

WHATEVER SINGULARITY: QUEERING THE ‘QUODLIBET’ IN *THE WELL*
OF LONELINESS AND ORANGES ARE NOT THE ONLY FRUIT

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OF LONELINESS* AND *ORANGES ARE NOT THE ONLY FRUIT*

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I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to propose a hypothetical community for queer people of 20th century England depicted in two novels: Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) and Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985) through Agamben's idea of community. This study also intends to investigate the issue of the queer people in the 20th century, while demonstrating that the oppression of homosexual people has not changed despite the fact that one of the two novels is written at the beginning and the other at the end of the twentieth century. Suggesting a community to the queer people via Agamben's *whatever singularity*, this thesis attempts to examine the exclusion of the lesbian characters as depicted in the novels either by the society or the family. In a nutshell, the present thesis offers an alternative conception of society and/or community for the queer people in the aforementioned novels through Agamben's notion of the *whatever singularity*, which welcomes each individual within the society, at the same time accepting them as they are (*tel quale*) since every person is *lovable (quodlibet)*.

Key words: Whatever Singularity, Agamben, Friendship, Radclyffe Hall, Jeanette Winterson, 20th century of England

ÖZET

Bu tezin amacı, Radclyffe Hall'un *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) ve Jeanette Winterson'ın *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985) adlı iki romanda anlatılan 20. yüzyıl İngiltere'sinin kuir insanları için Agamben'in cemaat fikrinden yola çıkarak varsayımsal bir topluluk önermektir. Bu çalışma aynı zamanda 20. yüzyıldaki kuirler sorununu araştırmayı amaçlarken, iki romandan birinin yirminci yüzyılın başında, diğerinin ise sonunda yazılmış olmasına rağmen eşcinsellere uygulanan baskının değişmediğini ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Agamben'in herhangi tekilliği üzerinden kuir insanlara bir topluluk öneren bu tez, romanlarda tasvir edilen lezbiyen karakterlerin toplum ya da aile tarafından dışlanmasını incelemeye çalışmaktadır. Özetle, bu tez, Agamben'in toplumdaki her bireyi olduğu gibi kabul eden ve aynı zamanda onları olduğu gibi (*tel quale*) kabul eden *herhangi tekillik* kavramı üzerinden bahsi geçen romanlardaki kuir insanlara alternatif bir toplum ve/veya topluluk anlayışı sunmaktadır çünkü her insan sevebilir (*quodlibet*).

Anahtar kelimeler: Herhangi Tekillikler, Kuir Teori, Birliktelik, Agamben, Dostluk, Radclyffe Hall, Jeanette Winterson, 20. Yüzyıl İngilteresi

To my dearest family



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I can nothing render but allegiant thanks.

William Shakespeare, Henry VIII

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INTRODUCTION

In fact, we, the LGBTQ community, have always been here.
 We were required to lead invisible lives out of necessity.
 We loved who we loved in the background of society
 because it was too dangerous to do otherwise.

— Gayla Turner, *Don't You Dare: Uncovering Lost Love*¹

Literature can be interpreted as the art of conveying thoughts, feelings, and dreams, in a pleasurable, aesthetic manner. The materials thus conveyed inevitably contain the characteristics of the society to which they belong. In this context, literature is marked by the traces of social dynamics both in its content and form; it has the power to exhibit the flaws in the social order that it depicts. James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* (1956), which mirrors the suffering of homosexual individuals in the USA is a significant example in this sense. Baldwin becomes the voice of queer people and stimulates them to manifest their sexuality: "Love him and let him love you. Do you think anything else under heaven really matters?" (p. 75). Not only does this quotation encapsulate the scope of the present analysis, but it also draws a parallel to what Hall and Winterson display in their novels. Similar to James Baldwin, both Winterson and Hall depict the discrimination against queer individuals in the 20th century Britain and try to give voice to homosexual people via their narratives. Hence, the ostracized homosexual identities depicted in Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) and Jeannette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985) constitute the focus of the present thesis.

¹ Turner, G. (2022). *Don't You Dare: Uncovering Lost Love*. BookBaby.

The Well of Loneliness (1928) revolves around Stephen Gordon, a girl given a masculine name by her family who had vainly hoped for a boy child. The protagonist is outcasted firstly by her mother and then by the world at large, due to her masculine behaviour, her being a lesbian person, and her failure to meet the expectations of the society. *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985) deals with similar issues. Jeanette, the protagonist, is kicked out of her home by her mother after revealing her sexuality, and her attraction to girls. A relatively balanced relationship between Jeannette and her mother can only be attained in the narrative when the mother chooses to ignore her daughter's homosexuality rather than come to terms with it.

In the context of the novels briefly introduced above, the idea of “togetherness”, with Agamben’s notion of “whatever being” as discussed in *The Coming Community* (1990) offers a hypothetical “being-with” and a possible society for queer people in the 20th century, without the necessity to be restrained by any particular definition or ‘whatness’. Agamben’s claim is that each singularity is significant within community no matter what it may be. He argues that the individuals who make up the community, apart from belonging to it, are lovable as individuals and are welcome as such. In other words, “[t]he singularity exposed as such is whatever you *want*, that is, lovable” (Agamben, 1997, p. 9).

Throughout history, the presence of queer individuals has been a problem in the context of the heteronormative character of communities. Due to the norms established by the individuals who make up the majority of the community, queer individuals are characterized as either sick, or strange, or both. Thereof, queer theorists “simply ‘reversed the discourse’ by changing the meaning of the category from sick and deviant to healthy and normal” (Vallochi, 2005, p. 756). Furthermore, after being adopted by queer people themselves, the term “queer” starts to function as

an umbrella term for the expression of sexual identities and experiences, whereas it is actually a pejorative word used to denigrate homosexuals. At the same time, the term came to define and denominate a certain theory, by emerging from gay and lesbian studies within and outside the academia. At the same time, queer theory “approaches heterosexuality as a normative category of sexed, gendered and sexual identity which serves both to support the binary logic by which ‘hetero’ and ‘homosexual’ identities are produced and to perpetuate the construction of homosexual identities as deviant and abnormal” (Carroll, 2012, p. 2). In addition,

queer theory is concerned with questioning the binary structures by which sex, gender and sexuality are conventionally understood, whereby all human persons are required to identify/be identified as either male or female, either masculine or feminine and either heterosexual or homosexual (Carroll, 2012, p. 6).

According to Seidman, queer theory “articulates a related objection to a homosexual theory and politics organized on the ground of the homosexual subject: This project reproduces the hetero-homosexual binary, a code that perpetuates the heterosexualization of society” (Seidman, 1994, p. 174). The main reason for this is that a choice has been made between sexual orientations, and heterosexuality has been determined by society as the ‘normal’ and ‘natural’ one. Therefore, homosexuality, in essence a sexual orientation, is perceived as diverging from society’s sexual norms, and homosexuals are denied a fundamental aspect of their identities.

In the light of the explanations above, this present thesis will try to shed light upon Agamben’s discussion regarding the concept of community along with the ‘togetherness’ in his work, *The Coming Community* (1990). As the title of the book reveals, through the collection of essays, Agamben argues for an alternative conception of being-with and thus a community. It is significant to note that the

adjective in the title of Agamben's work does not point at any potentiality of a particular future. Rather, 'the coming' implies a constant potentiality at each and every present moment. In other words, according to Agamben, this is a society that is in a continuous process of development; it exists now but its potential has not yet been fully established. The community holds a potential movement that can actually take place. Yet, the reconceptualization of singularity which opens up in the coming community designates a new vessel of the relationship between binaries such as the part and the whole, individuality and community, specificity and universality. What the adjective 'coming' designates is a society that embodies all the characteristics of the singularity and can share this specificity. For this reason, Agamben's understanding of community is a new conception which is established independently of these structures, beyond the state and law.

1.1.Theory / Methodology

1.1.1. Agamben's Whatever Singularity along with Quodlibet

Agamben's *The Coming Community*, was published in 1990 after the fall of Berlin Wall. The collection of essays constitutes the perpetuation of an argument on the concept of community in relation with some specific problematics from the history of philosophy. Agamben's main claim is that "the coming being is whatever." (Agamben, 1993, p. 11). "By putting the accent in *whatever* and pointing it as a condition for everything beyond it, Agamben achieves a significant inversion in the meaning" (Campero, 2015, p. 12). He asserts for the community, whatever it may take, has no requirements or conditions for belonging. In other words, the community Agamben refers to, is a community that embraces singularities by rejecting all sense of universal identity for the sake of a more inclusive society. In addition, Agamben (1993) explains that "the Whatever in question here relates to singularity not in its

indifference with respect to a common property (to a concept, for example: being red, being French, being Muslim), but only in its being such as it is” (p. 11). The “being such that it is” can be read as an explanatory phrase, which plays a key role in the discussion. What is meant in this phrase is welcoming the being as it is. Definitions and determinations such as being red, French or Muslim continue to exist as *whatever singularity*, instead of defining the individual according to an acceptable common. As Durantaye (2009) explains “this is an idea of singularity not of indifferent importance but, on the contrary, conceived of in all its rich difference from other singularities - whatever they may be” (p. 162). *Whatever singularity* signifies “the possibility of a community free of any essential condition of belonging, common destiny or work, or principle of inclusion and exclusion” (Whyte, 2010, p. 2). The “whatever” that Agamben focuses on, in fact, does not acquire a singularity in its indifference according to a common feature (for example, a concept such as being red, French, Muslim), but only as it is in its existence. Thus, the singularity is far away from the false dilemma that obliges recognition and knowing to choose between the inexpressibility of the particular and the thinkability of the universal (Agamben, 1993, p. 1). It is “singularity insofar as it is” (1993, p. 1). Singularity is not determined in terms of belonging to the genus or to another class, but by its “being-as-such”:

Thus *being-such*, which remains constantly hidden in the condition of belonging (“there is an *x such that* it belongs to *y*”) and which is in no way a real predicate, comes to light itself: The singularity exposed as such is whatever you *want*, that is, lovable (1993, p. 3).

Within this framework, Agamben’s *whatever singularity* forms the basis of the theoretical framework of this present thesis, which offers a debate with respect to a queer community in the 20th century, since queer individuals, who make up the

community are the ones who are excluded from and by the community. Although Agamben himself never specifically discusses gender identity or queerness in *The Coming Community* (1990), it appears to conform to the parameters of *whatever singularity*, since the difficulty and promise of queerness reside in its lack of essence. *Whatever singularity* has no essence to embody; its authenticity comes from being what it is, from its own being. Consequently, this thesis, while paying attention to the authors' description of the discrimination that homosexual individuals are subjected to, nevertheless explores the possibility of a more inclusive community, which could potentially include the queer characters. The methodology draws on Agamben's concepts briefly introduced above. Accordingly, the focus falls on the hegemonic heteronormativity of communities, as depicted in the novels and its impact on the characters. Agamben's reflections on the issue of community inevitably recalls Blanchot's perspective as he presents in *The Unavowable Community* (1984) and thus Levinas's discussion of the Other in *Totality and Infinity* (1961). Therefore, in order to clarify Agamben's viewpoint, I will briefly discuss Levinas's and Blanchot's relevant reflections.

Blanchot dwells on the idea of community and the relationship with the other by referring to Jean Luc Nancy's *Inoperative Community* (1985)² and Georges Bataille's *Acéphale*. He defines singularity as "exposed, at its limit, to a limitless or abyssal outside that it shares with the other singularities, from the beginning, by their common mortality" (Miller, 2005: 91). Blanchot draws on the views of Georges Bataille while describing the community that emerges with the death of the other and

² For Nancy, the understanding of community is as follows: Individuals in the community are close to each other, they come into contact; but there is no certain principle or form that determines the commonality and closeness of each, and offers to be together, to be together. It is the relations, communication, elbow contact of multiple singularities with each other. However, this closeness is not intended to be confrontational, mutually affirming or negating each other's existence.

he quotes Bataille: “a man alive, who sees a fellow-man die, can survive only beside himself” (Blanchot, 1988, p. 9). For him, the community “is the simple putting in common, inside the limits it would propose for itself, of a shared will to be several, albeit to do nothing” (Blanchot, 1988, p. 8). Blanchot (1988) explains that:

a finite community, for it in turn has its principle in the finitude of the beings which form it and which would not tolerate that it (the community) forgets to carry the finitude constituting those beings to a higher degree of tension (p. 6)

since the finitude of the singular being is also the finitude of other beings.

Nevertheless, he claims that the community does not provide non-mortality. Blanchot (1988) adds:

I do not die because the community of which I am a part (or the fatherland, or the universe, or humanity, or the family) goes on. Rather it is almost the exact contrary. Jean-Luc Nancy: The community does not create ties of a higher, immortal or transmortal life, between subjects (p. 10).

For Blanchot, the community does not perform the process of transforming the dead into any substance or any subject homeland, motherland, nation. If the community is manifested by the death of the other, it is because the true community of mortal (finite) beings is death itself (1988, p. 10). He follows “that is what found community. There could not be a community without the sharing of that first and last event which in everyone ceases to be able to be just that (birth, death)” (1988, p. 9). According to Blanchot’s criticism, a community that accepts only death as transcendent appears as a negative community because people also lose their existence with the moment of death. To the extent that the community is made possible for Blanchot by the death of the other, it will only be able to manifest itself as a community of the non-community. Along with these negative references to community, in the second part of his work,

Blanchot suggests an alternative, namely “Community of Lovers”, which is depicted as an antisocial society or association. Here, “Blanchot questions the community of lovers and relates their union to unavowability: no real communication takes place because secrecy blurs semiotic transparency” (Salas, 2013, p. 68). The main aim for offering a community of lovers’ is to (destruct / deconstruct) the society. In this context, Blanchot claims that love might be an obstacle in ethics unless it imitates and questions ethics. Similarly, the dispersion of people as men and women also poses problems in various versions of the Bible (Blanchot, 1988, p. 40). In order to explain this, Blanchot revisits *The Malady of Death*, a récit by Duras, and he demonstrates that Duras’ text delineates a relationship between a man and a woman.

The man in the story is called with the pronoun “you”. He meets a woman, who is presented as “she”, and “you” asks the woman whether she would stay with him or not, although he does not know her yet. It is implied that the man perceives love as a contract between himself and the woman, which can grant her stay with him.

However, he fails because of his malady, his impotence. Hoem (1996) writes:

[t]he desire is not for the kind of ravishment that brings an orgasmic forgetting or loss of self. Rather, the two come together because the man, in particular, experiences an “impossibility of loving” [34] this or any other woman. The copulative performance occurs only as a matter of course and not as the terminal point of the communion (p. 53).

In this context, Blanchot presents love only through the man and woman in the “Community of Lovers” with references to *The Malady of Death*, questioning the primary role of love in the community. He explains that despite the man’s impotence, he is constantly in action, despite his unhappiness about his body, since he is never able to grasp his impossible unity (1988, p. 39). According to Blanchot, in the male-

female relationship, the woman is seen in a more divine position. This asymmetry poses men and women in a disproportionate position. In this context, the man in Duras' story considers the possibility of obtaining the knowledge of the woman through the sexual contract. Nevertheless, the woman, for Blanchot, is the present absence of impossibility, at the same time, the passivity of the woman is a representation of this. It is the impotence of the relationship, which is the asymmetrical product between the impossibility and possibility represented by women and men. Here, Blanchot demonstrates the emergence of non-denial while revealing sexual differences. The point is:

that in the homogeneity – the affirmation of the Same – understanding demands that the heterogeneous appear suddenly, i.e., the absolute Other in terms of which any relationship signifies: no relationship, the impossibility that willing and perhaps even desire ever cross the uncrossable (Blanchot, 1988, p. 41).

According to Blanchot, the man cannot love because he is an immanent subject, and men cannot interact with the dying because the imagination of immortality becomes weak with the proximity of death. At the same time,

due to her very weakness, due to her very frailty, she cannot be killed, preserved as she is by the interdiction which makes her untouchable in her constant nakedness, the closest and most distant nakedness, the inaccessible intimacy of the outside (1988, p. 37).

This weakness can allow their powerful fears to be more visible and touchable, which can be intolerable. Within this context, she cannot kill the man, because the existence of the impossible terrifies the man before the throne of the goddess. Accordingly, Blanchot (1988) alleges that the community of lovers is destructive towards the society, since, "[f]or the community, lovers are on its limit, they are outside and

inside” (p. 40) and there is no community in this space in the absence of passion, as couples are not pressured to do anything, but they solely are with each other. This is experienced by couples who come together by marriage or through a sexual contract as in the *récit* of Duras. This actually allows to neutralize death and open up an endless field of relationship. This is the community “of those who have no community” (1988, p. 50). As a result, lovers are never isolated from the community. The community of lovers is just the community that emerges amid finitude. Lovers are exposed inside the community of singularities.

In reading Duras’s *recit*, Blanchot revisits Levinas’s ideas regarding the Other and ethics. He points out that only when ontology which always reduces the Other to the Same takes a back seat can an antecedent relation assert itself, a connection in which the self is not satisfied with recognizing the Other, with recognizing itself in it. “But feels that the Other always puts it into question to the point of being able to respond to it only through a responsibility that cannot limit itself and that exceeds itself without exhausting itself” (Blanchot, 1988, p. 43). Levinas, on the other hand, argues that the other should be loved without being reduced to sameness as Levinas (1979) explains:

[f]or the philosophical tradition the conflicts between the same and the other are resolved by theory whereby the other is reduced to the same-or, concretely, by the community of the State, where beneath anonymous power, though it be intelligible, the “I” rediscovers war in the tyrannic oppression it undergoes from the totality (p. 47).

For Levinas, metaphysics is the desire that emerges from the discontent of being in the world and thus an endless reaching towards the other. In metaphysics, a being separated from Infinity is still in relation with it; it is in a relationship with what it

cannot assimilate, which it cannot grasp epistemologically, which does not invalidate the infinite range of separation and therefore differs from it at each interval. “Similar to metaphysics, the inner unity of social science is unified by the circular relation of the individual and community” (Harold, 2011, p. 161). Concretely, the positive aspect of the formal structure, which has the idea of infinity, is the discourse determined as a moral relationship since it is a metaphysical relation, which “[is] infinitely distant from my own reality, yet without this distance destroying this relation and without this relation destroying this distance, as would happen with relations within the same” (Levinas, 1979, p. 41). Levinas emphasizes that the encounter is an ethical one and the moral bond with the Other is the most fundamental subject of philosophical reflection, since it is not something that precedes or takes precedence. Accordingly, Levinas (1979) claims that “western philosophy has most often been an ontology: a reduction of the other to the same by interposition of a middle and neutral term that ensures the comprehension of being” (p. 43). He also qualifies ontology as a kind of “egology” that imitates otherness and confronts egological subjectivity based on freedom/autonomy with a definition of subject that centres responsibility for the other. Levinas (1979) describes that “a calling into question of the same-which cannot occur within the egoist spontaneity of the same - is brought about by the other. We name this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other ethics” (p. 42). Here, he defines the Same as aiming for an all-embracing and needing totality. He thinks that this situation of the Same should also include such a unity in the Other. He states that

the radical separation between the same and the other means precisely that it is impossible to place oneself outside of the correlation between the same and the other so as to record the correspondence or the non-correspondence of this going

with this return. Otherwise, the same and the other would be reunited under one gaze, and the absolute distance that separates them filled in (1979, p. 36).

For Levinas, separation stands on the basis of the relationship with the other, as a requirement for a moral encounter with and embracement of the Other. Levinas (1979) explains:

[s]eparation designates the possibility of an existent being set up and having its own destiny to itself, that is, being born and dying without the place of this birth and this death in the time of universal history being the measure of this reality (p. 55).

Furthermore, such a separation presupposes the possibility of a genuine relationship between the I and the Other. Therefore, according to Levinas, the self is not different from the Other because it provides a great perspective to the person when the Other and the self are considered a whole. Levinas first seeks separation in the dimension of inwardness that opens up in contentment and sensitivity from life. According to Levinas, the course of Western philosophy has changed irreversibly with Heidegger's ontology as Hand (1989) explains:

it is this contestation of the ontological by the ethical that ultimately leads Levinas to disagree also with Heidegger. Even as the latter heralds the end of the metaphysics of presence, he continues to think of being as a coming into-presence. Philosophy is still an egology in the way, in which Heidegger subordinates the relation with the Other to the relation with Being (Levinas & Hand, 1989, p. 4).

Dasein is also far from everything human and is only taken into consideration within the problem of Being. Therefore, according to Levinas, an ethics which regards

separation and therefore differences, cannot be derived from Heidegger's philosophy.

He (1979) writes:

[c]oncretely our effort consists in maintaining, within anonymous community, the society of the I with the Other-language and goodness. This relation is not prephilosophical, for it does not do violence to the I, is not imposed upon it brutally from the outside, despite itself, or unbeknown to it, as an opinion; more exactly, it is imposed upon the I beyond all violence by a violence that calls it entirely into question (p. 47).

In the light of the quotation above, it can be said that this relationship is based on a "non-violent act" (1979, p. 51). To speak and to hear is not to beat or defeat each other, but to be one since:

Levinas' recourse to the primacy of the face-to-face, similarly, intervenes in a world that, for him, holds the potential to erupt into a totalized form of war. The nakedness and singularity of the face of the other, becomes the grounds for the self to hear a commandment as it is interpellated as a human being (Prabhu, 2012, p.128).

In other words, the existence of the 'I' necessitates a dialogue with the other and vice versa. Speaking of the self also means speaking of the other since all kinds of explanations and comments about one of them, in one way or another, concern the other. As Levinas (1979) argues:

the self must be separated from the Other in order to have the idea of infinity.

The idea of infinity is itself a form of transcendence of the relation to the Other.

Exteriority is achieved by having the idea of infinity (p. 1).

This encounter is also the moment when meaning-making begins. Thus, much so that since signification begins with encounter, then thinking, understanding and knowing

also follow this moment (1979, p. 42). “If the Same would establish its identity by simple opposition to the Other, it would already be a part of a totality encompassing the Same and the Other” (1979, p. 38). His argument is that the Other and the Same are not “the simple reverse of identity, and is not formed out of resistance to the Same, but is prior to every initiative, to all imperialism of the Same” (1979, p 38-9). In addition, Levinas attempts to establish a position where the I and the Other have a relationship with each other, describing the self and the other separately, yet not by distinguishing them from each other totally.

All in all, according to Blanchot, there is the principle of “inadequacy” at the basis of the search for community. If community manifests itself through the death of the other, it is because the true community of mortal (finite) beings is death itself. “The community therefore occupies the following singular space: it takes upon itself the impossibility of its own immanence, the impossibility of a communitarian being as subject [...] the impossibility of the community” (Blanchot, 1997, p. 11). On the one hand, Levinas claims that by reducing the different to the same, the otherness in the other is dissolved in the same, and the otherness is destroyed; therefore, the other should be accepted as it is without reducing it into sameness. To conclude, understanding the community not as the result of an identity and transcendent union, nor as the consequence of an immanent union between its parts, is to avoid reducing and forcing difference. It is to open the space towards coexistence with otherness, it is to prevent the political temptation to merge heterogeneity into a projectable and indissoluble unit culminating in the destruction of difference and of the community as a space of coexistence between what is different. Within this concept, Agamben carries the non-reducibility of the other to sameness beyond with *whatever singularity*.

Agamben discusses ‘whatever’ in relation with the Latin adjective *quodlibet*. Durantaye (2009) points out that Agamben’s use of *quodlibet* is different from the word’s general meaning in scholastic thought. (p. 162). “Quodlibet, “whatever” but also “any” as in the expression “whatever being,” is the term that remains unthought in the definition of the transcendentals but conditions the meaning of all other terms. It considers singularity not in its indifference in regard to a common propriety but in its being as such” (Salzani, 2012, pp. 214-5). In this context, Quodlibet is defined as the “lovable, desirable”. Salzani (2012) notes that, “Quodlibet refers rather to the “singular” and expresses a pure singularity. Pure singularity has no identity, Agamben states, it is *omnivalent*” (p. 215). It is the term which remains “unthought in each, conditions the meaning of all the others” (Agamben, 1993, p. 1). Agamben (1993) explains:

The common translation of this term as “whatever” in the sense of “it does not matter which, indifferently” is certainly correct, but in its form the Latin says exactly the opposite: *Quodlibet ens* is not “being, it does not matter which”, but rather “being such that it always matters (p. 1)

Quodlibet emphasizes “being such that it always matters” and it alludes to love and the loved one, since the lover desires the loved one with all its propositions.

According to Agamben, the lover is wanted only for being as such. As a result, *whatever singularity* is lovable and its lovability does not depend on a person’s knowledge, identity, or value. “Yet, this figure of the lovable or desirable is not defined by any particular predicates but simply designates the sheer potentiality for loving or desiring, which is inherent in existence itself” (Prozorov, 2011, p. 87). Therefore, *Quodlibet* does not involve a self-appointed understanding of existence with the immanence of infinite meanings and historical essences. For Agamben, a

singularity is not determined through a given concept or relationship. However, it is not indeterminate either and this refers that the singularity is determined through the whole of its possibilities and potentials (Agamben, 1993, p. 74). The singularity, which is determined through certain concepts or identities, comes into contact with another via this relationship. In other words, it does not encounter a being possessed by another mediation, identity, or concept, but communicates with something through the state of being its own possibilities and receives its own definition through contact with all these possibilities. Accordingly, for him, the only thing that makes community possible is love. Agamben (1993) states that:

[l]ove is never directed toward this or that property of the loved one (being blond, being small, being tender, being lame), but neither does it neglect the properties in favour of an insipid generality (universal love). The lover desires the as only insofar as it is such-this is the lover's particular fetishism. Thus, whatever singularity (the Lovable) is never the intelligence of something, of this or that quality or essence, but only the intelligence of an intelligibility (p. 13).

In this context, love appears as the essential element which leads the individual to accept “being-with” all its other predicates in Agamben’s idea of togetherness. Moreover, singularity can be possible by lovingly accepting that all different conditions of belonging, which are in relation to the outside, and by considering these conditions of belonging to only one of any singularities.

1.1.2. Agamben’s Exemplar and Threshold

Agamben puts forth the idea of community that every singular being should welcome any being without belonging to any being or thing. In the chapter, *From Limbo*, Agamben explains and exemplifies whatever singularities with an allusion to

the children in Limbo, who died before being baptized. According to him, these children in Limbo were punished with being deprived of the vision and the knowledge of God. They were neither blessed as the chosen, nor hopeless like the damned. And yet, they could not be saved. They cannot find a way out of like the letters with no addressee (Agamben, 1993, p. 16).

Agamben's quest to imagine and convey a singularity through a medium-language whose basis is universality takes him from the classical *quodlibet* to a daily figure: the *example* (Durantaye, 2009, p. 163). In the chapter titled *Example*, Agamben explains the singularity, by focusing on the word, 'tree'. He specifies that the word tree does not actually describe all trees with words without any distinction between them, because he names them by presuming a universal signification instead of referring to singular trees. For instance,

Linguistic being (being-called) is a set (the tree) that is at the same time a singularity (the tree, a tree, this tree); and the mediation of meaning, expressed by the symbol e, cannot in any way fill the gap in which only the article succeeds in moving about freely (1993, p. 16).

As it can be understood from the quotation above, although the example is yet another singularity among others, it replaces each and it applies to all singularities. Here, each example is considered as a real particular case, while it is understood that it cannot assume its particularity. Karaman (2021) unravels that

[t]he exemplars are, for this reason, the whatever beings of the coming community; as pure singularities which are not limited, defined, or determined by identities or common properties. The reconsideration of the example as purely linguistic being, that is being-called, enables the dissolution of identifications such as being Italian, being Turkish, being European (110).

That is to say, it is neither particular nor universal, the example is, so to speak, a singular object that presents itself as such, showing its singularity. (Agamben, 1993, p. 17). The same is true in the case of the word, example, itself because what is shown as an example in an instance indeed, is uniqueness. On the other hand, the same example stands for something else, or is said for/in place of something. However, as an example, the tree continues to exist both as a universal with the form of a tree and as an authenticity in its singularity. By belonging to a whole, the “tree” both contains the universal features of this set and continues to contain its own characteristics.

According to Agamben, “being called” is actually at the root of all possible belonging and is therefore something that can radically invalidate all belonging. Agamben reflects on *haecceitas*³ with references to the Duns Scotus’ interpretation. This interpretation allows the individual to be grasped “as it is”, with all its qualities and all its complex character, instead of a universal and indivisible understanding of the individual:

according to Duns Scotus, common form or nature must be indifferent to whatever singularity, must in itself be neither particular nor universal, neither one nor multiple, but such that it “does not scorn being posed with a whatever singular unity (p. 24).

For Agamben, community appears as a new form of unity which rejects the forms of organization that are built on certain essences. He alludes that community occurs at the level of singularities, where it gets out of its own isolated structure and

³ “haecceity (from Latin *haec*, ‘this’), (1) loosely, thisness; more specifically, an irreducible category of being, the fundamental actuality of an existent entity”

Audi, R. (1999). *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*. New York: Cambridge University Press. p. 359.

communicates with the other. Singularity for Agamben, it is an experience that can only happen in being-with-the-other.

Additionally, according to Agamben (1993), “the threshold is not, in this sense, another thing with respect to the limit; it is, so to speak, the experience of the limit itself, the experience of being-within an outside” (p. 75). The threshold⁴ constitutes a point of contact in the relationship established with a space that is empty and must remain empty. The fact that *whatever singularity* is both filled with everything and not filled with anything means that it contains emptiness in its structure. The void of this space is an undetermined space, just as the singularity that is whatever is not determined through any identity or concept. In its emptiness, the void contains the existence of all possibilities. Agamben (1993) notes that:

whatever adds to singularity only an emptiness, only a threshold: Whatever is a singularity plus an empty space, a singularity that is *finite* and, nonetheless, indeterminable according to a concept. [...] *Whatever, in this sense, is the event of an outside*. What is thought in the architranscendental *quodlibet* is, therefore, what is most difficult to think: the absolutely non-thing experience of a pure exteriority (p. 74).

Since the singularity does not determine itself through any specific properties, it does not exclude any of its possible states. Therefore, just like the singularity that is not determined or defined through any universal identity and concept, it carries the

⁴ The state of being on the threshold is also seen in Bakhtin’s account of the chronotope. For Bakhtin, time is momentary in that it is a turning point or break chronotope, it is used to express short moments, not long durations. Thresholds are places where crisis events, declines, resurrections, changes, renewals, decisions that determine a person's whole life take place. That is, the threshold chronotope is usually the expression of a sudden decision, crisis point, change, transformation, renewal, crossing over, decline or a new beginning in human life (Vlasov, 1995, p. 47)

existence of all possibilities, allowing the singular to open itself to the outside.

Accordingly, it can be said that *whatever singularity* can offer a domain for all possibilities and potentials which can constitute a community. Agamben claims that the one, who stays outside is not the one. He writes “[t]he outside is not another space that resides beyond a determinate space, but rather, it is the passage, the exteriority that gives it access—in a word, it is its face, its *eidos*” (1993, p. 75). Furthermore, Bos (2015) elaborates on the concept of the threshold with regard to its treatment in Agamben’s discussion as follows:

The concept of the ‘threshold’ is central to Agamben’s project and he uses it (or alternatives such as ‘zones of indifference’) to make clear that nobody is safe from the other side of order and civilization and that we may therefore have to face it right away. This implies not only an ethics about the other but also an ethics about the self, for it is the self that might easily pass the threshold and turn into the other (p. 19).

Whatever singularity belongs to both inside and outside at the same time, being neither inside nor outside. The threshold, is nothing but a limit, it, so to speak, is the experience of the limit itself, being inside an outside. In this context, the threshold does not refer to any limit. It is an outside event that cannot be included in the set, cannot be determined, and has an externality with its face. This non-belonging of the threshold makes it belong to all possible beings. That is, the connection between the inside and outside of *whatever singularity* turns it into a kind of threshold.

1.1.3. Agamben’s Idea of Friendship

It is difficult to respond to Agamben’s specific question of “how can the togetherness of *whatever singularity* be defined without belonging to community?”

without first articulating his ideas on friendship because the concept of *whatever singularity* can be read and replaced with the concept of “friendship” (Mocan, 2019, p. 3). For this reason, it is inevitable to consider the section on the concept of friend in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, as in Agamben’s *The Friend*. The best-known example of the concept of togetherness, which has been discussed in relation to the concept of “friend” since ancient times, is the discussion of collective thought between Nancy, Blanchot and Agamben. The concept of togetherness has generally been discussed in the focus of the togetherness concept. It is not wrong to say that Agamben has a special connection with the verb to “sense” since sensation is of great importance in the concept of friendship.

According to Agamben, the friend and I sense together. It is to consent to the existence of these two polar friends who share pure existence. The friend and I share existence through co-sensing. Therefore, “rather being itself is divided here, it is non-identical to itself, and so the I and the friend are the two faces or the two poles of this co division or sharing” (Agamben, 2009: p. 34). Due to the existential importance of the friend, friendship is the primary and fundamental issue that philosophy should deal with and Agamben asserts that

friendship belongs to *prote philosophia*, since the same experience, the same “sensation” of being, is what is at stake in both. One therefore comprehends why “friend” cannot be a real predicate added to a concept in order to be admitted to a certain class (Agamben, 2009, p. 35).

In other words, in *The Coming Community* (1990), the answer to which sense friendship can form a coherent cluster becomes clear. Agamben demonstrates the intertwining of *philosophia* (philosophy) and *philos* (friend) in his article *Friend* (2009) since *philia* (friendship) is directly related to the definition of philosophy since

philosophy contains the word *philos* (friend), there can be no philosophy without friends or friendship, and also *whatever singularity* cannot be considered separately.

Agamben (2009) points out that:

Friendship is so tightly linked to the definition of philosophy that it can be said that without it, philosophy would not really be possible. The intimacy between friendship and philosophy is so profound that philosophy contains the *philos*, the friend, in its very name, and, as often happens with such an excessive proximity, the risk runs high of not making heads or tails of it (p. 25).

Agamben's *The Friend* (2009) begins with a disappointment about a friend. Although Agamben and Nancy decided to write on the subject of friendship, this decision lost its validity in the first attempt of correspondence. Agamben's next disappointment concerns Derrida.⁵ The source of the disappointment is which of the two sentences attributed to Aristotle is correct. Therefore, friends do not share a particular togetherness, but rather a togetherness in life. Agamben continues that if friendship is not such an intimacy that it is impossible for one to form a representation or concept of it for oneself. To regard someone as a "friend" is to accept him as *whatever singularity*. In this case, *whatever singularity* of Agamben and the concept of friendship cannot be dissociated in this context.

To conclude, Agamben proposes a hypothetical community in which each individual is valuable and recognized. According to Agamben, "coming" clearly emphasizes not togetherness based on community, but togetherness without community. In this context, Agamben (1993) reiterates the unrecognizability of

⁵ While Derrida begins his book with "O friends, there are no friends," Agamben has already written to Derrida requesting that the sentence in question be amended as a consequence of his study as follows: "He who has (many) friends, does not have a single friend". However, Agamben is surprised that Derrida does not acknowledge what Agamben suggests in his work.

existence and the fact that it does not belong to an identity with the following sentences:

Assuming my being-such, my manner of being; is not assuming this or that quality, this or that character, virtue or vice, wealth or poverty. My qualities and my being-thus: are not qualifications of a substance (of a subject) that remains behind them and that I would truly be. I am never this or that, but always such, thus. *Eccum sic*: absolutely: Not possession but limit, not presupposition but exposure (p. 104).

For this reason, *whatever singularity* appears as a way of coming together within the community that does not necessitate an essential universal identity.

Finally, the present thesis has a twofold aim. Firstly, it will offer a re-reading of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) and Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are not the Only Fruit* (1985) with a special focus on the status of the queer individual within the 20th century British community. Secondly, it will offer a reconsideration of queer community via Agamben's reflections on 'whateverness' as singularity, employed to designate an alternative community, a being-with. There are several studies which separately handle these two novels, from different perspectives, such as gender, obscenity, profanity, or religion. However, there is not sufficient scholarship in the field that elaborates on a possible inclusive community encompassing all gender identities. This juxtaposition of Agamben's idea of *whatever singularity* with queer theory, not attempted to this date, constitutes the novelty of the present work and its focus on the topic of togetherness without the common.

CHAPTER 1: Stephen & Jeanette as Whatever Singularities

Somebody, your father or mine,
 should have told us that
 not many people have ever died of love.
 But multitudes have perished,
 and are perishing every hour –
 and in the oddest places! – for the lack of it
 — James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*

Having shed light upon love with queer identities through hegemonic masculinity in the epigraph, James Baldwin (1956), with his character, Giovanni, expresses the queer people's inability to find a place for them and their identity to be approved by the society. Baldwin reveals the social pressure on homosexuals by describing the difficulties and even death of queer individuals just because they fall in love with the same sex individuals. Similar to Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*, Radclyffe Hall and Jeanette Winterson narrate the stories of lesbian characters, Stephen and Jeanette, who gradually realize that they are attracted to women in their novels, *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) and *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985). These novels deal with the search for a better and happier place of their characters, Stephen, and Jeanette, who are ostracized by both society and her mother just because of their homosexual identity.

Agamben offers a society that embodies everybody *tel quale* and he asserts that there is a possible society, in which people within the society respect and accept each other as whatever they are since whatever acquires a singularity as it is in its existence. An individual cannot be ignored and/or excluded from the society since they belong to a whole, but that belonging does not represent anything concrete; belonging/being as such is here only related to an empty and undetermined totality.

The Coming Community (1990) also presents an understanding of a society that acknowledges all the characteristics of the singularity, and the singularities can share their being-as-such as their specificity. Accordingly, this chapter will endeavour to demonstrate why homosexual people are to be accepted by the society by the means of idea of *whatever singularity* offered by Agamben by analysing two texts comparatively: Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* and Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*.

The Well of Loneliness (1928), regarded as a prominent example of lesbian literature, revolves around Stephen Gordon who signals that she is homosexual since her young age. During WWI, she is smitten with Mary Llewellyn, who drives an ambulance, however their relationship suffers as they are shunned by community due to their gender-fluidity. Also, the novel portrays homosexuality as a God-given condition, and it concludes with the appeal, "Give us also the right to our existence" (Hall, 1928, p. 399). Besides, since the novel includes a lesbian protagonist, it is subsequently banned for a certain period of time "after a prosecution for obscenity and [is] not republished until 1949" (Stringer, 1996, p. 274). Hall is harshly criticised for the lesbian theme and discourse she presents in the novel, posing a strong opposition within the status quo of the early 20th century. James Douglas reflects on the theme of lesbianism in Hall's work as follows: "I am well aware that sexual inversion and perversion are horrors which exist among us today. They flaunt themselves in public places with increasing effrontery and more insolently provocative bravado"⁶. Since people of the 20th century are against homosexuality and since they are inclined to ignore the existence of homosexuality within the society, individuals who are brought

⁶ *Defending The Well of Loneliness*. Penguin Books UK. (2020, April 27). Retrieved April 1, 2022, from <https://www.penguin.co.uk/articles/2016/defending-the-well-of-loneliness.html>

up by the rules of society shape themselves according to the requirements and the written and unwritten codes of the community, by prioritizing what the society will think or whether the society will accept them as they are, or not. Accordingly, the idea of *whatever singularity* provides an alternative perspective in analysing Stephen's position as a persona who constantly finds herself in identity and gender dilemmas in *The Well of Loneliness* (1928).

Stephen Gordon is the lesbian protagonist of the novel who is seeking for love and a better life within the heteronormativity of 20th Century British society. Lady Anna Gordon, Stephen's mother, presented to the reader as a religious figure, defining her daughter's masculinity "unnatural": "Stephen is very unusual, almost – well, almost a wee bit unnatural – such a pity and poor child, it's a terrible drawback; young men do hate that sort of thing, don't they?" (Hall, 1928, p. 63). The fact that Anna Gordon complains about her daughter simply for her behaving outside the norm unlike the other girls in society can be highlighted when Butler's comments on compulsory heterosexuality are recalled. Butler (1991) suggests that "compulsory heterosexual identities, those ontologically consolidated phantasms of "man" and "woman," are theatrically produced effects that posture as grounds, origins, the normative measure of the real" (p. 21). In this case, Stephen's masculinity is stuck in heterosexual hegemony, and Stephen is thus despised due to her masculine attitude; that is not accepted in the 20th century Britain where everyone's sexual orientation is taken for granted as heterosexual. That is why, if lesbian or gay people reveal their homosexuality, they are stigmatized by other people by claiming that they are "unnatural". As a result, due to the compulsory heterosexuality of the society, Stephen starts to question herself since she does not behave as expected in the society and opens up to her father by specifying her confusion about her emotional state: "Is there

anything strange about me, Father, that I should have felt as I did about Martin” (Hall, 1928, p. 90). Accordingly, Agamben’s understanding of *whatever singularity* provides Stephen and other queer people with a new perspective for escaping the established codes of the traditional society. What happens in the novel, (in contrast with the suggested hypothetical community) is that the community becomes the source of Stephen’s troubles and suffering, especially after her father’s death. In this context, homosexual individuals have always been subjected to discrimination throughout history and have always sought a place for themselves in society like Stephen and her queer friends. However, every individual should be welcomed or accepted by the society regardless of their sexual orientation since “*whatever singularity* (the Lovable) is never the intelligence of some thing, of this or that quality or essence, but only the intelligence of an intelligibility” (Agamben, 1993, p. 9).

Singularity or selfhood, in the Levinasian sense, can only be established and experienced in being-with-the-other. That is why, love plays an important role in designating the relationship between selves. For Agamben, the singular being makes community possible via lovability. Love does not focus on this or that feature of the loved one; the lover loves the object of love with all its features and as it is as such. Within this context, Stephen’s love for Angela is an apt example since her secret and unrequited love for Angela, despite knowing that she is married. Albeit briefly as Agamben (1993) explains “the lover wants the loved one *with all of its predicates*, its being such as it is. The lover desires the *as* only insofar as it is *such-this* is the lover’s particular fetishism” (p. 9). In the light of Agamben’s idea of love, Stephen begins loving her unconditionally regardless of her gender, and keeps writing letters to her regardless of the consequences.

In addition to the idea of *whatever singularity*, Agamben's discussion of the Limbo might also offer a peripheral perspective for reading the queerness in *The Well of Loneliness* (1928). As Agamben discusses in *The Coming Community* (1990), 'whatever beings' are very much like the unbaptized children in Aquinas' *Limbus*. The inhabitants of *Limbus*, who have no fault other than original sin, do not go through a painful punishment in hell, but a punishment of being deprived of the image of God forever (Agamben, 1993, p. 12). From this point of view, Stephen's feeling like a man and later realizing that she is a lesbian girl is no different from the unbaptized children in *Limbus*. Stephen is subjected to constant hate comments by her mother just because she acts like a man or emulates her father:

It is you who are unnatural, not I. And this thing that you are is a sin against creation. Above all is this thing a sin against the father who bred you, the father whom you dare to resemble. You dare to look like your father, and your face is a living insult to his memory, Stephen. I shall never be able to look at you now without thinking of the deadly insult of your face and your body to the memory of the father who bred you. I can only thank God that your father died before he was asked to endure this great shame. As for you, I would rather see you dead at my feet than standing before me with this thing upon you--this unspeakable outrage that you call love in that letter which you don't deny having written (Hall, 1928, p. 221).

As seen in the quotation above, Stephen is in endless despair and society including her mother never stops ostracizing her since she cannot change the society's point of view towards queer people; therefore, she cannot find a way out.

As previously stated, Stephen as a singularity being does not belong to this or that idea of community; however, belonging itself with all her features. Her insisting

state of mind and identity are the proof of thereof since despite the difficulties and exposure of the society, she never abstains from acting as she wishes.

However, in the explanation of *whatever singularity*, Agamben (1993) claims that singularities pose a threat to the State:

What the State cannot tolerate in any way, however, is that the singularities form a community without affirming an identity, that humans co-belong without any representable condition of belonging (even in the form of a simple presupposition). The State, as Alain Badiou has shown, is not founded on a social bond, of which it would be the expression, but rather on the dissolution, the unbinding it prohibits. For the State, therefore, what is important is never the singularity as such, but only its inclusion in some identity, whatever identity (but the possibility of the *whatever* itself being taken up without an identity is a threat the State cannot come to terms with) (p. 93).

Based on the quotation above, what the State cannot accept is individuals coming together to form their own community. In this reading, Agamben's State simply represents the status quo of the 20th Century British society. Stephen's attempts to establish her own circle of lesbian friends also constitute a threat to the most fundamental codes of society, despite the fact that the need for such a circle, a community of their own, results from the society itself. The lesbian outcasts feel the need to appropriate and establish their own belonging:

[w]hatever singularity, which wants to appropriate belonging itself, its own being-in-language, and thus rejects all identity and every condition of belonging, is the principal enemy of the State. Wherever these singularities peacefully demonstrate their being in common there will be a Tiananmen, and, sooner or later, the tanks will appear (p. 94).

Although whatever singularities like the lesbian circle in *The Well of Loneliness* (1990), never pose any real danger, the society never considers *whatever singularity* as peaceful and perceive them as a threat to itself, as any other unfitting figure. This is obvious to Hall since she writes:

if Stephen or other [lesbian girls] were to speak the truth and “declare themselves,” they risk that even their closest friends “would turn aside.” Despite this risk, Hall nonetheless believed that [lesbian people] had a duty to declare themselves and not perpetrate “lies of omission.” [...] In other words, Hall believed that [lesbian people] had a duty to conduct themselves without shame (Knauer, 2000, p. 428).

Portraying lesbian characters in her novel, Hall herself challenges the norms of the society, although she writes with the hope of a society where homosexual individuals can express themselves freely, by revealing the undeniable existence of homosexuality without the fear of facing physical or emotional violence.

Also, Hall illustrates the social perspective of the 20th century Britain. Society makes everyone suffer except the people they call “normal”, and they shape them according to the rules they call normal. To demonstrate, “They lived natural lives – lives that to them were perfectly natural” (1928, p. 272). In this respect, Jamie’s committing suicide because of Barbara’s death would be right on the spot. Homosexuals, who try to live their lives through the identities or rules imposed by society, find themselves excluded from society when they act in ways that society does not want. The death of Barbara, one of the partners of the lesbian couple, in the novel and the suicide of Jamie reveals the pressure that society puts on, homosexuals. For instance, “The good must be defined as a self-grasping of evil, and salvation as

the coming of the place to itself” (Agamben, 1993, p. 22), which tells that the different individuals within the society should be accepted as an individual.

Similar to Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness*, Winterson also puts forward the theme of love in her novels since for her theme of love can be considered as “dependent on its ability to transcend sexual barriers and gender. It should be limitless” (Ellam, 2010, p.13). She also draws the readers’ attention by portraying the main character of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985) as a lesbian girl. By doing so, she tries to demonstrate that love has no gender and subverts the conventional comprehension of love of the 20th century Britain. Winterson firstly challenges the love of a mother, which is generally and arguably presumed to be the most unconditional love.

Although at the very first glance, Jeanette’s mother, like every other mother seems to love her daughter, the reader soon discovers that this love is based on certain expectations to be fulfilled. At the age of seven, Jeanette suddenly loses her ability of hearing because of swollen lymph nodes. Jeanette’s mother leaves her at the hospital alone. However, when she realizes that this is a disease-related deafness “[her] mother [comes] to see [her] quite a lot in the end, but it [is] the busy season at church. They [are] planning to the Christmas campaign” (Winterson, 1997, p. 28). This is a very early sign, indicating that the mother’s love for the daughter is conditional. She constantly tries to shape her daughter according to her own expectations, instead of accepting her as she is. In order to analyse the mother’s relationship with the daughter, Agamben’s discussion of the *quodlibet* within its relation to the dichotomy of the individual and community should be taken into consideration. Accordingly, *Libet* is about *whatever singularity* being lovable as it is (Agamben, 1993, 10). *Whatever singularity* does not belong to any particular class or concept that reveals itself not through a particular concept but simply as “being-as-such”. Jeanette’s mother’s failure

to embrace her as such, followed by the society at large is the central concern of the novel.

Jeanette is presented as a character who constantly problematizes her own identity and existence: “[she] had often thought of questioning her [mother], trying to make her [mother] tell [her] how she saw the world” (Winterson, 1997, p. 88). Whenever Jeanette displays a questioning attitude about religion, a theme that plays a central role in the mother’s world, she warns her that she should not talk about such topics. “Jeanette’s mother establishes herself as the bearer of the divine will” (Gamallo, 1998, 133). Accordingly, the mother-daughter relationship is mostly formed and shaped around the highlighted religious belief and its consecutive codes. “*Oranges* also considers how impossible it is to escape from a constructed past where, although there is no biological tie between mother and daughter, the connection is still present even after betrayal and Jeanette’s excommunication” (Ellam, 2006, p. 80).

DeLong argues that the title of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* is associated with homosexuality (2006, p. 270). In one of their dialogues, Jeanette’s mother categorizes the demons by colour and defines the orange devil as the hedonistic demon: “What sort of demon? The brown demon that rattles the ear? The red demon that dances the hornpipe? The watery demon that causes sickness? The orange demon that beguiles? Everyone has a demon like cats have fleas” (Winterson, 1997, p. 106). DeLong explains that while the orange demon represents homosexuality, the oranges represent heterosexuality, and Winterson, with the title *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, metaphorically explains that heterosexuality is not the only sexual orientation. He (2006) alludes “Winterson’s use of this shifting image explodes the homo=hetero binary, or, at the very least, inverts traditional assumptions about the two, since all oranges (hetero) are orange (homo), but other things can be orange (homo) as well”

(p. 270). Taking the title itself into account, Agamben's *whatever singularity* becomes relevant. Winterson depicts Jeannette as a lesbian girl labelled by the society as "unnatural", reflecting to the reader that they exist within society despite several difficulties and rejections. This existence itself within community, in relation with Agamben's approach, indicates that whichever sexual orientation you are, you are still agreeable. Starting with Jeanette's relationship with her mother, the 'ethical encounter' as Levinas would put it, Jeanette should take her place in the community as a lovable singularity. Whether she is attracted to men or women, whether she is religious, a Christian, or not should not determine her lovability. In this context, the mother must love her daughter wholeheartedly, not with regard to her own proper or acceptable definitions. The same also applies to the love and respect that people in the community have for other people. Jeanette might love either a man or a woman but each love is still unique and *singular* since the lover loves the one "such as it is" (Agamben, 1997, p. 2). As displayed in the title, oranges are not the only fruit, meaning heterosexuality are not the only sexual orientation in the society and differences should not stand for discrimination. On the contrary Jeanette should be loved as what she is.

Winterson portrays Jeanette's quest for identity, her struggles against a prejudiced society, the pressures by family members, and a young girl who nevertheless pursues her own desires. The identity crisis that Jeanette goes through stems from social, religious, and sexual reasons. The unbearable pressures of society and her mother push her to question over love and religion. Jeanette's lesbian love, in a way, liberates her from the constraints imposed by society since her love and faith are the things that allow her to see the possibilities of community. In this case, as can be seen in Agamben's discussion on the concept of community, one of the

possibilities that provides the unity of the community is love. As Agamben (1993) explains “whatever is the thing *with all its properties*, none of which, however, constitutes difference. In-difference with respect to properties is what individuates and disseminates singularities, makes them lovable (quodlibetable)” (p. 26). In this case, *whatever singularity* can be loved as such because it is an entity that belongs only to itself, not in the absence of any genus belonging to another class, but in terms of its “being as such”. That is why, Jeanette should be welcome regardless of her sexual orientation or questioning character. In a different context, Agamben (1997) discusses:

fleeing from our own impotence, or rather trying to adopt it as a weapon, we construct the malevolent power that oppresses those who show us their weakness; and failing our innermost possibility of not-being, we fall away from the only thing that makes love possible (p. 33).

Jeanette’s mother’s almost fundamentalist attitude and the pressure she lays on her daughter as a reaction to her unconventionality, in a way shows her own impotence, therefore, she creates a kind of evil power and destroys the love between mother and daughter:

The simple transposition of the binary in *Oranges* (lesbianism = natural and therefore good; heterosexuality = unnatural, perhaps evil) pave the way for more complex strategies with which Winterson will neutralize heteropatriarchal authority and begin to map an alternative social order, one that positions lesbian at the centre (Doan, 1994, p. 145).

In *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985), Winterson highlights the bias of obligatory heterosexuality, through which lesbian experience is judged on a spectrum ranging from aberrant to odious, or just rendered invisible. As Butler claims, gender is not the natural space on which culture is built, but rather a discursive thing, and what Butler

endeavours to do is to reveal the power mechanisms that create the perception that gender is natural and gender is cultural (1999, p. 51).

Taking an upright stance since the beginning of the novel, Jeanette stops resisting for a while when it comes to Melanie and appears to seek for forgiveness after this painful experience. French (1999) claims the fact that Jeanette is forced to give in to the pressures of the church and her mother as follows:

Jeanette has unconsciously appropriated and transferred the association between "orange" and heterosexuality to her own situation, so that what was once dominant is now marginal, and vice versa. Thus, she legitimates same sex desire, but at the cost of preserving the standard polarity between homosexuality and heterosexuality (p. 234).

Meanwhile, she still knows deep down that she has performed nothing whatsoever to violate God, since there is nothing more innocent than loving someone. Her mother is worried that Jeanette's inclination leads to their demise, and she compels Jeanette to leave because she believes the evil infects her family if she stays with them. Jeanette strives to rebuild her life after being cut off from her family and friends. The fact that Jeanette's mother does not want her daughter is in contradiction with Agamben's idea of an alternative community because Agamben (1993) alleges that "[t]he lover wants the loved one with all of its predicates, its being such as it is" (p. 9). Instead, Jeanette's mother refuses to see her daughter in her environment and she does her best to make her daughter socially acceptable rather than accepting her as she is. Jeanette is exposed to her mother's religious brainwashing, which disregards Melanie, since her main aim is to educate her daughter as a preacher for God. Rather of seeing Jeanette as a human being with desires of her own, the mother sees her as a wonderful tool for

her Lord. However, it is significant to realize that the importance of whatever being is “contingent” on its singularity (Agamben, 1993, p. 112).

Apart from that, Winterson also endeavours to find the answer to the question of who Jeanette is. In this quest for self-discovery, Jeanette finds herself not only in a search for identity, but also in a search for a suitable society in which to live.

However, the church, which is the representative of the dominant ideology, and the church members who have become its ideological weapon, create a perception of reality that they believe in and expect their society to believe in it. Individuals who have difficulty in adapting to this system see the truth as they get to know themselves, but they are forced to comply with the system by being more pressured by the governments. For Jeanette, who is sent to her own exile because of her sexual preferences, she must fight against her fears and weaknesses, her suppressed emotions, and the dominant ideology. Yet, with this fight, Jeanette poses a threat to the church doctrines, and so both the church members and her mother try to suppress her by claiming that there is a demon in her, and then she is sent from the town. As in the case of Stephen in the first novel analysed here, the struggles and even the existence of a queer is perceived as dangerous to the existing community.

Additionally, both Jeanette and Melanie first avoid interacting with men. These two women defy society’s heteronormative sexual norm and prefers embracing their desire by excluding the prescribed sexuality of the patriarchal discourse. Nevertheless, Melanie embraces the seemingly, so to speak, acceptable heterosexuality while rejecting the ostensibly unnatural homosexuality since “[w]hat the State cannot tolerate in any way, however, is that the singularities form a community without affirming an identity, that humans co-belong without any representable condition of belonging” (Agamben, 1993, p. 93). Thus, she does not want to be a threat to society

and the status quo and prefers to live the way of life she does not want. Melanie's denial of her sexual orientation can also be linked to homosexual panic since "it refers to the supposed uncertainty about his own sexual identity of the perpetrator of the antigay violence" (Sedgwick, 2008, p. 20). Consequently, Melanie rejects her identity in order to avoid further oppression and lead a decent life in an anti-gay community, and prefers a heterosexual life, which is one of the necessities of the community, in order to survive in the society.

Furthermore, Jeanette, the protagonist of the novel *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985), is intended to be a missionary, but as she learns more about herself and her sexuality, she reinterprets both her faith and her family. As a result, members of the church and her mother see her as a threat. Jeanette succeeds in breaking free of heterosexual discourse and establishing a new future for herself, rejecting the destiny her mother had planned for her and who had become the ideological weapon of the church she belongs to. However, nothing has changed in the city she left once she returns after a long time. The fact that the society she has not been in for a long time has not changed reveals that the real problem is the society, so Agamben's notion of community would be just right for Jeanette and the 20th century Britain. As Agamben emphasizes, what a state cannot tolerate is that singularities form a community without affirming any identity. This corresponds to the situation in which people belong to each other, without any representative condition of belonging, a situation.

To conclude, the protagonist of Hall's Stephen and Winterson's Jeanette are lesbian characters who are exposed to discrimination by their society and their mothers. Despite the fact that they both are written decades apart, the protagonists deal with the same exclusion. However, Agamben's *whatever singularity* enable them

to live within the society with their whatness since Agamben claims that there is a possible society which accepts its members with their whatness.



CHAPTER 2: Stephen & Jeanette on the Threshold as Exemplars

Love is not something you can negotiate.
Love is the one thing stronger than desire and
the only proper reason to resist temptation

— Jeannette Winterson, *Written on the Body*

Whatever is the figure of the pure singularity. The *whatever singularity* has no identity, neither definite by a concept, nor simply indefinite; rather, it is determined through its relationship with an idea, that is, with the sum of its possibilities. It is through this relation that singularity is acquired not by its inclusion in a certain concept or actual quality (such as being red, Italian, homosexual), but through this very act of limitation. Thus, the singularity belongs to a whole, but this belonging cannot be represented by a real condition: here belonging, being-such is only a relation to an empty and indefinite total. Whatever adds just a void, just a threshold to the singularity: whatever is a singularity plus an empty space—a singularity that is finite but still undefinable according to a concept. However, a singularity plus empty space can only be a pure exteriority, a pure exposure. Whatever is, in this sense, an outside-in event. What the architrancendental quodlibet suggests is therefore the most difficult to think about: the absolutely not-thing experience of a pure outside. What is important at this point is that the concept of “threshold” finds expression in a word meaning “at the door” in many European languages. It is not another space beyond a certain space; it is rather a transition, an outside that gives access to it – in short, its face, its eidos. The threshold, in this sense, is nothing different compared to the boundary; The experience of the limit itself is an experience of being-within the outside. This ek-stasis is the gift of singularity from the empty hands of humanity.

Stephen in *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) is presented with identities throughout her life. For instance, when her mother reminds her of her gender in an attempt to mould her according to the norms of society, Stephen, despite her great effort, drives everything to its limit. She straddles all individuality: woman, male, lover, friend, and sister. In essence, she exists alongside and beyond all individualities. As a result, she resists and ridicules all these roles, causing them to collide. She has all these attributions, yet she is not uniquely identified with any. She illustrates what happens when society's conferred identities are put into question, when one hovers on the threshold of singularity. As exemplified by Agamben, the structure of *whatever singularity* comprises emptiness. This void is an undefined space as much as the singularity that is undefined by any identity or notion. The gap holds the existence of all possibilities in its nothingness. "Hall also uses a body between genders to symbolize the "inverted" sexuality Stephen can neither disavow nor satisfy. Finding herself "no match" for a male rival, the adolescent Stephen begins to hate herself" (Newton, 1984, p. 570). This indicates the fact that Stephen as a singular being is described neither as a woman nor a man, instead she is in the *threshold*.

Considering the failure to conform with the normative looks and sexual tendency, what Butler mentions in her article *Gender Trouble* (1990) supports the idea: femininity or masculinity are genders created by society. Defining gender as performative, Butler asserts that expressions are not the results of our gender, but rather its founders. (1999, p. 77). On the other hand, the performative concept of gender that rejects heteronormativity, suggesting that there are not only two different genders, femininity and masculinity, but it can be observed that many genders that cannot fit into certain stereotypes, and proposes to constantly deviate from the norms. As a matter of fact, Butler also criticizes the feminist thought, which has built its

arguments based on the male-female dichotomy. From this perspective, it would be wrong to judge someone based on their look. How to act as a woman or a man is only a socially constructed idea. Likewise,

in Hall's novel, Stephen's clothing showcases her marginalization and her alienation from her family, her society, and her own body— especially when she meets the first of her real lovers, Angela Crossby [...] Her new masculine clothes make her feel more authentic and comfortable with her looks, and once her writing career helps elevate her status, she is considered odd, but only as a reclusive artistic type with an unusual style (Cybanski, (n.d.), p. 164).

Following Butler's (1990) claims, it can be said that expecting Stephen to act like a woman just because her body gives her the feminine attribution would be improper. Describing all orientations other than heterosexuality as "different" is an indication that heterosexuality is accepted as the norm and considered "normal". Thus, Stephen is seen as "unnatural" both by her mother and the society and to define an identity based on another identity or definition is to marginalize it at the same time.

Pointing out that the "normal" is turned into a secret and closed into a closet in the text, Sedgwick claims that, "being in the closet" is a performance in itself, just as being silent is yet another speech act. She argues that it leaks from the text as an underlying discourse and is used as a strategy. As Sedgwick asserts, sometimes by being taken out of the closet, sometimes by simply pointing out what's in the closet, they become narrative strategies (2008, p. 3). Stephen's attempt to change herself in the way her mother wants, is an effort for society and her mother to accept and respect her, because even though she knows that no matter what she does, she will not be able to become the person she wants, she dresses in a different way to win her mother's love since "her contrary appearance and predilections appear to be outside the

available sex/gender narrative and therefore appear simply not to be” (Green, 2003, 282). Additionally, “getting out of the closet” is associated with coming out / being extrovert and talking, while living in the closet is associated with hiding and silence. Taking this into account, Stephen’s new friends from Paris shows parallelism with Sedgwick idea of “closet”: they want to stay undercover since they are forced to have some secret places, which are known exclusively among queer people by the heteronormative society. That is why, homosexual individuals need a space where they can easily display their identities and behave as themselves, and the fact that homosexuals do these in closed spaces away from the social environment is a clear example of their being detached from the social environment.

Additionally, the concept of being in “closet” by Sedgwick (1990), heterosexual / homosexual dichotomy, which is a founding distinction in Western culture, is constructed in secrecy; no matter how much it comes out of the closet, the secret position will not change. Homosexuality always remains a secret and therefore something that should be removed from the closet. Within the relationship between Barbara and Jamie in *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) context, once Barbara dies due to her sickness, Jamie commits suicide after her partner’s death, feeling that she can no longer bear the pressure of society. Jamie’s committing suicide can be linked to Sedgwick’s term “homosexual panic”:

Judicially, a “homosexual panic” defence for a person (typically a man) accused of antigay violence implies that his responsibility for the crime was diminished by a pathological psychological condition, perhaps brought on by an unwanted sexual advance from the man whom he then attacked. In addition to the unwarranted assumptions that all gay men may plausibly be accused of making sexual advances to strangers and, worse, that violence, often to the point of

homicide, is a legitimate response to any sexual advance whether welcome or not, the “homosexual panic” defence rests on the falsely individualizing and pathologizing assumption that hatred of homosexuals is so private and so atypical a phenomenon in this culture as to be classifiable as an accountability-reducing illness (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 19).

Jamie, who chooses to commit suicide since Barbara and Jamie’s lesbian relationship is a love affair that is not accepted by the society. Therefore, she will be alone with Barbara’s death and cannot be exposed to the pressure applied by the society anymore. This exclusion can be explained with the following words by Sedgwick (1990) that she will not be able to withstand the hegemonic society any longer because “it is possible that they fear that, because of the asymmetrically marked structure of heterosexist discourse, any discussion of homosexual desires or literary content will marginalize him (or them?) as, simply, homosexual” (p. 197). Before Barbara dies, she wants to get rid of social pressure on homosexual people and she declares that “Jamie, let’s go away ... they hate us. Let’s go where nobody knows us. I am twenty-one now, I can go where I like, they can’t stop me. Take me away from them, Jamie” (Hall, 1928, p. 322).

A traditional society, on the other hand, does not easily welcome any undefined or indeterminate existence. This is what Agamben attempts to stress in his discussion of community:

Just as the right human word is neither the appropriation of what is common (language) nor the communication of what is proper, so too the human face is neither the individuation of a generic facies nor the universalization of singular traits: It is whatever face, in which what belongs to common nature and what is proper are absolutely indifferent (Agamben, 1993, p. 26).

Using the example of Agamben's "face", it is possible to claim that each individual is distinctive and has its own characteristics since the human face is neither a universalization of single characteristics nor the individuation of a generic facies. Along with that, Agamben (1993) suggests "it is whatever face, in which what belongs to common nature and what is proper are absolutely indifferent" (p. 26). That is why individuals who do not conform to social norms, such as homosexuals as represented in Hall's novel, are in the community with their own specificities despite being excluded from society.

Her exclusion from society and the attitude of her mother brings Stephen, paradoxically, closer to God and she finds a kind of happiness in her communication with God. By telling God about the troubles with her mother and society, she attempts to comfort herself in a way and begging for mercy from Him no matter what she experiences outside. As Agamben mentions in his book chapter, namely Example, to be an exemplar is to be not defined by any characteristic other than being called. Within this perspective, it is not being heterosexual, but being called to be heterosexual as these define the example. Pure singularities communicate, for example, in their empty space, without being attached to any property or identity (Agamben, 1993, p. 20-21). In this case, the example is valid for all cases of the same genus and lies between them, and stands for each one, although there is a singularity among the others, it applies to all singularities. In this context, if sexuality is to be considered as such an example from Agamben's point of view, sexuality is valid for all human beings and is a singularity that lives within all humans and sexuality also creates its own singularity, including the state of falling in love with any gender. In that, sexuality constitutes singularity, regardless of gender. Considered in terms of Stephen, Stephen becomes an exemplar of 20th century of Britain as a lesbian

character. Stephen is neither particular nor universal because of her homosexual identity. Neither society accepts her as she is nor is she recognised as a homosexual. She is a singular being, showing her singularity as a homosexual individual. Regardless of her sexual orientation, her existence should be tolerated by society in all circumstances. As Agamben articulates what makes the Example distinctive is that it applies to all cases of the same genus, and in addition, it is “in-between” them. That is why, Stephen is neither unique nor universal, an existent that only shows her own uniqueness, that presents itself as such in the 20th century Britain.

Similarly, Jeanette in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985) is located on *threshold* between being religious and irreligious, with her mother and with her lover, the community and herself. However, this does not mean that her determinations are not clear, or she is deprived of identities. She believes in God, but this does not prevent her from questioning the existing religious doctrine. She loves her mother but at the same time she loves Melanie, because loving somebody of the same gender is not something to be blamed for; and yet, she is posited as an alien in the community where she lives. However, Jeanette as a whatever singular being, “has no identity, it is not determinate with respect to a concept, but neither is it simply indeterminate; rather it is determined only through its relation to an idea, that is, to the totality of its possibilities” (Agamben, 1997, p. 66). Along with that, Jeanette’s existence is confronted by her mother’s binary oppositions. Jeanette notices that her mother has clear and precise limits beyond which she does not stray. She advises Jeanette to build her life by relying on these codes she has been following throughout her life:

Enemies were:

The Devil (in his many forms)

Next Door Sex (in its many forms)

Slugs,

Friends were:

God

Our dog

Auntie Madge

The novels of Charlotte Bronte

Slug Pellets (Winterson, 1997, p. 3)

As the above quotation underlines, everything in the Church's structure seems to be in conflict, and the limits are strictly defined. Its system should never be disrupted or called into question. This system is what Jeanette's mother's embraces. For Jeanette's mother, life continues through binary oppositions on the axis of black/white, sin/goodness, wrong/right. If Jeanette takes her father as a role model, she will not be accepted by the society, she will be exposed to prejudices and she will enter into a struggle that she will never win as Jeanette confesses: "Poor Dad, he was never quite good enough" (1997, p. 11). Jeanette's mother is the dominant character in the marriage, and she exerts control even over her husband by either entirely ignoring him or ensuring that he follows the rules of her faith (Bollinger, 1994, p. 365). However, as a lover, a daughter, a member of the community, pious, Jeanette associates with all identities and at the same time transcends them all. By doing so, she challenges and mocks all these identities, bringing them to a point of crisis.

Men and women, who are biologically differentiated from the moment of birth, are separated when it comes to social norms which turn biological sex into gender since "heteronormativity is a societal hierarchical system that privileges and sanctions individuals based on presumed binaries of gender and sexuality; as a system it defines and enforces beliefs and practices about what is 'normal' in everyday life"

(Toomey, McGuire, & Russell, 2012, p. 188). Winterson's novel attempts to disrupt and transcend the binary framework that stifles gender variation and flexibility. She attempts to address the traditional view of gender, as well as the negative dichotomy of male/female and masculinity/femininity, in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985), since the role assigned to the individual from birth is prescriptive and its borders are well defined. The versions of sex or sexuality presented to men/women have been shaped by their environment from the very first moments and are debilitating in many ways "because their governments have socialized them since birth to view these norms and standards as the only acceptable behaviour. Citizens who reject heteronormativity typically do not start at this position but rather evolve to this position" (Holmes, 2019, p. 5). These characteristics are shaped by the person's family, close environment, and the dominant gender roles in societies. "[That is why] women who loved other women became defined as unnatural, many were simultaneously empowered through their ability to name themselves and their feelings, and through the help that 'naming' gave them in identifying other lesbians" (Bland, 1995, p. 8). Moreover, gender identity, according to Butler, is interchangeable and complicated while also being constrained by societal norms and expectations "because certain kinds of 'gender identities' fail to conform to those norms of cultural intelligibility, they appear only as developmental failures or logical impossibilities from within that domain" (1999, p. 24). This is demonstrated in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985), when the protagonist, Jeanette, confesses being a lesbian person. Jeanette opposes the idea of a normative, binary society in which everyone acts and lives according to the prevailing, conventional gender and sexual standards of men and women in the novel. Despite being obliged to obey the church's regulations and seek love from people of the same sex in order to be an idealized girl, she defies the

hierarchy and falls in love with a woman, breaking gender boundaries. As a result, Jeanette's lesbian love transcends the sexual and gender restrictions connected with traditional love.

People may rewrite their own interpretations of history since "everyone who tells a story tells it differently, [because] everybody sees it differently" (Winterson, 1997, p. 93). As Butler (1999) claims, "the story of origins is a strategic tactic within a narrative that, by telling a single, authoritative account about an irrecoverable past makes the constitution of the law appear as a historical inevitability" (p. 46). In this regard, Winterson (1997) states:

People have never had a problem disposing of the past when it gets too difficult. Flesh will burn, photos will burn, and memory, what is that? The imperfect ramblings of fools who will not see the need to forget. And if we can't dispose of it, we can alter it (p. 72).

As the quotation indicates, Winterson's narrative, attempting to deconstruct the binary oppositions and impositions shaped around gender, shares parallel concerns with her own life (Oruç, 2022, p. 205). The author, who uses marginalized characters in her novel, does not feel the need to hide her sexual identity in her real life since Winterson openly expresses that she is a lesbian girl. That is why:

Winterson's writing her own life story in the form of a *Bildungsroman*, including her troublesome upbringing as an adopted child by emotionally distant parents and discussing her first experience of lesbian relationships alongside her active role in a Methodist Church have led to the analysis of *Oranges* in terms of trauma, self-writing, fact/fiction boundaries, gender identity, religion and problematic mother-daughter relationship with a psychoanalytic vantage point (Oruç, 2022, p. 205).

She also deconstructs the perception of the church of that period and at the same time challenges heterosexist discourses since:

Winterson's parody interlaces Biblical materials with her fiction, using the history of the Israelites to explore Jeanette's experiences of maturation. Given the thematic of the novel, Winterson's choice of the Bible seems especially appropriate; besides being a relevant cultural document, it is a personal one as well since both Winterson and Jeanette were raised by Pentecostal evangelists (Bollinger, 1994, p. 364)

As stated in the quotation above, the social structure is family-centred and the woman's place in the household is predominantly the effect of religion. Additionally, the fact that women are subordinated in the spiritual sense and that they are essential for the continuation of worldly life points to the religious exploitation of women. The conversion of the Church into the ideological weapon of the patriarchal society is embedded in the narrative with its criticism.

As mentioned before, Jeanette also pushes everything to its boundary by defying church theology and her mother's regulations. She dwells on the borders of all her identities: woman, lover, homosexual, and pious. She exists alongside and beyond all other identities. As a result, she is, in a way, unknown: she owns all of these identities but is unaware of them. She represents what happens when society's conferred identities are questioned, and when one stands on the verge of uniqueness. The structure of *whatever singularity*, as represented by Agamben, consists of emptiness since it is both full of everything and not full of anything. The emptiness in this space is undefined, much like the singularity that is anything is undefined by any identity or idea. In its nothingness, the gap contains the presence of all possibilities (1993, p. 74). For instance, what Jeanette perceives as her mother's betrayal, on the

other hand, may be seen as the foundation for Jeanette's choice to pass by the *threshold* from heterosexuality to homosexuality. Jeanette informs her mother about her deep affection for Melanie, yet her mother betrays her by refusing to support her daughter. Jeanette's most recent affair with Katy also helps her to reaffirm her lesbian identity. Acceptance and reaffirmation of her homosexuality are critical in preventing her personality from being fragmented. Accepting her homosexuality also means destroying the connections she has with her mother and community. However, given the mother-daughter connection, the most logical interpretation is one of possession to mother. Jeanette is constantly in her mother's grasp. Despite the fact that she is no longer under her mother's control, Jeanette maintains a deep bond with her. She fails whenever she attempts to cross the *threshold* between being her mother's daughter and being an autonomous girl. As portrayed in the novel, "[t]here are threads that help [she] finds [her] way back, and there are threads that intend to bring [her] back. Mind turns to the pull, it's hard to pull away. [Thus, Jeanette] is always thinking of going back [to her mother]" (Winterson, 1997, p. 151). She cannot keep herself away from her mother although they do not have any proper mother-daughter affair. She stays in the *threshold* of their relationship.

For Agamben, what determines a singularity comes from its relation to the sum of all possibilities. The singularity, which is not determined by anything, is without an identity, and with this feature it is in an openness that can encounter all possibilities (1993, p. 74). This point of contact corresponds to the *threshold* which is not a boundary, instead is relationship established with an external space. Therefore, Jeanette as a whatever singular being, is not determined by any identity, and this makes her open to any probabilities.

All in all, Stephen and Jeanette, in Agamben's sense, are figures of singularity who stand on the boundary of all their possibilities and characteristics. Such boundary, according to Agamben, is a threshold rather than a limit. This threshold forces everyone to disclose themselves completely. It is also a realm of nothingness "empty space" where everyone comes together without any condition or identity, as "being whatever." The threshold is the sense of the boundary itself, of being-within an outside. This ek-stasis is the gift that singularity collects from humanity's empty hands (Agamben, 1993, p. 67).



CHAPTER 3: The Notion of Friendship for Stephen & Jeanette

Being who you are is so much more important than fitting in will ever be.

— Cheryl B. Evans, *I Promised Not to Tell: Raising a Transgender Child*⁷

Friendship is, arguably, one of the most reliable relationships an individual can develop. Loneliness is a palpable experience for every individual. However, the increase in loneliness is an abnormal situation for the individual as a social being. The remedy that can be developed for this abnormal situation is friendship since in a true friendship, there is only a bond based on love, without any fear, obligation or condemnation. This bond naturally brings together sharing and trust, thus reducing loneliness.

Friendship is also closely related to the definition of philosophy that it can even be said that philosophy would not be possible without it. The closeness of philosophy and friendship is so deep that the word philosophy includes *philos*, that is, the word friend. Agamben notes that the word ‘friend’ belongs to what linguists call the ‘nonpredicative term’, so it does not refer to anything specific like ‘white’, ‘hard’, ‘hot’. In addition, it is not predicative and it is problematic whether it can form a consistent set (Agamben, 2009, p. 29). Just like in insults, the word ‘friend’ is not a descriptive predicate, but a proper noun. Because insults have a different place among all possible forms of addressing or addressing in the language: Insult replaces the person’s name. Therefore, no matter how dissatisfied the person called with this naming is about the nickname, this situation ties the person’s hands and arms. “What is offensive In the insult is, in other words, a pure experience of language and not a

⁷ Evans, C. B. (2020). *I Promised Not to Tell: Raising a Transgender child*.

reference to the world” (Agamben, 2009, p. 30). According to Agamben, friendship is an intimacy that cannot be represented or conceptualized. Words such as white, hot, hard can be predicates, and their predicate refers to what something is. However, the fact that the word ‘friend’ is not predicate indicates a situation that is separated from the determination beyond the unique feature or quality of the friend.

Once Stephen in *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) grows up, she begins to consider herself a boy although “Stephen is biologically female, and the expectation is that her expression of gender reflects biological femininity, while her sexual desire seeks a masculine” (Green, 2013, p. 282). For instance, when she talks to her friend Collins, she reveals that she does not see herself as a female by stating: “Yes, of course I am a boy. I’m young Nelson, and I am saying: [...] I must be a boy, cause I feel exactly like one, I feel like young Nelson in the picture upstairs” (1928, p. 13). It is obvious in the quotation that she is searching for her identity and is lost in this world which makes her life even more problematic. Furthermore, Stephen’s masculinity is explained by Bauer (2003):

Stephen’s masculine mind conducts the ways in which she uses her masculine body to express her sexuality. Initially, the body had marked her as ‘narrow-hipped, wide-shouldered little tadpole of a baby’ who somehow did not seem to fulfil the parental expectations. When she learns to shape her body to her own ideals, she becomes the narrow-hipped and wide shouldered (p. 27).

Her masculinity also demonstrates that “[h]er struggle to find her place ‘unexplained as yet’, has made her one of the most appealing and problematic heroines of twentieth century fiction” (Saxey, 2005, p. vii).

Nevertheless, Stephen is much closer to her father than her mother since she does not want to be like the other girls; who are either going after boys or staying in

their homes. Instead, she spends her time with her father and enjoy fencing, which is counted as a male activity. Hall (1928) explains, “A young woman of her age to ride like a man, I call it preposterous” (p. 81). Her mother wants her to emulate the other girls in the town and she tries to find for her daughter a suitor. Her father, on the other hand is more inclined towards embracing his daughter with whomever she loves and whoever she is in the 20th century Britain. The mother sees Stephen as:

a social disaster, yet at seventeen many a girl was presented, but the bare idea of this had terrified Stephen and so it had had to be abandoned. At the garden parties she was always a failure, seemingly ill at ease and ungracious (Hall, 1928, p. 65).

Contrary to her mother’s opinion about her, she has a friend, named Puddle, and supports her in all cases even though people are generally against her. Whenever she feels frustrated, she is always there to support. This friendship does not prevent Stephen from feeling outcasted especially when she fails to find in herself the capacity to get engaged in a heteronormative relationship:

What was she, what manner of curious creature, to have been so repelled by a lover like Martin? Yet she had been repelled, and even her pity for the man could not wipe out that stronger feeling. She had driven him away because something within her was intolerant of that new aspect of Martin (Hall, 1928, p. 82).

Unlike her thoughts about herself, Puddle does not withhold his support to protect and empower her. Within this context, Agamben’s discussion on community cannot be thought without the discussion of friendship since one of the most fundamental factors that enable the individuals that create the community to stay together is their togetherness and friendship. Agamben (2009) sees friendship as:

[recognizing] someone as a friend means not being able to recognize him as a 'something.' Calling someone 'friend' is not the same as calling him 'white,' 'Italian,' or 'hot,' since friendship is neither a property nor a quality of a subject (p. 31)

Accordingly, Stephen's friendship with Puddle, stands as a substantial example, since this friendship is not based upon regular and normative definitions with unconditional support. As the above quotation suggests, Agamben's approach to friendship dismisses any given subjectification. Such friendship requires accepting the other as such. Puddle does not alienate herself from Stephen just because she is a lesbian girl.

Besides, because of Stephen's masculine appearance, Anna Gordon feels ashamed and thinks Stephen is an embarrassment to the community. On the one hand, Stephen does not satisfy what Anna Gordon asks for from her; therefore, Stephen starts to think that, "[she looks] like a scarecrow; you are beautiful, darling, but your daughter isn't, which is jolly hard on you" (1928, p. 64). She tries to dress as her mother wants; however, her mother still dislikes Stephen's fashion. She tries to get her mother's attention but she fails again since "Stephen's expression of gender, which she and others experience as masculine, and her sexual desire, which is directed toward women, initially render her illegible within her social milieu" (Green, 2003, p. 282). However, Stephen, who does her best to win her mother's love, always feels the support of her friends. Unlike her mother, who has turned her into someone she is not, her friends accept Stephen as she is, always support her and allow her to hold on to life.

Since the reflection on community should also focus on friendship, it might be necessary to focus on Stephen's friends. Brockett, for example, warns Stephen about Mary since she is young and "the young are easily bruised", asking her to "be a bit

careful of the so-called normal” (Hall, 1928, p. 313). Brockett also advises Stephen to move to Paris from London in order for her to be a good writer and develop her writing skills since London is not a good place for her to write a novel because she needs to focus more on her career. The difficulties that Stephen are exposed to in Britain are not bearable; however, with the help of Brockett and Puddle, Stephen becomes more powerful to this exclusion from the society. Otherwise, she is not able to stand the death of her father, the pressure her mother put on her, and the social exclusion of her, and could give up quickly. For instance, Jonathan is always there to support her and states, “do the best you can, no man can do more – but never stop fighting. For us there is no sin so great as despair, and perhaps no virtue so vital as courage” (1928, p. 318). Jonathan and Puddle do not exclude Stephen due to her being lesbian girl. “Friendship is, in fact a community; and as we are with respect to ourselves, so we are, as well, with respect to our friends. And as the sensation of existing is desirable for us, so would it also be for our friends” (Agamben, 2009, p. 33). From this perspective, Stephen’s friendships with Jonathan and Puddle stand for unconditional lovability.

Similar to Stephen in *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), Elsie Norris, in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985) is a strong supporter of Jeanette, even after it becomes obvious that she is a lesbian person. Additionally, Elsie, unlike Jeanette’s mother, leads Jeanette along the appropriate road as a genuine mentor. Elsie meets Jeanette even after she leaves the church and does not reject her. She even proposes that Jeanette should strike out on her own and find her own path in the world, and she means her identification is not inherently improper. The moment Jeanette is freed from the hegemony of the church is when her relationship with Melanie comes to light. After her being lesbian girl is discovered by the society, Jeanette’s commitment

to the church is immediately questioned; her pride is hurt, and her feelings are utterly ignored by the church members. At the very beginning of the novel, the church has drawn the border for Jeanette based on the approach to good and evil. According to the church doctrine, her sexuality is on the forbidden side for Jeanette. Same sex relationship as in the case of Jeanette and Melanie, is explained not only by the society, but also by the mother with being possessed by the demon. However, Elsie does not care about whom Jeanette loves and accepts her as she is. Therefore, friendship is a significant theme in Winterson's novel as it is in *The Well of Loneliness*. Agamben's discussion of friendship would be a felicitous illustration to support the importance of friendship. Agamben's explanation of community cannot be thought without a consideration of friendship because togetherness and friendship are two of the most important characteristics that enable community's members together. Agamben's association with the "lovable" while describing friendship is undoubtedly in concordance with his idea of community, since for him, friendship is related to accepting the other person as they are, just like in the perception of the community that every individual forming the community, should be loved as they are. Elsie Norris, accordingly, defends Jeanette and urges the church to stop abusing her. At the same time, Elsie is aware of what Jeanette and Melanie are up to the entire time but intends to protect them from the damage that can occur when their relationship is discovered. For, no matter what happens, she argues that Jeanette should be loved and accepted as she is, and she strives for it. She is aware of "being such that [Jeanette] always matters and that is lovable" (Agamben, 1993, p. 8-9). Until Elsie dies, she is seen and described by Jeanette as "encouraging" friend (Winterson, 1997, p. 22). Although Jeanette is ostracized by the society and the church, Elsie never excludes Jeanette just because she has a love affair with a girl, Melanie.

Whether Jeanette really belongs to the society she lives in, not being able to define her identity and trying to explain every difficulty/easiness of her mother with the orders given by the church leads to different questions and problems in Jeanette's mind. After being locked up in the room due to the revelation of her relationship with Melanie, Jeanette accuses her mother of treason and is now completely estranged from her mother. She says: "[s]he burnt a lot more than letters that night in the backyard [...] In her head she was still queen, but now my queen anymore, not the White Queen anymore (Winterson, 1997, p. 110). With these expressions, Jeanette asserts that her mother tries to hide something by burning the letters. This moment can also be read as a push by her mother for preferring to stay "in the closet". As Sedgwick (2008) puts forth, being in the closet is "a performance initiated as such by the speech act of a silence—not a particular silence, but a silence" (p. 3). This silence means that there is a dichotomy between what it is spoken and what is not. Regarding the discourses, surrounding and exploiting it, being in the closet is a performance established by the speech act of silence because "[t]he gay closet is not a feature only of the lives of gay people. But for many gay people it is still the fundamental feature of social life" (2008, p. 68). That is why, many homosexual individuals prefer to be in the closet to survive within the society. Unlike her mother, Jeanette instead of hiding her relationship, has a love affair with Melanie without worry or fear that their relationship will be revealed thanks to her friend's support. After her relationship with Melanie is discovered by the society, she challenges the society, openly stating that "I love her" (Winterson, 1997, p. 80).

According to Agamben, the only evil is to be indebted to existence and to benefit from the possibility of not being as a substance or a basis beyond existence; or it consists in deciding to regard one's own impermanence, which is the most peculiar

mode of human existence, as a crime that must be suppressed in any case (1993, p. 51). That is why, the real evil is to make society see Jeanette and Melanie's relationship as evil and mould them into what they are not. Thereof, "all that in any way concerns every or each member of a class must not be a member of that class" (1993, p. 79), but on the contrary, "Jeanette is exposed to the discourse of the small evangelical society when she is made to take part in the rituals and Sunday masses of the Church" (Atasoy, 2021, p.5). However, Elsie directs Jeanette in the proper direction. Even after Jeanette leaves the church, Elsie continues to see her. She even proposes that Jeanette go out and create her own way in the world, and that her identification is not necessarily incorrect. Unfortunately, Elsie becomes ill and dies at the conclusion. Coming out of the closet can be considered as a strategically liberating move, as a result of this naturalization since it provides role models. At the same time, it attracts others to the queer struggle, combats the internalized homophobia and self-limitation that comes with secrecy, builds a more powerful group by increasing the number of visible homosexuals, and demonstrates that queer people are everywhere and thus cannot be easily circumscribed and effectively discriminated against it. Since according to Sedgwick, "only through the act of coming out does an 'open flow of power become possible,' because the act reveals previous 'unknowing *as* unknowing'" (Xhonneux, 2012, p. 97). However, this coming out is seen as a rebellion and is suppressed by the society. Just like when Jeanette's relationship with Melanie is revealed, the society and Jeanette's mother endeavours to suppress their relationship except for Elsie Norris.

At the end of the novel, Stephen is forced to break up with her girlfriend by the social norms and pressures for the sake of Mary's happiness, since she does not want Mary to suffer and deal with the same segregation from the community. By arranging

Martin and Mary's union, she believes she offers them a better life although she herself will be left in the well of loneliness. Nonetheless, Hall ends her novel with a hope for a possible society, in other words, 'a coming community': "[a]cknowledge us, O God, before the world. Give us also the right to our existence" (Hall, 1928, p. 399).

All in all, *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) has been examined through censorship, modernity, lesbianism, identity crisis and Christianity in the existing scholarship. The present chapter, also focused on the exclusion of homosexual individuals in the 20th century Britain. In addition to the former studies of the novel, a reconsideration of queer community as a community of whatever (lovable) singularities has been discussed with references to Agamben's relevant concepts. Similarly, although *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985) has been analysed through lesbianism, Christianity, family values, identity in other studies, by covering all aforementioned analysis, this dissertation offers a possible community for each member of the society, such as a lesbian person, Christian, friend. Therefore, it sheds light upon every member of the society is "lovable". Along with that, *whatever singularity*, together with all its existing patterns, is full of possibilities and potentiality to change. It can be simply wrong to keep this potentiality restrained all the time. An alternative ethical ground is required in order to actualize these opportunities and potentials, and this can be possible with Agamben's understanding of community. That is why, any concern regarding queer individuals would require a re-discussion of community.

CONCLUSION

But this is your life, and it will stretch out before you,
and you are the only person who can make it whatever you want it to be.

— Christina Lauren, *Autoboyography*

The Well of Loneliness (1928) and *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985) display the approach of society towards homosexual individuals in the 20th century Britain. Because of their homosexual identities, the protagonists of these novels are despised by either their families or society, or both. First of all, *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) focuses on Stephen's problems and loneliness as a result of her being alienated first by her mother and subsequently by society due to her physical appearance. Similarly, *The Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985) features Jeanette who discovers her lack of interest in the opposite sex. When she informs her mother, she encounters the first sample of multiple rejections. By highlighting the problems experienced by queer people, both texts – also because of their autobiographical component - enable homosexual individuals to find a reflection of their plight in literature.

While treating homosexual people as individuals in their own right, both novels clearly disrupt authoritarian hegemonic prohibitions against queer people; naturally, a work's contents and language are not devoid of hegemonies or power structures of a society, region, or historical period. For instance, the initial public reactions against Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, its publication ban are as many markers of hegemonic authority. As stated by Rowbotham (1973 as cited in Whitlock, 1987) "language conveys a certain power. It is one of the instruments of domination [...] Ultimately a revolutionary movement must break the hold of the dominant group over theory, it has to structure its own connections. Language is part

of the political and ideological power of rulers”. Hence, according to most feminist writers challenging the dominant discourse necessitates the development of alternative forms of articulation. Hall achieves this in *The Well of Loneliness* by depicting the exclusion of lesbian people and their consequent search for new places to be happy. Similarly, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* accomplishes the same via its protagonist who constantly questions, challenges norms, and endeavours to make both her mother as well as society at large to accept her gender identity.

The presence of queer people has been an ongoing concern in community. ‘The queer’ focuses on gender beyond sexuality and is used as an umbrella term to represent non-normative sexual identities and practices. Queer theory, accordingly, is positioned at a critical juncture in the deconstruction of hegemonic roles since it stands in opposition to heterosexual standards; it also encompasses the ambiguity, mystery, and flexibility that define queerness. Namely, queer theory aims to deconstruct gender in a way that prevents it from being reconstructed as yet another heterosexist hegemony. This is why it deliberately refrains from defining its boundaries and becoming a set normative discipline. In Turner’s (2000) words, its aim is “to investigate the historical circumstances by which ‘sexuality’ especially the charge of ‘homosexuality’ can automatically render subjects the somewhat pitiable victims of a determinism that ‘heterosexual’ subjects supposedly remain free of” (p. 38). In this case, queer theory emphasizes social norms, established heterosexual hegemony, and examines the legitimacy of all gender identities.

For instance, Hall’s outcast lesbian characters in *The Well of Loneliness* reveal the resistance to the heterosexist order that is proposed or imposed on them. Stephen as a tomboy has been exposed to discrimination because of her appearance and her hobbies since her childhood. This can be better understood via Butler’s idea of

institutional heterosexuality and via the argument of gender as something established by the society. According to Butler, the identity or identities that the subject has/will have, is/are formed by the elements of the social structure. In this context, the exclusion of Stephen from society just because of her appearance and her preference for things that the men of that period liked is meant to force her into an identity. This also makes her a subject created by society beyond the pure subject.

Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* is a narrative built around an ostracized lesbian character named Jeanette. By rethinking the woman as a gender, Winterson attempts to change the conventional picture of woman; furthermore, she opposes the cultural construction of heterosexuality by rejecting the idea of female identity and femininity imposed by established gender hierarchies. Jeanette is supposed to be a missionary, but as she comes to grasp her own religious and sexual reality, she re-interprets both her faith and her family.

This present thesis discusses Agamben's notion of community and togetherness in his book, *The Coming Community* (1990). The philosopher's reassessments of the community of people who do not have a community result in the concept of togetherness regardless of the common. As previously stated, *whatever singularity* has no identity and is not specified with regard to an idea. Additionally, the community to which Agamben alludes, welcomes singularities while refusing all ideas of identification and belonging, since his concept of a real community is one in which singularities are not marginalized. As a result, singularities are considered as a highly important aspect of society. The 'whatever' does not achieve singularity in its attitude as a result of a common trait (for instance, being red, French, or Muslim), but it acquires as it is in its presence (Agamben, 1993, p. 11). This new conception of community reveals a society that incorporates all the singularity's traits and can share

this originality. As a result, Agamben's community is a novel structure that emerges outside of traditional frameworks, beyond the state and beyond the law. It has been the aim of the present thesis to argue that Agamben's idea of potential community represents a viable alternative for homosexual individuals who were excluded in 20th century Britain. Such a community respects the individuality and togetherness of the human beings because people are *lovable* as they are. By exploring two different texts written at the beginning and at the end of the twentieth century, this thesis also argued that the discrimination and exclusion of homosexual people did not decrease over time. However, perhaps one should remember that we are at a "threshold" of a new era; to use Agamben's words, we are considering the "outside", which is not "another space that resides beyond a determinate space", but "the passage, the exteriority that gives it access [...] its eidos". If queer people, if all of us are to re-learn to assume our own significance, our importance as whatever singularities, we surely have to compel ourselves to practise the state "of being-within an outside", that which will enable us to collect the "ek-stasis" as the "gift that singularities gather from the empty hands of humanity" (Agamben, 1993, p. 69).

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