

## INTRODUCTION

*One is not born, but, rather, becomes a woman.*  
(Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 265)

I have chosen the theme of female embodiment as a major factor when talking about identity and the body is a source of (dis)content, self-esteem, liberation from gender roles and stereotypes, and therefore a subject of topical importance.

In this context, when Simone de Beauvoir wrote her famous philosophical work *The Second Sex*, little did she know about the major impact it would have on the feminist lines of thought, literature and social activism. The above quotation not only describes women's condition but it also lays the grounds for a major aspect of women's lives: gender. We could say that at this very moment a distinction between sex and gender starts to be shaped. Thus, for the first time the sex/gender difference is shaped and highlights the fact that sex is a biological given and gender is a social construct. This theory has a major impact on other feminist theorists of body and gender.

For gender theorists such as Judith Butler the distinction between sex and gender is of great interest because she takes over this analysis and formulates her theory on performativity. For Butler, gender is a set of acts, regulations, stereotypes and utterances which, if continuously repeated, form gender identity.

The body is a major element for acquiring identity. It is the tool for the social manifestation of gender. Thus, it facilitates a continuous relation between the social environment and the individual's presentation in this environment.

For feminist writers, women's bodies are an important tool for creating new ways of deconstructing patriarchal norms and stereotypes. For this reason, such writers as Angela Carter and Jeanette Winterson create

female characters with fantastic body features – usually grotesque and monstrous – in order to make their points which regard the liberation of female bodies from social constraints and acquiring control over one's own body. Under these circumstances, the present thesis is concerned with the grotesque female bodies and their social manifestation – gender.

In my endeavour the theoretical approach I intend use for the analysis of the chosen literary texts is the feminist approach. I find it suitable because it is appropriate for exploring how the characters succeed in acquiring their identities and form their selves in different social situations. Grotesque bodies and lesbian or gay people do not easily find their places in society. The feminist approach used in analysing these situations attempts to show how the grotesque deconstructs patriarchal norms and leads to new interpretations. It also helps create new ontologies, new worlds for the characters. The common denominator for them is the idea of gender (Goffman, Butler) and body fluidity (Russo) specific to postmodern times. The monstrous body is fluid because it does not comply with the fixity of body norms and standards and refuses to try to integrate in a patriarchal world. Monstrosity is therefore used in order to fight these stereotypes and ridicule them thus rendering women strong and confident. The grotesque becomes a means of celebrating women's bodies and is used in a carnivalesque manner. Gender is also fluid and shows how easily one can transcend one gender or the other or find himself/herself in an androgynous situation.

The authors whose novels I use are British writers Angela Carter and Jeanette Winterson. Angela Carter lived in the period of high academic and activist feminist movements and her novels reflect some ideas of the time that she agrees or disagrees to. On the other hand, Jeanette Winterson is a contemporary writer who started her writing career in 1985. Both writers are concerned with women's bodies and the desire to celebrate them. The difference is represented by the fact that Jeanette Winterson is a lesbian writer and she dwells more on the impossibility of lesbian women to be accepted in patriarchal societies. Both writers embrace the idea of gender fluidity.

For this reason, in the present thesis I have chosen to focus on a selection of Angela Carter's and Jeanette Winterson's novels (*The Passion of New Eve*, *Nights at the Circus*, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, *Sexing the Cherry*, *The Passion*) because they reflect best the idea of the grotesque as a means of deconstruction of patriarchal norms and liberation from these

constraints and gender, therefore as a means of liberation from gender roles. I believe that the theories I have chosen (grotesque body and grotesque character in the mother – daughter and mother-son relationships and gender performance and performativity) can be applied best to the two writers because their concerns intersect in the representation of the monstrous female body. These novels are relevant for my analysis because they express best the characters' struggles for finding their selves and defining their identities. In their later writings, the authors' interest shifts towards rewritings of fairy tales – Angela Carter – and science fiction – Jeanette Winterson.

The authors are relevant in the international context and are included in the university curricula with hundreds of analyses from different perspectives and literary approaches. In Romania, Ileana Botescu-Sireteanu wrote a PhD thesis (*Naratiunea diferentei: Romanele Angelei Carter și ale lui Jeanette Winterson* 2010) using narratological and postmodern approaches and gender studies. Lazar Mihaela Cristina's thesis entitled *Representations of the Female Body in Jeanette Winterson's Fiction* (2014) focuses on the female body and its fragmentation using psychoanalysis, feminism, queer theory, anthropology. Aba Carina Parlog also wrote numerous articles on Jeanette Winterson's works, thus revealing that the authors are relevant for the Romanian context of research but they have not been approached from the perspective I have used. In this respect, in the present thesis I have chosen to approach the problem of the female body starting from the secondary meaning of the term grotesque and moving gradually to the female grotesque physique. I continued my endeavour by considering gender formation as a series of acts that are implemented in the already existing subject or are implemented in the moment of speaking. Thus, the starts from the mother relating to the infant and how this gradually leads to the adult development and his/her gender formation in different social contexts.

The present thesis is composed of three chapters. The first chapter presents the theoretical approach used: the feminist approach with respect to the theories on the grotesque and gender. The second chapter makes an analysis of the novels using the grotesque theories of risk and excess and the grotesque mother figure in mother-daughter and mother-son relating. Thus, I have divided the chapter into two so that it analyses the novels from the perspectives of two major theories which are completed by theories on the excess, the grotesque body, and of the character.

My analysis in this chapter starts from Mary Russo's interpretation of the grotesque body offered by Mikhail Bakhtin. I have decided to extend my analysis from the primary meaning of the term to its secondary meaning which refers to the monstrous as a character trait. I have used this meaning of the term in order to analyse the mother-daughter and mother-son relationships as a monstrous and less monstrous condition in the formation of the infant and adult self. For this reason, I have relied on the theory expressed by Nancy Chodorow because I have found it to be more relevant to my analysis of self-formation and how this is shaped under different circumstances. If the mother-daughter relationship is monstrous in my analysis of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, the mother-son relationship analysed in *Sexing the Cherry* with the help of Nancy Chodorow's theory reveals a successful relationship between mother and son. Both cases refer to adopted children. Next, my focus has moved to *The Passion of New Eve* where I have analysed Mother in terms of the grotesque, with reference to her grotesque body and monstrous character in trying to rewrite religion.

In the second part of the chapter my focus shifts from the metaphorical meaning to the primary meaning of the term and I choose to refer to *Nights at the Circus* with a focus on the carnivalesque celebration of the female body as defined by Mary Russo while in *Sexing the Cherry* I analyse the female protagonist in terms of the grotesque as a means of protest against patriarchy and its norms regarding beauty standards.

The third chapter is also divided into two parts according to the theory applied. The first part of the chapter is concerned with gender formation as a form in a theatrical manner and how the characters live their lives as a representation on stage. I will analyse *Nights at the Circus* from this perspective and how the characters seem to form their gender identities in two ways: with and without a mask as defined by Erving Goffman and his study on everyday life behaviour. In the second part of the chapter my analysis shifts from Goffman to Judith Butler and her theory of performativity.

In this second part of the chapter my intention is to see how performativity creates gender identity. In this respect I use Judith Butler's theory on performativity in order to see how the results of utterances, acts of speech and continuous repetition shape one's gender. The analysis focuses on gender formation at the moment of speaking and how these practices form the identity of the subject. My interest here is to show how

the characters whose gender is affected by these practices become strong subjects and resist stereotyping. My analysis centres around Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are not The Only Fruit* and Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* which have strong characters that prove that sex does not necessarily imply gender and gender is a continuous process of becoming.

Thus, in the present paper my analysis relies on the combination of the first and secondary meanings of the concept of the monstrous and their relevance to successful mother- daughter and mother-son relationships and the outcome of these relations. The secondary meaning relates to the primary meaning of monstrosity and shows how a grotesque body or a grotesque character create situations from which women characters try to escape, thus representing a means of liberation. The use of gender theories comes to complete the social manifestation of the female bodies which resist social norms.

The last chapter in the thesis is *Conclusions* where I show how my analyses have supported and confirmed the thesis that for women the monstrous is a means of liberation from restrictive patriarchal societies and that the gender manifestation of these bodies creates a fluidity of identity. Therefore, the thesis has used the feminist theoretical approach for an exploration of the female grotesque body and its literary representation and how it defines women's place in conservative societies which continually have to accept their fluidity.