

Women, Wimmin and Womxn: Challenging Gender Identities in Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other*

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Abstract:

This paper aims to examine the representation of non-binary gender identity in Bernardine Evaristo's recent novel, *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019). Based on the lived experiences of twelve women, mostly black and British, the novel deals with issues of racism, immigration and the fluid perimeters of gender and sexual identities. The multiple voices in this novel, like in Evaristo's other works of fiction vis a vis *Lara* (1997), *The Emperor's Babe* (2001) or *The Soul Tourists* (2005), are not only employed to disrupt stereotyped notions of black women in Britain, but also to stress on diverse sexualities, both revealed or closeted. The paper, however, particularly focuses on the character of Morgan Malenga and her process of transformation from a lesbian, a bi-sexual and then to a non-binary gender identity. By closely examining Morgan's changes, the paper seeks to argue that Morgan's eventual identification with her sexuality stands as a utopic desire that is liberating and limiting at the same time. Consequently, this desire for a gender-free identity is accentuated in the novel through the depiction of Morgan's ambiguous attachment and performance of gender in rural-urban spaces. This is particularly amplified by the representation of a place called Hebden Bridge, where people of various backgrounds reside in solidarity with each other, and which also speaks of Evaristo's attempt at undertaking an intersectional approach. Thus, Morgan's character and her transformation, in a way, incorporates all three terms, women, wimmin and womxn, embracing the idea of inclusivity.

Keywords: Radical lesbianism, non-binary gender identity, Intersectionality