

Gender and Queer Theory in Modern Literature: A Study of Fluidity and Representation

Idrees Samir Deli

University Of Anbar / College Of Islamic Sciences

idrees.sameer@uoanbar.edu.iq

Abstract:

Over the last few decades of modern literature, it has been common to depict gender identity and sexual orientations within the context of LGBTQ plus and serve the society's changes and resisting the traditional perceptions of male and female. This paper looks at how the current authors; Jeanette Winterson and Maggie Nelson depict and complicate gendered binaries in their texts. According to the goals of the study, the choice of the authors and their works is designed to reveal how literature is a place from which the notion of gender and sexual identity is problematized and potentially deepened. Thus, the idea that can be considered as the foundation of this paper has to do with the interaction of the postmodern literary texts and queer/Gender Studies. Queer theory developed as an emergence of the study of sexuality of the LGBTQ+ community and feminism overturning the inversion of binary categories of identity. It is vital for understanding how gender and sexual diversity is represented and discussed in contemporary literature this theoretical framework. This paper's purpose is not a general exploration of contemporary literature, but specifically, to analyse which female authors and their books in particular have influenced the notion of gender and queer theory: Jeanette Winterson and Maggie Nelson. This involves analysing in what ways these authors depict gender fluidity, challenge gender conventions and portray/tackle issues affecting members of the LGBTQ+ community. This paper aims at explaining how literature mirror and at the same time act as a contributor to the definition of gender and sexuality in the current world. The research hypothesis that guides this study is that literature of the current generation specifically Winterson and Nelson contributes to reconstruction of the societal constructs of gender and sexualities. Through their interventions of complicated and often oppositional representations of gender fluidity /queer in their texts, these authors subvert rather fixed gender norms and assist in a cultural shift in understanding of self-

identity. Their literary analyses suggest that the text is informative of the concept of gender and queer theory in the society, and the role of literature in shaping or reflecting the society's perception.

Keywords : (*gender , identity , fluidity , sexual , modern*).

Introduction :

This shift in theoretical lens speaks a new way of looking at the gender and queer identity in the contemporary literature other than the binaries that have been long held culturally and literarily. More recently authors have started to subvert these norms and represent their characters and identities as rather fluid, which corresponds to the shift towards postmodern tolerance. Gender and queer theories will be used as lens through which an analysis of how literature documents and theorizes shifting paradigm of identity can be made. Through these theoretical frameworks, the readers and scholars will be able to understand how the modern literature problematise, challenge and [...]

By engaging these theoretical concepts, readers and scholars can understand the manner in which contemporary literature engages, challenges and subverts traditional notions of identity, gender and sexuality.

Gender theory can largely be attributed to the feminism theories which aimed at challenging the masculinity and other systems of gendered structures. This hasn't been done earlier, but for example in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* from 1949 there are early considerations as to what gender really means. For instance, de Beauvoir asserted an idea that 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman,' thus dissenting with the determinists who believed that a woman's fate was predetermined by her reproductive system (de Beauvoir's). This proposition that gender is a construct rather than individuals' ontology set the premise upon which other scholars such as Judith Butler was going to build on claiming that gender is not naturally given but socially constructed. Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990) conceived of gender as performative arguing that the category is created through performative acts or user repetitions (Butler, 1990). In literature, this theoretical allows one to understand how characters 'do' or 'undo' gender, thereby implying that gender is a social construction.

Other theorist such as bell hooks also advanced the scope of Gender theory by introducing factors such as colour, class and sexual desires into the Gender identification theories proffered by Butler. Hooks' work engulfs the view that gender cannot be looked at in isolation but has to be seen from top of other forms of social oppressions especially those faced by women of color (hooks, 1981). This intersectional approach have.also influenced modern literature in general and writers such as Toni Morrison and Audre Lorde especially in understanding the combined experience of racism and sexism. These authors, via the narratives, make the male readers aware of the existence of multiple experiences based on different intersectionality, hence denying clear distinctiveness of gender and race.

As with many critical theories, queer theory evolved in reaction to the norms with especial emphasize on the sexual. Coming into center stage in the last decades of the 20th century, queer theory aimed at negating the now polarized discourses of homosexuality and heterosexuality. Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* (1978) was however useful in the formation of queer theory as it posited that sexuality is a social construct influenced by power relations (Foucault 1978). Using Foucaults work on the social construction of sexuality and how institutions like medicine law and religion maintain and produce sexuality it was possible to advance sexuality from a structure that is defined by the opposition of two polar extremes. Queer theory therefore opposes a sexual 'normality' framework that has locked people into a permanent sexual identity.

Building upon these theories, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) discussed how the knowledge system created by the binaries of "in" and "out" (being closeted or being out) affects people's perception of sexual orientation (Sedgwick, 1990). Sedgwick stated that this binary either constructs people into heteros or homosexual, whereas erasing the dynamics of desire and attraction. Queer theory has been the perspective by which readers and academics can understand how authors depict queer sexualities, subvert normative heterosexual paradigm, and offer a voice to queer sexual subjects. The queer narratives from the novels featuring lesbianism such as Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985) and Sarah Waters' *Fingersmith* (2002) demonstrate how the binaries of identity can be subverted

With the coming of gender and queer theory the influences of such theories in the current literature works could also be felt. Gradually, these theories were started to be applied by many contemporary writers, and they presented heroes who can be considered as postmodern personalities which do not follow common cliches. For instance, Jeffrey Eugenides' *Middlesex* (2002) can be considered as the novel that is focused on the theme of gender and sexual bender. The principal character, Calliope/Cal, is intersexed and cal precisely the journey of personal transformation that leads towards the elimination of understanding and categorizing gender in binaries. Eugenides employs this role to bring out the reality that being gendered does not only depend on the physical genital but on other social, cultural, and psychological factors. Likewise, Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* published in 1928, can be read through the lenses of Gender and Queer theories even though the discourses became popular only in recent decades.. Woolf's protagonist, Orlando, transitions from male to female over the course of several centuries, suggesting that gender is not a fixed, inherent identity but one that is fluid and subject to change (Woolf, 1928). This fluidity reflects modern theoretical understandings of gender as performative and constructed.

Queer representation in contemporary literature is not limited to fictional its, there are autobiographical and experimental writing too. *Self-located Fun Home* : Alison Bechdel as a queer graphic memoirist covering the experience of growing up as a lesbian and the difficult father-daughter dynamic in the context of the author's household. I believe that Bechdel's visual and narrative strategies of dealing with coming out and living within a heterosexual/patriarchal family are rather profound. Likewise, Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts: A Memoir* (2015) is a memoir that includes queer theory, where Nelson discusses the relationship between her and her gender-nonconforming partner and pregnancy, and motherhood (Nelson, 2015). Thus, eschewing linear narrative styles, both Bechdel and Nelson challenge the ways in which queer subjectivity might be depicted while articulating the politics of embodiment, desire and kinship in queer multicultural context

When exploring how gender and queer theory has shaped modern literature it is possible to understand that such theory provides profound ways to navigating identity politics. From the perspective of these theories, literature is unveiled not simply as texts that mirror the life of society and its institutions, but as texts that offer a possibility for

analysing, subverting and thus reconstructing the predominant social rules and regulation. As for such types of characters as those who question the stabilities of gender and sexual preferences, modern literature supports the initiatives of society that seeks recognition and appreciation of diverse types of identity. Thus the analysis of gender and sexual fluidity in literature persists as a necessity as they become more present in pop culture and academic studies

Gender and Queer Theory: A Theoretical Framework

Gender theory and queer theory have been the dominant discourses in comprehending identity, sexuality and power in literature with the assistance of readers and scholars. The gender theory stems from the feminism school of thought, and originally evolved as a method of deconstructing patriarchy, as well as the understanding of gender as a simple binary. This theoretical approach developed also meant that the very concept of identity adopted a more complex and fluid set of definitions reflecting upon how identity is constructed, performed and controlled by social institutions. At the same time, queer theory appeared as the reaction to both feminist and traditional definitions of sexuality, which were set to eliminate norms that define sexual orientation only in binary ways. Combined with this approaches, these two theoretical concepts permit presenting the modern literature works as dynamic and shift-changing processes of identity and representation construction.

Gender theory can be regarded as elaborated upon the basis of early feminism, which criticised the naturist perspective on the concept of gender as a biological construct. This attitude that was formulated by early feminism theorists such as de Beauvoir was a major breakthrough that oriented the concentration on social and cultural reasons behind gendered characteristics. In *The Second Sex* (1949) de Beauvoir suggested that there exists an essentialization of the category 'woman' through the process of socialisation; the existential Declaration: "One is not born but rather becomes a woman" (de Beauvoir, 1949). From this assertion, other feminist theorists rose to compels the credibility of the binary male-female gender system arguing that gender is not a stable but a process in any given society. One of the most important matters of fact proposed by combating the concepts of male/female was the opinion of De Beauvoir about the fact that differentiate between manner masculine/feminine was socially constructed.

Subsequently, Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) shifted the conversation even further via the introduction of the idea of gender performance. It was for this reason that Butler noted that gender is not an innate trait, which is expressed as an actualization of a true self but it is an enactment of coherent set of theatrical behaviours and practices that are prescriptive in nature (Butler, 1990). These performances are expected due to the gender roles assigned to each person whereby the boys are expected to be strong and dominant while the girls are expected to be submissive, emotionally fragile and weak. In doing the performances therefore, such an individual is actually reproducing the gender dichotomy he claims to be resisting. This perspective warmly embraced by Butler paved way to a new interpretation regarding gender as something that is movable and situational rather than solid and fixed. In the context of the literature, this particular theory makes it possible to introduce the characters who are either bisexual or changing sex during the story time.

Moreover, one of the most significant benefits of gender theories is their capacity to reveal by means of which power relations gender is controlled. Based on Foucault's view of power as a dispersal of relations of power, Butler claims that those institutions regulate gendered performances that enforce heteronormativity (Butler 1990, Foucault 1978). For example, texts representing, or characters who experiencing nonheteronormative sexual identity or gender expression always depict societal repercussions of rebellion against the norms. Such novels include Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* (1977) where elemental changes and rebellion against conventions of sexuality are depicted. In Carter's work, the main character is subjected to a forced sex change operation and the novel looks at how society exercises domination over the body thus supporting Butler's view that gender is policed by power (Carter, 1977). Here, I identify some complexities and probable questions that such narratives pose to the readers concerning the naturalness of gender and the possibility of socially constructed gender subjects.

Where as gender theory was historically interested in how gender was constituted through cultural representation, queer theory brought in an interest in sexuality and how heteronormative forms of power managed desire. Gaining its foundation in post structuralism, queer theory disputes the notion that identities especially the sexual ones are easily located and constant. However, the queer theory does not reject the construct of sexuality as fixed, categorical, and binary: heterosexual/homosexual,

normal/abnormal, but is defined as an epistemological procedure that tries to blur the differences and categories. Foucault in his work 'The History of Sexuality' published the same year moved the understanding of sexuality from biology to discourse by positing that sexuality is a construct of the power relations (Foucault, 1978). For example, Foucault showed that there was no such thing as the 'sexual identity' until it was constructed through power and knowledge in the modern world.

Continuing from the works attributable to Foucault, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick was to emerge as the postmodern queer theorist. Sedgwick put forward that such clear-cut division as heterosexual/homosexual is in fact socially constructed to reinforce power relations in Epistemology of the Closet (1990). Sedgwick pointed that the division which is made between „being in“ or „out“ of an objectified closet prejudices public understanding of desire and sexual orientation. In queer theory then, the self is a variable entity, and therefore, one is as much a homosexual, bisexual, heterosexual, or transsexual, as the next person. Literature especially serves the purpose of providing such examples where authors blur and break characters and narratives.

Apart from challenging sexual binarism, queer theory interrupts the heteronormative framework within which literary production happens. Heteronormativity, a concept made most widely known by queer theorist Michael Warner, looks at the presumption that being straight is the standard sexual orientation with other orientations being considered as freakish. This assumption is common in most of the Western-produced literature since heteronormative relationships are considered normal, Agree, and LGBTQ+ people are either erased from or described in negative terms. But in today's literature those norms are not propagated so rigidly and the portrayal of sexuality is far more complex having variations of types. For example, controversy of lesbianism is depicted in Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges are Not The Only Fruit* (1985) which also portrays the growing up of a young lesbian woman in religious community of radicals where heterosexuality is forced (Winterson, 1985). Trough the novel, Winterson's presents reader with the opportunity to challenge the given sexual identify of the individual.

Intersectionality, which has been conceptualized by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw also has significantly enriched both gender and queer theory. Intersectionality can therefore be defined as the interaction that is between the two orthogonal systems of oppressions,

namely, matrix of domination and Matrix of Exploitation and Dominion and how these interactions create subject/objects (1999:Crenshaw). When used in the context of gender and queer theory, intersectionality enables the examination of a number of dimensions and come up with an understanding of how these various dimensions shape a person's existence. For instance, Audre Lorde and Cherríe Moraga have provided narratives through which the multiplicity of the racist gender and sexually discriminated woman of color disrupts fetal and queer politics of identity. Lorde's *Zami: Autobiographical and fictional creative writings* include *The Story of A New Name* (1982) – by Audre Lorde, and *Loving Year in the War* (1983), By Cherrie Moraga – combine lesbian and black identity (Lorde 1982, Moraga 1983). If the above stated works were to be taken, then we shall establish that intersectionality can be used as a way of strengthening the identification of the representations of identity in literature.

Both **gender and queer theory** encourage us to question fixed categories of identity, recognizing that gender and sexuality are socially constructed, performative, and regulated by power structures. These theoretical frameworks are invaluable for analyzing modern literature, where authors increasingly engage with themes of fluidity, resistance, and marginalization. By applying gender and queer theory to literature, scholars and readers can explore how texts challenge normative assumptions, represent marginalized voices, and imagine alternative ways of being. In doing so, these theories open up new possibilities for understanding the complexities of human identity in all its fluid and multifaceted forms.

Gender Fluidity in Modern Literature

This prompted the coming up of gender fluidity, which has slowly found its way into both everyday usage and literary works since the traditional gender roles are being eroded. This is not to suggest that gender fluidity in modern texts is simply an artistic response to emerging new culture and fresh outlooks on the concept of gender, it is rather an important instrument for critical analyses of the self, body and culture. Instead of using gender roles, male and female, authors are introducing readers to the variety of gender identity, which combines opposites into a single spectrum, and therefore provides readers with works that emphasize the changeability of gender identity. In these literary representations, the modern literature does not only reflect contemporary practices that

have admitted gender fluid people but also, it suggests expanding the criticism about the conventional representations of identity and its main dichotomy – gender.

In its simplest concept, gender fluidity is an idea that completely negates the two-gender structure but puts forward the idea for men and women to change gender, be of multiple genders, or have no gender at all. This concept is often employed in relation to more conventional concepts of gender in which the latter is seen as an essential attribute of an individual that is fixed by one's sex. The growing social and literary representation of gender fluidity as an acceptable position adequately inscribes the postmodern theorem of deconstruction of hegemonic compounded and binary world where categorical concepts such as gender, race and sexual orientations have been prolonged by contemporary theorists such as Judith Butler. In recent years, Judith Butler, a post modern theorist has noted that gender is not an essentialism; which implies that gender is performative and normalization so that when the concept of the performativity of gender is made, then one is in a position to understand the fluidity of identity (Butler, 1990). One writer has been more explicit in revealing how literary works has been instrumental in articulating the identity of non-binary and gender-fluid people in the society particularly in raising questions regarding the nature of people as supplied by the society. Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: A Biography* (1928) by Renee Vivien is the work that can be referred to as the pioneers of works with references to gender perversion. In Woolf's novel *Orlando*, the protagonist is a man at the start of the novel; by the middle of the book, he wakes up a woman. Here, Woolf does not present this gender anamorphosis as a problem or as a source of uncertainty; on the contrary, she writes regarding Orlando's character development as if it is a normal thing, which makes it possible for her both to conceptualise gender and sex more like a fluid and changeable rather than a rigid concept (Woolf, 1928). Gender fluidity in Woolf's *Orlando* also explores issues related to the gender that was pioneered by Judith Butler and Susan Stryker and is considered to be modern.

Another text that explores the theme of gender fluidity is Jeffery Eugenides' *Middlesex* (2002) that recounts the life of a person named Cal who was born intersexual and raised as a girl, Calliope before transforming into a male. Thus, Eugenides, in his storyline, shows the reader not only the ins and outs of being intersex but also how gender is a combination of both a biological factor and social construct. These themes are portrayed

through Cal's coming-of-age and are one of the transforming the world into a place that can only understand two types of gender, while at the same time embracing the beauty of trying to escape those restraints (Eugenides, 2002). Cal's story makes Middlesex deal with the issues of change, personalities, and opposition between the conventional norms and individual experience. This is in contrast to traditional gender roles that are so clearly defined and distinctly in Eugenides' portrayal of a mixed sexed/main character, the new representations of genders and identities are complex and progressive. Gender fluidity has also been explored severally in science fiction and speculative fiction, especially due to the possibility that anything can be imagined when it comes to gender. Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) is one of the most acclaimed works of this type of science fiction which describes the world of Gethen where people are ambisexual, they are able to change their sex if they need it for reproduction purpose. That is the reason while in Gethenian society gender is not considered as a part of identity instead it is mutable depending on the biological and social conditions. As such, Le Guin challenges readers to envision a society with no stereotyped gender roles and where the flexible categorisation of individuals is welcomed and become a structure of society (Le Guin, 1969). The novel by Le Guin forces the reader to think about gender stereotypes and to accept the fact that gender is not a permanent fixed category. Likewise, Butler's *Wild Seed* (1980) also brings out a plot, which tries to solve the issues of the gender swap and genderlessness. However, in Butler's novel the character Anyanwu, a shapeshifter who undergoes transformations not only as to the form but position in the gendering system as well. In all the parts of the narrative, Anyanwu transforms from male to female and the reverse at different junctures to show that gendered body is flexible and not a rigid structure (Butler, 1980). The process of shape-shifting challenges the more fixed and biological concept of gender that has come to be more aligned with a more fluid and adaptable one. Thus, Butler's work represents posthumanism as imagination of unrealised possibility of gender mobility and spatiality, which envisions the future where fluidity of gender is not an aberration, but a norm.

Recently, non-binary and gender fluid characters are frequently described and included in the literature, especially where the focus is placed on the subjects of minorities. For instance, Akwaeke Emezi's *Freshwater* (2018) uses Nigerian setting focusing on a young woman named Ada and her body contains multiple spirits some of which are binarily gendered or genderless. Slaying of the novel is identity, body and mind, which the book

situates as cultural and spiritual issues regarding Ada's non-binary gender (Emezi 2018, p.23). I would also like to admit that one of the strong points of Emegi's work is the inclusion of non-binary and gender-fluid people in modern literature and giving references to intersectionality of gender identity with race, culture, and spirituality. Through presenting gender fluidity within a larger context of self and spiritual change, Freshwater enlarges the gendered potential of literature.

Besides, characters that are queer, as well as women and people of color, are getting more visibility in modern young adult novels that allow the young readers to see themselves in the characters. In Juno Dawson's *The Gender Games* (2017) the author/speaker straightforwardly and passionately addresses the topic of gender and the difficulties implied by living in a society divided into binary genders. Although Dawson shares a very personal story and makes her journey a representation for many of the modern people, her memoir is also painfully subversive in revealing the contemporary gender norms (Dawson, 2017). Books for young adults are especial significant for the way younger generations learn about and engage with gender; the inclusion of nonbinary and gender-nonconforming characters into literature rises the question about acceptance of such identities in society.

Intersectionality is a crucial aspect in the portrayal of the theme of gender fluidity in literature since most modern literature authors always focus on how gender fluidity interacts with other forms of diversity such as the racial, the economic or the sexual. For example, Maggie Nelson's *'The Argonauts'*, published in 2015 discusses gender and science, and the narrator's own gender-less partner, as well as issues of pregnancy and motherhood, which brings into question the very concept of what it even means to be gendered and fluid (Nelson, 2015). Nelson's work undermines conventional binarized perception of gender roles as well as the concept of family. By integrating auto-ethnography and the evaluation of concepts of queer theory, *The Argonauts* is primarily an attempt to explain how gender fluidity can look like in practice.

Thus, the modern presentation of gender fluidity in literature not only mirrors the cultures' general trends toward the inclusion of gender minorities but is also capable of distinguishing between the essentialist viewpoints that embed gender binarism into people's minds. Authors use their stories to subvert the ontological presuppositions that

govern a conventional subjectivation of the human being and genderisation of existence which is no longer fixed and stable in the contemporary culture. This reveal has come as an important element of society and literature and as the representation of gender fluidity becomes more widespread within the literary sphere and society as a whole these stories will remain paramount in understanding the concepts of identity and the self as well as the embodiment.

LGBTQ+ Representation in Contemporary Fiction

The appearance of the LGBTQ+ in contemporary fiction has been more evident in the current generation in prejudice of the overall demographic changes of the society in accepting individuals of different sexual orientations and gender identity. It not only gives representation for groups that suffer from oppression and invisibility, but interrupts literary history, which has all too frequently excluded and misrepresented queerness. Thus, queerness and especially contemporary fiction has become an area where the issues of identity, love, and community of the LGBTQ+ people, as well as the members of this community who write their books or whose books are published by other authors, are welcome and expanding more and more. But the visibility of queer characters and storylines in popular fiction is not without its drawbacks, which include concerns of legitimacy, Representation, and the dangers of queer characters being simply productized.

In the past challenges have been associated with the LGBTQ+ representation within literary works. It was not until the late 1990s that viewers saw positive depictions of queer characters with the show Ellen that featured the story of a middle-aged woman who comes out of the closet after adjusting to her divorce. For instance, although The Picture of Dorian Gray (1890) by Oscar Wilde is an influential novel that bears a homosexual theme, the novel can be contentious since the treatment of queerness is actually mixed with moral penalty at the end (Wilde, 1890). In the same manner, Radclyffe Hall's The Well of Loneliness (1928), one of the first known lesbians' novels, presents the main character, Stephen, as the tortured and rather hopeless personality (Hall, 1928). While these texts can indeed be clearly dubbed as the first works that tried to somehow address queer experience, they clearly echoed the societal perception of homosexuality as some kind of perversion or pathology.

The emergence of Queer theory and the political activism associated with claiming the rights for the LGBTQ+ community in the late twentieth century led to dramatic shifts in the position of the LGBTQ+ characters in the fiction. Writers started to question why

queer characters are always cast as victims or get punished, and wrote about the joyful complex, and inclusive LGBTQ+ experience. For instance, James Baldwin's drama *Giovanni's Room* (1956) can be discussed as one of the most stimulating works that provide the representation of same-sex love and desire alongside with the topics of race, identity, and otherness. Baldwin's novel remains as one of the earliest successes in the literature from the marginalised queer point of view to tell the readers that love between two people of the same genders is not shameful and must not be portrayed as the great tragedy (Baldwin, 1956). In tracing Baldwin's negotiation of sexuality and loneliness he offered a route to queerness that refused the duality of the lonely and inauthentic earlier works.

Over the last decades, there has been a steady increase in the quota of the portrayal of homosexuals in the fiction genre with writers from different background and heritage producing multiple-dimensional depiction of gay life. Undoubtedly, the shift to the critical focus on intersectionality can be regarded as one of the most notable trends in modern centrality qt-LGBTQfiction. More, this would be in concord with Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality paradigm (1989) arguing that peoples' experience of subordination or their personal identity cannot be extracted from other categories of existence, such as race, class, or gender. As such, the contemporary fiction about the queer populations embraces this notion by indicating how the gay subjectivity is constructed due to the webbing of other social variables. For example, Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019) include several characters that self-identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community and who undergo various or- -decker traumas based on their race, gender, and class. *Siku kwa siku*, novel ya Evaristo has no haus of accepting an idea of 'one way' of being queer which works against the diversity within the community (Evaristo, 2019).

In the same manner, there is Ocean Vuong's novel, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* (2019), which addresses queer people of color experiences and the immigrant's life, focusing on a gay Vietnamese American protagonist who has to discover himself. The so-called magical realism, therefore, contains messages of the struggle and joy of being a queer Vietnamese-Australian male in multifaceted ways Vuong describes, how queer experiences are intertwined with other facets of one's living condition (Vuong, 2019). Thus, invited the narratives of queer professionalism from immigrant or non-Western subjects, contemporary fictions have decentralised the white, cisgender narratives in the promises of the LGBTQ+ literature.

Besides the queer of color critique, the contemporary queer/LGBTQ+ fiction is also concerned with the challenges that the gender fluidity and non-binary pose to the

narrative. A more recent example is Akwaeke Emezi's *Freshwater* that was published in 2018, where non-binary protagonist is in the states of multiple genders and grapples with the existence in the body based on the Igbo spiritualism. In completely dismantling western binaries of gender, Emezi's writing masters identity as multiple, plural and defined by culture and spirituality as well as the spiritual realm (Emezi, 2018). This switching of narrative perspective not only expands the territory of the literary works belonging to LGBTQ+ fiction but still testifies to the impact of postcolonial and/or decolonial approaches on the contemporary works. Through Imoigenity, Indigenous and non-Western epistemologies of sex/gender, Emezi is creating a comparatively diverse conceptual vocabulary for queerness.

Paradoxically, the positive representation of homosexuality in fiction is addressed to contemporary culture including the processes of the politics of visibility impact. With an enhancement in the visibility of the queer identities in media, there is a need to portray characters of the queer community in a positive manner. This has led to the development of queer romance and young adult fiction where they have embraced the message of the lgbtq+ narratives as a theme of love, hope and transformation. More recent gay themed movies include Becky Albertalli's young adult novel *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens agenda* (2015), which was adapted into the movie *Love, Simon* (2018) presenting instead queer coming of age narratives of joy and acceptance of identity unlike the earlier portrayal of gay characters as unhappy or dying (Albertalli, 2015). Likewise, Alice Oseman's *Heartstopper* series (2019) has become notable for giving(+) a very beautiful representation of homosexual romance between two teenage boys, thus making a contribution to young-adult realistic fiction literature emphasizing positive portrayal of queer characters (Oseman, 2019).

But this move to the centre has not without the controversies in the community about transparency issue and the issue of homonormativity. Lisa Duggan in her 2002 piece has noted homonormativity as the assimilation of LGBTQ+ identities to the acceptable mainstream culture erasing political possibilities associated with queer. This critique is particularly timely given how the visibility and sales potential of queer characters in fiction increases: publishers look for stories that embody queer identity that fit the #ownvoices and Hallmark Channel model. The problem with the push for diverse representation is that it perhaps falls into the risk of becoming pure tokenism and, in the process, can end up silencing more nuanced, rebellious, or just plain old critical queer narratives. One of the biggest challenges in LGBTQ+ fiction subjects the younger and more diverse genre risking to focus too much on the assimilation, the idea of the

uncomfortable queer characters trying to fit into the hegemonic mainstream rather than telling the audiences tales of defiance and the continued injustices faced by queer folk.

Modern queer writers are gradually addressing these issues by producing books which do not offer easily consumable representations of queer existence. Paul Takes the Form of a Mortal Girl (2017), written by Andrea Lawlor is a perfect example where the author using queer theory regarding gender fluidity as well as dream like magical realism to depict the position of queers in a context that tries to categorize them. In Lawlor's novel, the main character Paul can change the gender and this enables the novel to discuss gender and desire in a way that is different than in normal novels (2017). In the same way, Maggie Nelson's nonfiction book *The Argonauts* (2015) combines memoir and theory to focus on queerness, family, and fluidity while not fitting neatly into categories of either and refusing to present normative understanding of gender and/or sexuality (Nelson, 2015). These works stand in line with the contemporary trends in the literature of the queer experience of formal innovation and hybridization in attempting to cover increasingly diverse and atypical experiences.

Thus, it can be stated that representation of LGBTQ+ characters in fiction will only develop in the future as more people come out and as more tolerance is accepted in society. Some change has occurred in the prominence of the stories by authors that are part of the LGBTQ+ community; especially those who identify as trans and non-binary are becoming part of the mainstream writers in the narrative. For example, Torrey Peters' *Detransition, Baby* (2021) presents the experience of a twosome trans womynism and a cis womynism through three major characters, partnership, gender self-identification and motherhood (Peters, 2021). Comparing to the simple stories of transition which can be found in some other contemporary fictions, Peters' novel shows how diverse and complex trans identities are, as the novel presents a reader with a non-trivial and deeply individual life of trans person.

However, as fiction in relation to sexuality and gender beefs up its connection to speculative and science fiction, writers will implement such genres to create so-called 'preferred' fantasy worlds in which gender and sexual orientation are rearranged to constructive or destructive ends. 'Science fiction allows future queer and gender-diverse narratives where, although they are oppressed, characters are able to find ways of escape and fighting for their identities,' (Anders 2016; Solomon 2017). This speculative turn in LGBTQ+ fiction is indicative of the continued potential for literature to ask new questions

in light of and towards the development of queer existence in spite of the hurdles of society.

Therefore, contemporary fiction presents an effete lthough still a limited and certainly flawed picture of queer existence, portraying it as diverse, evolving and complex. The evolution of the forms of LGBTQ authors' works as part of their fundamental impact on the literature is the prospects of queer fiction, which will remain constantly progressive in terms of both narrative and representation.

Challenging Traditional Gender Norms in Literature

The questioning of gender roles in modern literature is therefore a reflection of the culture and the society where people are now questioning some of the traditional practices such as the construction of masculinity and femininity and the roles which these inference put on the individuals. They are founded on the old hegemonic models of sexual distinctiveness: where men are supposed to embody power, aggression, and reason, and women – subordination, passion, and nurturance. A realm that is capable of provoking, disrupting, and renegotiating cultural norms, literature has been an ideal territory for such investigations long before the contemporary attempts at gender mainstreaming. The characters of the modern authors have been questioning the norms of gender much more actively and offering more complex and multi-levelled images of gender representations.

Regarding the subjects of gender representations, one of the first and merriest challenges to traditional gender roles are the works of late 19th-early 20-century feminist writers whose works describe the oppression of women by a patriarchal society. Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) is usually discussed under this aspect because of the author's insistence on the need for financial freedom and a space of one's own for women writers to create. Portrait and its author Woolf condemn the stereotypical roles assigned to the women mainly to stay at home and be confined hence denying them the opportunity to be intellectual and creative (Woolf, 1929). Still, by drawing attention to the oppressive nature of such norms she also emphasizes how they exclude women from the public and the intellectual life. Thus, Woolf's work can be seen to challenge early and obvious narratives that portray women as inherently suited for domesticity consequently

providing a roadmap for later feminists writing to examine the psychological and social effects of gender oppression.

Likewise, a rather fuller application of similar issues can be found in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892). Because of her husband and doctor's decision to keep her locked inside her bedroom under the pretence of treatment for a terminal illness the protagonist increasingly turns into a psychotic figure. Gilman's story subverts the prevailing medical and cultural discourses of the nineteenth century and the culture beliefs about women as the 'weaker sex' on one hand and as potential lunatics, in need of male control, on the other (Gilman, 1892). However, accepting the suitability of the life given by the society, the protagonist remains a prisoner of those restrictive gender norms and, through her tragic death, Gilman shows the destructive potential of such norms and the need to fight against them.

Gradually, with the change in the sociology of gender in relation to different waves of feminism, the male sex was also involved in the reading or becoming an object of fictional male gender studies. Today, many writers have attempted to recapture gender stereotype and portray male characters who do not conform with strength, emotionlessness and aggression. In his debut novel *Fight Club* from 1996 Chuck Palahniuk examines the collapse of manliness in the America of the last century, focusing on how men are stranded between the roles of male chauvinists and the new, enlightened, gentlemen. For example, the main character tries to find his manhood thru the fight club where men beat the other in order to overcome what the author has described as a consumer-oriented and effeminate culture (Palahniuk, 1996). Still, it is necessary to note that, in fact, Palahniuk's novel is a satire that targets the seemingly liberating, yet in fact counterproductive and damaging, notion of hypermasculinity. Thus, the film *Fight Club* undermines the stereotype associated with masculine roles and shooting them down attributing the male identity to a much more complex perspective.

For example, in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) the issue of the interrelation between race and gender roles is highly pertinent. Through depiction of Sethe, a black woman, who was once a slave, Morrison's novel subverts the conventional gender roles domain by painting Sethe as a woman who is hyperprotective of her daughter and, at the same time, is a matriarchal woman who does not need a man. Through incanting the bloody

scene where Sethe killed her own child to save her for the torturers of slavery, Morrison portrays a black female character who is embracing a role quite contrary to the American dream of being a woman who is defined by her responsibilities to take care of her offspring. That is why Morrison's novel reveals how slavery and racism are intertwined with gender, thus disputing any simplistic classification of the and female/motherly roles in American society. Thus, by not conforming to the expected role of a woman, a wife, and a mother, Sethe ascends to the level of a hero/ine and becomes a purely positive character.

Queer literature has also been instrumental in problematizing the assumption of the hegemonic sexual and gender regimes through questioning piercing many of the standard gender norms. Other queer theorists particularly the post modernist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick have pointed out the argument that male/female or heterosexual/homosexual as classifications are social constructions which are put in place in order to ensure that people abide by certain set standards or rather to ensure that desires of individuals are controlled or rather channelled in the right direction (Sedgwick, 1990). In literature and other forms of art, queer literature writers have resisted such categorizations by depicting characters that blur the lines between male and female, masculine and feminine, straight and gay. It is popularly illustrated by Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body* first published in 1992 and whose narrator's sex is never stated. Thus, Winterson denies readers from coming up with stereotypical notions of gendered bodies and the relationships they imply, and also restricts the contemplation of the narrator's feelings and interactions from the preconceived notions about male/ female roles (Winterson, 1992). By using this kind of narrative technique, Winterson also disapproves gender as the essential constituent part of any identity or desire, and if so, love and attraction can be felt and shared despite any gender labeling.

Transgender narrative have thus emerged as a critical area in the literary battle against imposed gender prejudices. One of the more pioneering novels is Imogen Binnie's *Nevada*, which published in 2013, is a story of a transsexual woman Maria, living in New York. Maria's story challenges a 'transition narrative,' that is normally centered on the process of changing one's sex from the male sex to the female sex. Instead, *Nevada* explores the possibilities of being a trans woman in a post modern world which is still gendered in a very binary way (Binnie, 2013). Binnie does this by pointing to the fact that even

supposedly progressive discourses of gender still police the bodies of trans individuals in part by discussing gender through the metaphor of a journey from one stable identity to another. Instead, Nevada performs concerns of gender identity in ways that do not entail an understanding of a 'correct' version of a male or female self that one is supposed to find, but rather presents the multi-faceted and more nuanced exploration of gender.

As narrated in this speculative fiction, different worlds and future have been widely employed by writers to pose and problematize male pronated gender trends. In her sci-fi book *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) Marge Piercy portrays the actually existing society in which male and female roles do not exist. It is a world where there is no division between male and female people and pronouns are used nondiscriminatorily and all sexual splits of work with babies to the governing bodies are divided equally between people (Piercy, 1976). This vision of society presented by Piercy subverts the given culture's belief system regarding gender roles, which Society makes people believe are innate and unchangeable. It encourages readers to think about society outside of gender norms, about people's identity and work roles, defeating the notion of gender divided into male and female.

Modern literature also has a complicated struggle with traditional gender roles and roles that are expected of gendered beings, and it is impossible not to mention the intersectionality of identity, where gender cannot be considered separately from race, class, sexual orientation, and disability. In this respect, Audre Lorde has been especially helpful since she examines her black lesbian feminism in her poetry and essays. In her collection titled *Sister Outsider* published in 1984, Lorde is critical of the feminism and civil right activism movements for erasing the black women experiences from the two movements arguing that black women are not only black but are women and hence they are oppressed on both fronts (Lorde, 1984). Through this, Lorde's work deconstructs the notion of the existence of a singular 'construction of woman' or the general oppression of the 'woman of color' or the gender oppressed. Continuing in the tradition of the second wave feminists, her writing adds to the discussion of gender, especially multiplicity of oppression informing gender.

A subversion of gendered discourses in literature is therefore not a matter of deconstructing binary gender, or essentializing fluidity; it is a matter of understanding

how power operates to construct such gender and work to maintain it, and how subjects navigate such a symbolic economy. Atwood (1985) portrays Gileadean society in *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) by strictly defining gender roles and subjugating women to be fertile vessels in line with state desire. But perhaps, most importantly, Atwood's novel is a story about rebellion as the characters manage to subvert the gender roles assigned to them in one way or another, from minor rebellion to attempts at running away. Thus, *The Handmaid's Tale* demonstrates how oppression of the female gender is maintained through controlling women's reproductive rights as well as explaining how women can resist these attempts and gain their identity to the world.

Today, gender remains a topical issue which actively evolved and explored in the context of the modern world in the literature and media hence, literature remains a rich source of unique perspectives and perspectives on identity, power, and subservience. Gone are the days of 'boys will be boys' or 'girls are delicate' or even the 'woman power' that was branded for a certain type of feminism — the introduction of both Feminist and Queer theories and Trans literature has made it possible for authors to liberate the idea of being human, from the shackles of a gender biased culture and present genders in a constantly evolving spectrum.

The Future of Gender and Queer Theory in Literature

Since gender and queer theory in literature can still develop a plethora of new ideas, interpretations and application of those theories are conducive to encouraging new perspectives and advancements. With the shift in awareness concerning issues of gender, identity and sexuality literature is now broadly regarded as a path through which to examine these changing paradigms. Gender and queer theory have already permeated literature and changed the manner in which literary works are produced and analyzed and as these frameworks are extended the ways in which which they expound on identity, power and resistance will surely transform literature as well. As for gender and sexuality, they argue that new literary production should handle themes such as fluidity and even intersectionality and non-normative identity more directly, so that readers get the idea of what gender and sexuality can be in its broadest sense.

Although gender and queer theory formed the crux of the literary studies in the representation of gender in the future, the role of binary gender construction, therefore,

is not yet over. In other words, the modern queer theory which has been pioneered by Judith Butler and others scholars has already problematized the idea of gender as a fixed structure with two categories that correspond to biological sex respectively (Butler, 1990). Subsequent to this, authors will be more encouraged to address issues of gender mainly the construction of gender and its inclusiveness based on the notion of fluidity, multiplicity and performativity. As literature unfolds in the future, authors will depict more of non-binary, genderqueer and other gender fluid characters, who do not fit in the bracket of either male or female. In this sense, the explored characters and their live stories will again present readers with new methods to define a subject and discuss their uniqueness, as well as the connection between the self and the society, as well as between the body and the identity it pronounces.

In this vein, the use of intersectionality as one of the important theoretical concepts will also define the further development of gender and queer theory in literature. More specifically, intersectionality refers to the idea by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) who denotes how various categories of identity are interconnected with one another, in terms of oppression or privilege on the individual level. Subsequent work will continue to depict the schemas of queer and gender diverse people, especially when writers from the most excluded groups will be at the forefront. As such, current authors like Akwaeke Emezi, the author of the novel *Freshwater* (2018) and Ocean Vuong, the author of the poetry collection *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* (2019) have shown that literature can portray what it means to exist in between the worlds. For instance, *Freshwater* by Emezi is a novel that focuses on spirituality, mental health and non-binary ways of fleshing out the characters; and in this case, beyond the ways in which those concepts are interpreted in the West (Emezi, 2018). Thus, it is possible that in the future gender and queer theory in literature will be represented by the works that would not only focus on nonnormative gender, but also on the role of the culture, location, and history that form the individual.

The last important subject flowing through the future of gender and queer theory in literature is transhumanism as technology becomes a significant factor of identity transformations. Feminism and the interaction of human and technology as seen in *Cyborg Manifesto* by Donna Haraway will become more prevalent as literature will incorporate the ideas of cyborg, which actually means a half-human, half- machine creature. Speculative fiction and science fiction will probably give expression to these

explorations for the simple reason that the authors imagine societies in which the corporeal self and by extension, the gender, is indistinct or even eliminated. It seems that Haraway's cyborg as a being that is half machine and half organism is already in the process of being depicted in literary works like Ann Leckie's *Ancillary Justice* (2013), where the main characters can actually switch between multiple bodies, effectively eradicating even gendered differences as a concept (Leckie, 2013). More broadly, there is a degree of uncertainty in this male-identifying protagonist and queer undertone of this narrative seeking posthuman and transhuman spaces to push beyond the notion of the gendered body and argue against binarism.

Besides, gender and queer theory in literature in the future will likely show more focus toward queer temporality, a concept that negates the norms of time and progression especially in matters to do with life phases, relationships and the formation of an individual. As argued by such scholars as Elizabeth Freeman, queer time deviates from the life cycle beginning with birth, proceeding through marriage and reproduction, and ending at death – a cycle that was traditionally considered heterosexual. Queer temporalities in literature are an example of otherness where oppressed and marginalized subjects are forced to have dysfunctional experiences so as to 'behave' as per the standards of proper temporal progression set by the society. Subsequent works, alongside Nelson's *The Argonauts* published in 2015, that also endeavours on the cultures of queer belonging and the blurriness of identity in the future will interrogate the norms of family making and life pattern (Nelson, 2015). They will probably expand if more authors look into the non-teleological and cyclic nature of the queer and gender-diverse subjects' existence.

Also, as the world becomes globally integrated, more and more literature works will depict non- Western culture 's perception of gender and sexual orientations. The assimilation of people from Indigenous, South Asia and African descent into the Western gender binary are quite recent. For instance, the Hijra of South Asia and the Two-Spirit people of many indigenous cultures provide historical account of gender creativity or non-binary individuals. Every time modern authors of these origins publish more, their creation will enrich the range of perceptions on gender that is traditional within the communities a in literature. Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* (1994) which depicts the

struggles of queerness and cultural identity in Sri Lanka can be considered as one of the earliest of such attempts and the future literature will further develop on these lines.

The future development of queer theory within literary analysis will also relate to the role of representing politics as well as the role of identity politics. Considering that own voices are gaining a priority attention now, the literature by queer and gender-diverse authors will be an indispensable tool to influence how such identities are depicted. This demand for queering and diversification of representation is important as it has already helped grant the marginalized visibility in the media. As bad as it may sound, representation does not only refer to visibility; as Sara Ahmed (2006) has noted, the how of occupying cultural space. Subsequent works are likely to explore the concept of an even more imperative need to ensure that queer as well as gender-diverse people write the stories without tokenization and stereotyping.

Besides the politics of representation, the subject matter of queer literature in the future will further examine the connection within queerness and capitalist world. When queer subjects are being commercialized and represented in mass media, critics such as Lisa Duggan (2002) have expressed that homonormativity, that is the specific aspects of queer culture and politics that have been stripped off their radical political potential and neutralized into the normative, has been ascendant. It is possible that later work will address these conflicts between the queer as disruptive, subversive, and the queer as assimilable commodity. This tension between subjectivity and commodification is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in *Paul Takes the Form of a Mortal Girl* (2017) by Andrea Lawlor; the protagonist's gender fluidity is at once a form of subversion and a space of intersection with a neoliberal economy (Lawlor, 2017). Issues of queer people in relation to the economy, work, and consumption will become one of the key directions in future literature since the authors have to discuss how queerness can be radicalized in a world that implicates various forms of capitalist exploitation.

Last but not least, the future development of gender and queer theory in literature is going to turn to collective and community concerns and is going to positivism as individualism. Perhaps, as queer anarchist and collective movements evolve, literature will turn to imagining the types of relations, structures of belonging, and formations of identity that ranking so highly in post-industrial, postmodern, identity-obsessed neo-

nationalisms. Future novels may present more preferable model of identity which does not rely on biological and nuclear families but on chosen ones, communities of love and support, and solidarity. These forms of queer kinship described in the novels—'The Cosmopolitans,' by Sarah Schulman—the novels provide the modes of resistance against both capitalist individualization and the heteronormative structures of family and society (Schulman, 2016).

Therefore, the future of gender and queer theory in literature will be characterised by increased focus on the themes such as fluidity, intersectionality, posthumanism, queer time,.... Since literature remains one of the few venues that non-mainstream genders and queer identities are being portrayed and oppressive systems being criticized, Chambers & Padilla prove that the authors and theorists will keep expanding the definitions of gender and queerness for the individual and societal levels. They will express the emerging trends of identity construction in their future pieces while helping to define the cultural and theoretical tone of the twenty-first century.

Conclusion

The contemporary literature can be considered as a significant source for presenting the gender issues, including identity and sexual orientation, as well as representation of the queer communities in the context of the diversity paradigm in the present society. There are successful writers that have redefined gender roles for fiction writing such as Jeanette Winterson and Maggie Nelson who boldly write fiction that interrogate fixed gender roles and representations and compels us to demand more out of life and literature. In their writing, they explain how gender and queer theory can be incorporated into the literary texts and shown to readers not only as the voices of underrepresented minorities but also stir people's philosophical thought provoking questions regarding the real existence of true selves. Thus, through eradicating gender binarism and presenting femininity/masculinity and hetero/homosexuality as multifaceted contemporary literature has opened new perspectives in the definition and manifestation of identity.

Winterson and Nelson challenge and disrupt conventions in writing and representation thereby allowing experiments in new literary forms that made room for diverse marginalised characters. This means that it was possible to showcase that gender and

sexual identities are not preserved as the fixed and rigid positions within the contemporary cultures; on the contrary, they are as fluid and flexible positions that can be always constructed and constantly influenced by the personal, cultural and political factors. With these examples, and even as literature advances, literature will undoubtedly contribute significantly to future discourse on gender, sexuality and the general human life with a view to helping to embrace diversity of human life and all its aspects.

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