” (Internalized Authority”), thus giving the guards an unhindered view of the prisoner, creating an irrevocable and unwavering assertion of power as the prisoner remains on full display and unaware of when the watch will be turned onto them. Through this disconnected lens, Torres’s objective observation of self asserts that this power, particularly for women, is rectified through the patriarchy. Michel Foucault, a French intellectual, expanded further upon Bentham’s idea, arguing that the panopticon could be applied to everyday scenarios in which individuals internalize the dominant norms and authorities of

their respective institutions. The influence of Foucault's rendering of the panopticon, in terms of enforcing traditional sexuality, is seen through the narrator, who is unable to stop observing and surveying their own actions, barred through the institutions in which heteronormative and gendered customs have predetermined the actions and expectations of women. This internalized male gaze and implied male authority asserts that the narrator of the song is only given power or space when masculine traits are mimicked or performed.

The multilayered reading of Torres's songs and on-stage persona challenges the institutions that seek to diminish the voices of those that diverge from the norm, disrupting the script of the binary by presenting, either through sound or presence, that identity and presentation are ever-changing and intersectional performances. Aware of how intersectionality shapes every facet of personal experience, Torres's work takes inspiration from feminist theories, promoting social justice by using the narrative of her past to establish a way the future can reflect a broader and less constricting idea of self, while also giving power to those that are unable to publicly resist or speak upon their own adversity (see fig. 4).



(Fig. 4 "Revisited: The Jar Will Always Lift Again" Cover Photo, 2nd Jan 2019)

In her self-written article, “Revisited: The Jar Will Always Lift Again” the cover image of the article shows Scott wearing a t-shirt reading, “Diversity. Entitlement. Evidence-Based. Fetus. Science-Based. Transgender. Vulnerable.” This declarative shirt showcases how, as an artist, she is acutely aware of the public and social impact she has in using her power and privilege to promote discussions surrounding social issues that directly target women and the trans community. By using her image as Torres on stage, obscuring the performative nature of gender, while also explicitly defining her sexual intrigue, Scott’s balance of personalized storytelling mixed with her emotionally charged persona as Torres reshapes the way identity can be forged and crafted to reinvent and positively affirm personal discoveries, even if it challenges ingrained social codes.

Torres: The Body is the Bridge

Through the three records released, followed by numerous tour cycles, the evolution of Torres’s character, and Scott’s growing public image on social media, the artist has developed a message that encourages audiences and listeners to revere the capability of the body, mind, and spirit, even when these elements are not in cohesion with one another. The connectivity of music, soul, and body reinforces that the creative outlet of music builds upon the foundations of writers, poets, musicians, and the broader culture that is being experienced, diversifying the perspective and content often associated with the popular music. In her self-written article, Scott remarks that “I start to write once I’ve been made to feel powerless in some way; I like to subvert that and have the last word” (“The Jar Will Always Lift Again”), admitting that her music is her form of empowerment, providing her an outlet to cleanse the pervasive emotions that otherwise hinder her definition of self. In reference to the overt sexual nature of the song “Righteous Women” and

the reference to being an ‘ass man,’ Scott remarks in an interview with *Aquarium Drunkard* that “It makes me feel like I’ve taken back control of my own sexuality, which is not necessarily something that I ever felt was not within my control. I mean maybe a bit, but it’s mostly just nice to feel like I’m speaking for myself.” Much like young Jeanette in Winterson’s *Oranges*, a creation of fantastical space, through writing or performance, provides these artists an autonomous place of recognition for their identities. Rather than shying away from the taboo, or unconventional, Torres focuses on the sensual and universal experiences of touch and feeling to ground her lyrical narratives to have resonance with listeners.

Torres: Mouth the Source of Resistance

Acutely aware of how her artistic voice can be used to elevate those on the margins, Torres’s mouth and body becomes the source of resistance, unafraid to speak out against the way discrimination and privilege shape an individual’s life. In her self-written article, “The Jar Will Lift Again,” she ends the piece by stating that

Depression does not discriminate. It has no regard for social class, sexual orientation, gender identity, skin color, religious practice, political party, regional borders, or age, though any number of these factors have the potential to trigger or exacerbate a depressive bout. But please hear me: if and when it descends, like Sylvia Plath’s stifling bell jar, it’s a sure thing that it’s going to lift again. It’s always going to lift again.

In light of third-wave feminist ideals, Torres is affirming that systematically there are elements that are institutionalized used to diminish and hinder the voices of those on the margins, whether they be poor, queer, trans, etc. Despite these obstructions and injustices, there is power in uniting

and having personal faith in forward progression and improvement. Music and performance becomes a political act, challenging the status quo of restrictive social norms and political policies, particularly relevant to the LGBTQ+ community in Scott's case. Using her musical act to represent an unspoken narrative often left out of the music industry, trans and queer identity is pushed to the forefront of the stage and given proper space to be performed, unhindered by the expectation of socialized gendered norms. It is also of significance that Sylvia Plath's *Bell Jar* is alluded to both in this article and in Torres's song "To Be Given a Body." Alienation, isolation, and dissociation are introduced by the symbolic meaning of the bell jar. This suffocating and contained space, Scott reminds her readers, is temporary. In her closing song on her album *Three Futures* (2017) "To Be Given a Body," Torres sings,

To be given a body
 Is the greatest gift
 Though the jar lifts and the jar descends
 Though the morning glory withers
 Before it begins
 Though all creation groans (8-13).

Recorded in one take, and hymn-like with its melodies and repetitious verse and chorus, Torres's focus lies not with the isolation and restrictive nature of the 'jar', but instead with the gift of the body and its momentary pleasures in life. A type of equilibrium is reached between the raw unfiltered vocals and organ-like synth, infusing organic vocals with an experimental creation of smoothed over and pitched organ tones. This relationship between creative technological outlets combined with the realness of the body and voice defines her works, grounding all her songwriting and performances in the sensations and experiences of life, which is heightened

through the theatrics and emotional atmosphere created around the material with the use of amplifiers, guitar pedals, and her live production.

Personalizing and materializing her experiences through the production of the songs, the tactility and sensual nature of the lyrics and instrumentation evokes similar ideas seen in Winterson's *Written*, where the genderless narrator rationalizes their heartbreak and loss by rekindling memories and grounding them with the natural world. In her 2017 interview with *Vice*, Scott remarks that, "My whole life, I thought that—because of the way that I was taught[...] because of where I was raised, because of my gender, it all plays into it—I thought that the body was something to be overcome. That the flesh was something to be denied" ("The Art Rock Rebellion"). This conflict of expectation, in regards to sexuality and gender, fuels the creative work in which Torres emerges, serving as a physical embodiment of queer exploration and creativity. For artists like Winterson and Torres, the solution is not to forget the past, but to have power over words and memories, casting an image that better reflects an intersectional and diverse identity.

The symbolic use of food and pleasure is also another songwriting and literary element that Torres makes use of, affirming that the senses are prevalent in the art making process, working beyond the use of just sound and sight. The motif of food in songs, as seen in such song titles "Honey," "Tongue Slap Your Brains Out," and "Bad Baby Pie," giving her lyrical narrative a direct tie to environmental and familial attachment. In her self-written article, she states that

[My parents would] then soothe me, give me some water and maybe a banana to eat (food has generally been a comfort to me; I am deeply southern). My mom would scratch my back and sing soothing words of relief, and then maybe my dad would help me build a fort behind the couch, in which we would sleep together. I

would feel safe, but aware that the comfort of their security was but a temporary salve (“Revisited: The Jar Will Always Lift Again”).

Although the security and nourishment received from her parents was a fleeting solution to the existentialism she faced about mortality and identity, it helped craft a stronger foundation in appreciation for the material and tactile world, particularly when the mind was working against the body. Like in Winterson’s *Oranges*, the consumption of oranges, for young Jeanette, signifies a greater bond with her mother, regardless of the turmoil and angst they felt with one another. Despite the insecurity both Winterson’s young Jeanette and Torres faced within their young adult lives as lesbian/queer individuals, the lasting impact of this conflicted relationship with religious ideology, gender expectation helped form their respective modes of artistic creation and production.

Working and thinking in the abstract, this dissonance of classification and strict categorization is broken by Torres’s unique muse, inspired by taste and colors as much as she seeks influence from literary and personal histories. In her description of her album *Three Futures* (2017) she states that “I thought of colors: forest green and off-white. I thought of taste – instead of just using a guitar, I’d use a guitar pushed through a polyphonic octave generator so as to eventually, you sort of follow the trail in your head, it makes you feel like you’re eating peach cobbler” (“Torres: The Aquarium Drunkard Interview”). Beyond gendered politics and confronting queer stigmas through her music, Torres is also wildly distorting the use of traditional musical conventions, using the guitar and her voice as a vehicle to further project an emotional landscape in which listeners and audiences can fully immerse their senses. Creating such a space of artistic and unfiltered identity and emotion, diversity and the unconventional become celebrated and accentuated.

“Mother Earth, Father God” Conclusion:

With the rise of third-wave feminism in the 1980s, particularly since the release of Judith Butler’s theoretical work, *Gender Trouble* (1990), which discusses the performance of gender and binary expectation, feminist movements have begun establishing a broader notion of normative meanings of gender identity and sexuality. Since Butler’s early groundbreaking work, an explosion of critical and sociological interest has erupted in the unmooring of binary gender identities and (hetero)sexuality from traditionally fixed categories. With a growing influence of out and culturally defined queer and non-binary figures within current media, representation and affirmation of intersectional and fluid identity has become a more commonly discussed topic within popular media. In the past year, Tegan and Sara Quin, twin-sisters and pop-duo from Canada, published their memoir, titled *High School* (2019), documenting their separate tales of queer exploration and musical evolution in the 1990s as high school students. Although revisited nearly 30 years later, the narrative of these openly queer artists, much like their music, provides a varied perspective on coping with the anxieties of adolescence, particularly during an era that systemically ostracized and erased the queer experience. Through their remembrance of the past, their affirmation of authenticity and reverence for the voice of the youth establishes a new infusion of the arts, celebrating both the literary and musical modes of expression to validate their identity and experiences. In Teresa de Lauretis’s novel *Alice Doesn’t*, she states that “Narrative is international, trans historical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself” (103), articulating how the foundation of storytelling and narrative transcends any type of cultural or normative limitation, and lends itself to establishing a greater sense of collective consciousness and connectivity.

With the analysis of Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* and *Written on the Body* and Torres's three studio albums, *Torres* (2013), *Sprinter* (2015), and *Three Futures* (2017), these artists explore how religious expectations, sexual deviation, and queer breakthroughs served as their creative muse, propelling them to reconstruct and disassemble the social expectations of normative religious, gender, and sexual identity. The creation of the body and self, explored through Winterson's use of magical realism, and Torres's vulnerable exposition of self through her emotionally charged lyrics and graphically displayed broody stage presence helps audiences understand how the autonomy of thought, spirit, and body are liberating factors that can be used as tools to shatter the expectations of perceived cultural norms. Through Winterson and Torres's creative outlets, their art validates meaning, creating a literal and sonic space for underrepresented voices to see themselves as felt and heard. By examining the critiques made through the literature of Winterson and popular music of Torres, the evolving definitions of gender and sexuality are reframed in a way that showcase how these mediums are disruptive forces that give a voice to marginalized groups, unifying otherwise fragmented communities and urging for introspection to cause greater change for those underrepresented.

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