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Jeanette Winterson's Literalizing Metaphors in *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry*

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to analyze Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry* in terms of the feminine symbolic the writer creates in her female characters' narratives through a process of literalizing *dead* metaphors. Using metaphors in their literal sense, a rhetorical pattern which Regina Barreca calls "metaphor-into-narrative," is often deemed a subversive tool in women writers' works to create "laughter". It shows that women writers often use a metaphor in a conflicting context in their comedic works, and thereby stripping language of its symbolic quality. The present study argues that the marginal subject position of Winterson's female characters as "misfits" creates a noticeable difference in their discourses and suggests a move from the symbolic order of language to a feminine symbolic. With the examples from *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry*, the article studies Winterson's "literalization" to reveal how the writer uses metaphors out of their original contexts not only to create humor but also to destabilize the singular order of language used in historiographic representation by leaving the distinction between what is figurative and what is literal unclear. Winterson's female characters in *The Passion* and in *Sexing the Cherry* are also fitting examples for Bakhtin's "Fool" with their resistance to join in the discourse of patriarchy and to understand the habitual ways of conceiving the world.

Keywords: Jeanette Winterson, *The Passion*, *Sexing the Cherry*, metaphor, re-literalization, parody.

Jeanette Winterson's novels are marked with the novelist's departure, in every possible way, from the limits of a patriarchal world. Her departure chiefly takes the form of an intentional move from linear narrative and symbolic order, which also determines the way language is used in the writer's novels. In her 1993 interview with Catherine Bush, Winterson states: "I want to use language in a very raw and tough way so the reader can't pull back from the experience, from how shocking the experience of loss is."[1] Winterson's move from and her challenge against symbolic language is mostly conveyed by means of the "feminine symbolic" she creates in her female characters' narratives through adopting what is symbolic in its original, literal

[1] The interview "Jeanette Winterson by Catherine Bush" is available at https://bombmagazine.org/articles /jeanette-winterson. Accessed on Jan 19, 2021.

context, hence devising a language in her fiction not depending on *the constructions of men*, but highlighting its *constructedness*. Analyzing Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion*[2] and *Sexing the Cherry*,[3] this study argues that the marginal subject position of Winterson's female characters as "misfits" creates a noticeable difference in their discourses and suggests a move from the symbolic order of language to a feminine symbolic, which is embodied in these two novels by the female characters' use of metaphors discursively in their literal meanings and also their refusal to interpret language metaphorically. Reading Winterson's literalization of metaphors in light of Regina Barreca's concept of "metaphor-into-narrative" which she uses to describe the stylistic pattern of "re-literalizing" metaphors in women's comedic writing, the present study suggests that Winterson parodies the convention which conditions the reader to perceive metaphors on a figurative level by her metaphors out of their original contexts and the humor/laughter this creates. It is further claimed that besides blurring the distinction between fact and fiction, *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry* as works of historiographic metafiction subvert the monologic structure (the phallocentric order) of language used in historiographic representation through leaving the distinction between what is figurative and what is literal uncertain with the help of the author's re-literalized metaphors, and thereby opening up a space to give voice to the untold stories/histories of subaltern positions in her fiction.

Luce Irigaray puts forward in her seminal *This Sex Which is Not One* that femininity is silenced within the patriarchal symbolic[4] which "puts woman in the position of experiencing herself only fragmentarily, in the little-structured margins of a dominant ideology" (1985, p. 30). Against this silencing Irigaray offers resistance from within through parody and mimicry that will dismantle the monology of the phallocentric order, claiming that "woman always remains several" as opposed to "man's oneness" (1985, p. 31). In the same vein, Hélène Cixous points out the need to draw an analogy between the female body and women's writing—both of which consist of the qualities of fluidity, softness, and darkness. To Cixous, writing for woman is a return to her body, a return to her sexuality which will free her from the phallocentric order of language.[5] More recent literary studies on women writers' works acknowledge that woman's structural place as the silenced "Other" in the patriarchal order makes a notable difference in their narratives, and they attempt to break female silence, turning it into a subversive voice against the patriarchal authority. This is mainly seen in the writings of Shoshona Felman, Susan Gubar, Dale Bauer, and Diane Price Herndl, whose shared attempt is to read woman silence as a resistance and make the silent speak. In her re-reading of Balzac's story "Adieu," Felman's strategy for making the silent speak is to *re-learn how to speak* outside the specular phallogocentric structure.[6] By the same token, Gubar in her "'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity" adopts the metaphor of "the blank page" from Isak Dinesen's short story with the same title to show how women's writings silenced by the patriarchal literary tradition are, in fact, subversive stories. Through adopting and gendering Bakhtin's theory of dialogism in her book *Feminist Dialogics: A Theory of Failed Community*, Bauer develops a pattern of feminist reading she calls "feminist dialogics" which enables her "to read the woman's voice—excluded or silenced by the dominant linguistic or narrative strategies" (1988,

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[2] Hereafter cited parenthetically as *Passion*.

[3] Hereafter cited parenthetically as *Sexing*.

[4] Irigaray's claim that "'femininity' is a role, an image, a value, imposed upon women by male systems of representation" has come to be influential in the subsequent feminist theories (1985, p. 84).

[5] Hélène Cixous urges, in her ground-breaking article, for a new style of writing celebrating women's difference and expressing the bodily experiences of women. See "The Laugh of the Medusa." *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, eds. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (Rutgers University Press, 1997), pp. 347-362.

[6] Felman claims that in literary texts women are reflected as the silenced other whose only speech is the speech of patriarchy. See her "Woman and Madness: The Critical Phallacy." *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, eds. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (Rutgers University Press, 1997), pp. 7-20.

p. 673). Similarly, Herndl's refashioning of Bakhtin's dialogism into a definition of women writers' language foregrounds the double-voiced discourse in women's writing. Female silence, therefore, is paradoxically a double-voiced parodying speech in dialogic interrelation with that of patriarchal speech and resisting it.[7]

In line with the search for a writing style that can resist patriarchal speech and recognize women's difference, contemporary women novelists put even greater emphasis on parodic rewriting, fantasy, and magic realism, which can make different styles and different representations available in their work and which can also signify a move from linear narrative and symbolic language to writing in a language closer to the female body's quality of *fluidity*. For the symbolic is deemed "a masculine imaginary, characterized by the phallocentric scopic economy which quite literally en-genders differences that support man's illusion of wholeness through a fantasy of woman's lack" (Tyler, 1991, p. 41). Among contemporary women writers, Winterson's novels are mostly read as a challenge against the limits of phallocentric structures with her unorthodox themes and character portrayals, and also with the subversive language usage in the writer's novels. Considering the feminist orientation in Winterson's fiction, one can see that her novels seek to deconstruct phallocentric discourses through the transgression of heteropatriarchal boundaries. The problematization of gender identity is at the centre of her fiction which directly focuses on how gender, gender relations and gender roles are constructed. Her novels try to subvert the traditional gender roles through introducing characters whose gender identity is unknown or vague, or characters that are marginalized because of their bisexual/lesbian love or grotesque bodies. Winterson's female characters may stand for what deviates from the norm, and therefore they are seen as "Others" (mainly in the patriarchal context). Her female protagonists as queer/grotesque bodies or lesbians/bisexuals are marginalized characters with regard to heterosexual norms. They recognize that their bodies and/or lesbian/bisexual love is "not the usual thing" in their social contexts (*Passion,* p. 94). At the same time, however, being "misfits," Winterson's female characters are depicted as subversive individuals as they pose a threat to the patriarchal order and are treated with fear.

Due to the aforementioned marginal subject positions of Winterson's female characters, their narratives turn into a form of *l'écriture feminine* or Irigaray's *le parler femme* that denotes the "multiplicity" of the female body. Cath Stowers terms Villanelle's narrative in *The Passion,* for instance, as "'counter-narrative,' […] a specifically feminist discourse" (1995, p. 141). The discourse that Winterson creates through Villanelle's narrative may exemplify this feminine writing technique[8] with its undermining qualities due to Villanelle's gendered position. The same disruptive features are detectable in the Dog Woman's use of language to grasp female difference in writing in *Sexing the Cherry*. Winterson's female characters' language, particularly that of the Dog Woman, is in line with Irigaray's formulation of feminine symbolic: "Hers are contradictory words, somewhat mad form the standpoint of reason, inaudible for whoever listens to them with ready-made grids, with a fully elaborated code in hand" (1985, p. 29). One of the most obvious forms of this challenging discourse of Winterson's female characters in her *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry* can be observed through the distinct use of metaphors in their narratives. Winterson's use of metaphors and clichés in their literal meanings—like Villanelle's losing her heart literally in *The Passion* or the dancers' literal lightness that enables them to float easily in the air in *Sexing the Cherry*—is a topic which has drawn the attention of many critics,[9] although not explored as a subject in itself. In *"I'm Telling*

[7] See Herndl's "The Dilemmas of Feminine Dialogic." *Feminism, Bakhtin, and the Dialogic*, eds. Dale Bauer and S. Jaret McKinstry (State University of New York Press, 1991), pp. 7-24.

[8] See Stowers' "Journeying with Jeanette: Transgressive Travels in Winterson's Fiction." *(Hetero)Sexual Politics*, eds. Marry Maynard and June Purvis (Taylor and Francis, 1995), pp. 139-58.

[9] Margaret J-M Sönmez refers to this subject in "Voices from Nowhere: Speakers from Other Times and Countries in *Boating for Beginners, The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry*" to show that it has been tackled by many scholars

You Stories": Jeannette Winterson and The Politics of Reading, Helena Grice and Tim Woods consider this pattern in Winterson's narrative as a way of weakening the transparency of language (1998, p. 7). They also focus on the power of this technique to destabilize gendered identity, claiming that "the literalisation of linguistic metaphors works to undo gender roles" (1998, p. 9). Margaret J-M Sönmez sees literalization of metaphors as a "characteristic of play with words" frequently adopted in Winterson's work, which Sönmez briefly defines as a "recurrent tendency to turn back on a recently used metaphor, and bring it to literal life, or to 'literalize' a well-known metaphor without using it in its familiar sense at all" (2009, p. 100). Considering Winterson's literalization of metaphors as a way of playing with words to create humor often masks the subversive side of this technique. However, with regard to Winterson's playing with words in her fiction, it is argued that "your cognitive ground of language trembles under you as you laugh" (Swanson, 1997, p. 326). This device that Winterson exploits should be read as a direct challenge against symbolic order because the novelist, by means of her literalization of metaphors, can be said to adopt a form of language working in ways different from and independent of "the constructions of men," as is stated in *Sexing the Cherry* by the male narrator Jordan who, while living among the prostitutes in the city of words, learns that women have a unique language of their own, a different language from the one that men use. He says: "I noticed that women have a private language. A language not dependent on *the constructions of men* but structured by signs and expressions, and that uses ordinary words as code-words *meaning something other*" (*Sexing*, p. 31, emphasis added). Although Jordan states that he is denied this private language because of being "regarded with suspicion," he realizes it helps developing female "solidarity" which liberates them from the oppressive patriarchal world they live in (*Sexing*, p. 31).

Regina Barreca, in her 1988 article titled "Metaphor-Into-Narrative: Being Very Careful with Words,"[10] elaborates on this unique way that metaphors are used by women writers. She claims that women writers take a metaphor and "re-literalize what has become merely symbolic" in their writings to create humor (1988, p. 243). Barreca's primary focus is "women's comedic writing" and gives examples mostly from the works of Muriel Spark and Fay Weldon. However, "a similar pattern of concretizing metaphors can also be observed in the work of women writers such as Angela Carter and Jeanette Winterson, whose fiction is characterized by magical realism" (Korkut-Nayki, 2014, p. 234). The specific examples Barreca discusses in her study (like a character who literally finds a needle in haystack or the one who actually dies of boredom) show that women writers rewrite metaphors in a conflicting context in their comedic works (1988, pp. 244, 246). The reader is likely to find, in such works, instances similar to the ones that we can observe in Winterson's *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry*. A woman writer who adopts metaphors and clichés in this particular linguistic pattern, Barreca argues, "dislodges them from their intended context," creating, in the process, the parodic incongruity[11] between the disagreeing contexts (1988, p. 249). Therefore, exploiting the device of literalization of metaphors should be seen as a means of parodying the convention which has conditioned the reader to perceive metaphors on a figurative level, for "conflicting contexts, weighted equally, disturb our prepared interpretative strategies," asserts Barreca (1988, p. 243). Using metaphors literally in woman's writing is particularly destructive in nature as the strategy of "metaphor-into-narrative" encodes the very system that reality is constructed with and strips

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who explore Winterson's unique narrative. She puts forward that literalizing metaphor is treated in these studies mainly as a source of language play.

[10] The article was reproduced in 1994 in Barreca's *Untamed and Unabashed: Essays on Women and Humor* (Wayne State University Press, 1994).

[11] With regard to the comic effect that a parody text produces, Margaret A. Rose sees "the creation of comic incongruity or discrepancy [as] a significant distinguishing factor" (1993, p. 31). She regards this difference, rather than the similarity, between the parodied and the parody as the source of the parodic incongruity created with "a dissimilarity or an inappropriate similarity between texts" (1993, p. 32).

language of its symbolic quality, laying bare the device that symbolic language is formed. Barreca states,

> by attaching a buried, literal meaning to what is intended to be inert and meaningless, women writers subvert the paradigmatic gesture of relief that is seen to characterize comedy. A joke usually depends on the equation between initial error (taking something literally) and final pleasure (discovering that it is only meant figuratively). Here the process is reversed, the joke depends on the error of believing language to be used figuratively when it is used literally. There is little relief in this comedy; it is more apocalyptic than reassuring. (1988, p. 244)

Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion* has become the iconic work of historiographic metafiction as the novel attempts to reproduce historical past with metafictional self-reflexivity.[12] It relates the Napoleonic wars as the historical moment and depicts its pivotal character, Henri's experience as a soldier serving in Napoleon's army and his admiration for Napoleon as a great commander. The historical material is mingled with the fantastic stories told by both Henri and Villanelle as the dual narrators of the novel, opening historical discourse to parody and subversion.[13] Susana Onega says: "The combination of history with fantasy aligns *The Passion* with 'historiographic metafiction,' the type of novel characterized with intense self-reflexivity and a relish in story-telling" (2006, p. 56). The fantastic stories the novel involves are the sharper means of subverting the conventional discourse of history. The magic realist narrative of the novel and the fantastic stories told by the characters open the monologic discourse of history to multivocality, thereby creating a space for narrating the untold histories of the marginalized:

> *The Passion* problematizes history as a discourse by means of Villanelle's fantastic narrative that disrupts Henri's narration, and paradoxically by means of Henri's diary again. For Villanelle, the realistic mode of narration is not adequate to convey the multiplicity that she depicts the city of Venice in and female experience. The narrative of the novel which mingles fantasy and history, and thereby upsetting the clear-cut distinction between fact and fiction, aims at an intentional deviation from the limits of a linear world that is represented by Napoleon to the city of mazes embodied by Venice, where every boundary is denied. Villanelle's fantastic narrative challenges the objectivity of the discourse of history, and within the realm of fantasy, she is able to narrate the untold story of her lesbian love and of the Venetians under Napoleon's invasion. (Kirca, 2009, pp. 148-149)

The novel introduces Villanelle's inventive form of narrative that will value female experience and multiplicity in historical records. For instance, by means of the aforementioned device of literalization of metaphors, Villanelle's language differs from symbolic language. When Villanelle requires Henri to rescue her heart from the Queen of Spades who has stolen Villanelle's heart as her lover, Henri is sure that she is "talking figuratively" (*Passion*, p. 115).

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[12] Hutcheon labels postmodern historical novels as "historiographic metafictions" since they thematize the theory of contemporary historiography and problematize the distinction between history and fiction. In *Poetics of Postmodernism*, she explains her reason for such a label thus: "[historiographic metafiction] puts into question, at the same time as it exploits, the grounding of historical knowledge in the past real. This is why I have been calling this historiographic metafiction" (1989, p. 92).

[13] It should be noted that postmodern parody is rather "discourse parody," attempting to subvert grand narratives. Korkut argues, for instance, that "discourse is an essential object of parody in the postmodern novel, and this is not very surprising, given the significance postmodernism accords to exposing all discourses as constructs that can always be deconstructed and undermined. […] The postmodern novel, therefore, creates a nonhierarchical discursive realm where no discourse is immune to parody and where it is constantly implied that all discourses are products of language, which shapes reality and maintains an arbitrary relationship with it" (2009, pp. 72-73). See her *Kinds of Parody from the Medieval to the Postmodern* (Peter Lang, 2009).

However, Villanelle assures him that she has really lost her heart and he should help her in "the re-possession of her heart" (*Passion*, p. 109). Still hesitating, Henri accepts this and when he breaks in, he really finds Villanelle's heart kept in a jar. Together with Henri, the reader learns that the Queen of Spades has *literally* stolen her heart. For Henri to believe such a thing is possible, it is necessary that Villanelle should swallow it again:

> I heard her uncork the jar and a sound like gas escaping. Then she began to make terrible swallowing and choking noises and only my fear kept me sitting at the other end of the boat, perhaps hearing her die.
> There was quiet. She touched my back and when I turned round took my hand again and placed it on her breast.
> Her heart was beating.
> *Not possible.*
> I tell you her heart was beating. (*Passion*, pp. 120-121, italics in original)

Therefore, the literalization of metaphors is also a part of Winterson's fantastic narration in the novel, as the device creates suspense between believing and not believing.[14]

Villanelle inserts the fantastic elements of the novel in her narration by turning Venice into a city of mystery where you can easily lose—or find—your way, at the corners of which you are told your fortune, your heart can really be stolen, and boatmen are said to have webbed feet and can walk on water: "This is the city of mazes" (*Passion*, p. 49). To give another example to the literalization of metaphors in the novel, Venice is literally "a living city" as the streets may change places overnight due to the watery quality of the city. Villanelle says: "The city I come from is a changeable city. It is not always the same size. Streets appear and disappear overnight; new waterways force themselves over dry land. There are days when you cannot walk from one end to the other" (*Passion*, p. 97). Similarly, when Villanelle desperately falls in love with the Queen of Spades, love literally makes her walk on water:

> I [Villanelle] took off my boots slowly, pulling the laces loose and easing them free. Enfolded between each toe were my own moons. Pale and opaque. Unused. I had often played with them but I never thought they might be real. […] Could I walk on that water? […] I tried balancing my foot on the surface and it dropped beneath into the cold nothingness. Could a woman love a woman more than a night? I stepped out and in the morning they say a beggar was running round the Rialto talking about a young man who'd walked across the canal like it was solid. (*Passion*, p. 69)

Villanelle challenges the symbolic system of language used in the reflection of historical knowledge by means of her narration which problematizes this singular order of language. Within a text which is expected to attempt historical truthfulness, Villanelle narrates her fantastic tales, and through proposing her own narrative which rejects interpreting language on a figurative level, she fights against the so-called history writing embodied in Henri's notebook as a source of truth. In contrast to the grand narrative-style history, Villanelle's way of narrating the events with her literalized metaphors is transgressive in nature and enables one to perceive and understand the many-layered reality of the past. For readers, her storytelling becomes more trustworthy and reliable than facts themselves, leaving the distinction between what is fact and what is fiction in doubt.

Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry*, as the writer's *The Passion* does, fits into the categorization of historiographic metafiction. In this novel, too, Winterson handles historical material within

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[14] Todorov accepts the reader's "hesitation" as the only feature that distinguishes "the fantastic" from "the uncanny" or "the marvelous". He claims: "The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event" (1975, p. 25).

the fantastic framework of the text. The historical material of the novel is mostly given through the narration of its pivotal female character, who is named "the Dog Woman" as she breeds dogs for fighting and selling (*Sexing*, p. 11). She cites all the important historical events of the era she lives in, the years covering approximately 1630-66, and the historical materialism emerging in the Dog Woman's narration is mingled with the fantastic stories of her adopted son Jordan, who serves as the dual narrator of the novel. The deconstruction of the historical discourse in *Sexing the Cherry* is due to this merging of the factual with the fantastic, which gives way to the celebrated postmodernist paradox. As Linda Hutcheon claims, "its world is both resolutely fictive and yet undeniably historical" (1989, p. 142). The novel's overt politics in the issue of gender identity and its constructed nature, and the existence of a female grotesque figure as the narrator who not only catalogues the historical events of the seventeenth century but interprets them from her marginal position allow the reading of the text as a means of voicing the untold histories of women.

The same device of using metaphors in their literal meanings becomes a way of playing with language and with the symbolic order in *Sexing the Cherry* as well. In one of the fantastic cities Jordan visits, he mentions people dying of love literally, for whom "new graves were dug in the hillside" (*Sexing*, p. 76), or as mentioned above, the dancers' literal lightness that enables them to float in the air (*Sexing*, p. 97). *Sexing the Cherry*, however, offers striking examples to literalization of symbolic language in the narrative of the Dog Woman. Winterson produces in *Sexing the Cherry* a subversive example of the grotesque body with the portrayal of the Dog Woman as a detached character with her giant-like and ugly body[15] who observes her time and its political events with a critical eye from the banks of the river she lives by and who is at the same time involved in these events with her own *heroic* actions or with her individual comments on them from below. Depicted as a grotesque figure and a misfit in the phallocentric order who is the source of fear and disgust for men,[16] the Dog Woman produces examples of a language which does not fit into the metaphoric order of language. She is unable to understand language figuratively, and when she takes what is said to her literally, this gives way to comic scenes but at the same time subversive moments in the novel. For instance, after the king's execution, the Dog Woman gathers with other Royalists in a meeting house to listen to the words of a preacher. Interpreting the Old Testament, the preacher reminds the attendees of the famous quotation, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," and he calls for the king's revenge: "Then you must go in secret and quiet, and gouge out your enemies' eyes when you see them, and deprive them of their teeth if they have them. This fulfills the Law of God" (*Sexing*, p. 84). The Dog Woman ironically thinks that it is the ability and learning of the preacher "to interpret the Scriptures" in this way, assuming that the preacher, like she herself does, takes these words *literally*. The Dog Woman, therefore, avenges the king's murder by literally pulling out the eyes and teeth of the Puritans she comes across:

> By the time of the full moon I [the Dog Woman] had done gallantly, I thought, and went to the meeting to hear stories of injury and revenge. I was suspicious to see that no one had brought any trophy of their right-doings, and so, as an encouragement, I tipped my sack of takings over the floor. I had 119 eyeballs, one missing on account of a man who had lost one already, and over 2,000 teeth.

[15] The grotesque features of the Dog Woman are emphasized in different parts of the text. The Dog Woman herself points to her ugly, stating: "My nose is flat, my eyebrows are heavy. I have only a few teeth and those are a poor show, being black and broken. I had smallpox when I was a girl and the caves in my face are home enough for fleas" (*Sexing*, p. 3).

[16] The Dog Woman says: "I know that people are afraid of me, either for the yapping of my dogs or because I stand taller than any of them" (*Sexing*, p. 25).

> A number of those in the room fainted immediately, and the preacher asked me to be less zealous in the next fortnight or, if I could not be, at least to leave my sack at home. (*Sexing*, p. 85)

On another occasion, the Dog Woman bites off a man's genital (*Sexing*, p. 41). When the Dog Woman interprets the man's words directly, she actually bites it off. She relates:

> I like to broaden my mind when I can and I did as he suggested, swallowing it up entirely and biting it off with a snap.
> As I did so my eager fellow increased his swooning to the point of fainting away, and I, feeling both astonished by his rapture and disgusted by the leathery thing filling up my mouth, spat out what I had not eaten and gave it to one of my dogs. (*Sexing*, p. 41)

The Dog Woman's lack of knowledge about male body and her naïve personality can be seen as the cause of her action because she believes that a man's member will grow again (*Sexing*, p. 41). However, what is behind her taking what is said to her literally is her inability or *refusal* to interpret language on a metaphoric level. Besides the metaphors that are used in their literal meanings, the Dog Woman's misinterpreting language, or interpreting language with its literal meaning only, can be said to serve the same purpose of fighting against the symbolic order of language and its dead metaphors. The Dog Woman's refusal to understand metaphoric language is due to her resistance to the symbolic language of man, as Silvia Antosa associates it with the playing with language Winterson adopts in the Dog Woman's narrative: "Since [the Dog Woman] is outside the symbolic order, she is incapable of understanding the metaphoric significance of language. Her fierce action shows the ambiguities of the dead metaphors, which are dominant in the patriarchal language" (2008, p. 93). Therefore, it is possible to read the Dog Woman's refusal to understand the metaphoric usage of language and her use of a *biting* language when attempting to convey the historical facts of her time as a play with words, but a play which foregrounds the instability of meaning and her resistance to the phallic order. As Carole-Anne Tyler claims, "masochistic fantasies may indeed include frequent 'scenes' in which the male genitals, the symbol of the man's identification with the father as bearer of the phallus, are beaten or cut off" (1991, p. 51).[17] We argue that the Dog Woman redeems language from the phallocentric monology by denying the symbolic order of language (and symbolically by cutting off the phallus).

With their re-literalized metaphors and exaggerated incomprehension, Winterson's female characters in *The Passion* and in *Sexing the Cherry* are fitting examples for Bakhtin's Fool[18] who is unable to understand the habitual ways of conceiving the world. Jana L. French reads the Dog Woman as "a figuration of the Bakhtinian fool, a character whose 'misreadings' of the natural and social world […] indicate the disruptive energy of the carnivalesque" (1999, p. 246). Like the Bakhtinian fool character, the Dog Woman's resistance to join in the discourse of patriarchy, for instance, keeps her at a distance, opening the authoritative discourse to laughter with her naïve incomprehension throughout. By means of the Dog Woman's misreading the figurative language, the reader is forced to question the cultural frames of patriarchy in which the character operates and is made foolish. In Winterson's novels, her female characters' refusal to abide by the rules and to accept symbolic meaning is their refusal to admit the authoritative voice of patriarchy, that is, "the language of the father" (Barreca, 1988, p. 253). With this respect, Winterson's female characters in the two novels analyzed here refuse to identify with the logic of paternal discourse by denying the symbolic language of man. The literalization of

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[17] Tyler argues that "man's fetishistic misrecognition of the organ upon which his identity hangs is legislated by the patriarchal symbolic, so that it seems to be the real thing" (1991, pp. 50-51).

[18] Bakhtin says it is the privilege of fools to have the right to be "other," "have the right *not* to understand, the right to confuse, to tease, to hyperbolize life; […] *the right not to be taken literally*" (1992, p. 163, emphasis added).

metaphors in Winterson's fiction frees language from the phallocentric monology and therefore opens up new possibilities and new forms in terms of historiographic representation where the voice of the repressed or marginalized Other can be heard. Winterson's fiction allows her to write invisibly between the lines in white ink the untold histories of women, as Jordan in *Sexing the Cherry* suggests: "For the Greeks, the hidden life demanded invisible ink. They wrote an ordinary letter and in between the lines set out another letter, written in milk" (*Sexing*, p. 10).

Winterson states that "people have an enormous need […] to separate history, which is fact, from storytelling, which is not fact […] and the whole push of my work has been to say, you cannot know which is which" (1998, qtd. in Grice & Woods, p. 1). The problematization of the boundary between fact and fiction is one of the outcomes of the postmodern questioning in Winterson's fiction, and the foregoing discussion shows that the boundary between figurative and literal meaning is also problematized in her works. The resistance of Winterson's female characters against the symbolic order of language and their refusal to abide by the conventions of unity, coherence, and linearity upheld by patriarchal tradition are pursued through problematizing the way language constructs reality, since *facts* are created and sustained on behalf of patriarchy with language. According to Ann Rosalind Jones, women are "suspicious of language as penetrated by phallocentric dogma" (1997, p. 379). Winterson constantly foregrounds in her novels the constructedness of language and the fictionality of historical facts which are basically narrated accounts.[19] Another shared characteristic of her novels that should be foregrounded in this context is that they should be read as texts which allow female voice to be heard. Winterson's works, including more recent ones, openly indicate the urgency, for women "who have had to passively receive all kinds of stories about themselves" (Barr, 1991, p. 31), to tell their own stories rather than being told stories. Her women characters, both in *The Passion* and in *Sexing the Cherry*, tell their stories along with the past events through deconstructing gender myths and attacking gender identity as constructed reality. The stories told by Winterson's female characters become more audible through their "embodied" writing style[20] as they particularly subvert the symbolic order of language by using their metaphors discursively in their literal meanings. The writer's using metaphors and clichés in this way makes the reader question how language constructs reality, for by using metaphors literally what Winterson manages to do is to make language refer to itself only, not to any outside (historical) reality. Her metaphors are no longer inert; they "have meaning in terms not only of imagery, but of narrative; they are no longer mere rhetorical devices, but the very 'stuff' of the stories themselves" (Barreca, 1988, p. 247). The rhetorical tool of using metaphors literally *plays with language* and, as Barreca indicates, "to play with language […] seems to play with the authority of the symbolic/masculine view" (1988, p. 254). It is seen in the examples above that Winterson frees a metaphor from its original context and therefore manages to subvert its accepted, fixed meaning in the dominant discourse and the values behind. In conclusion, in Winterson's fiction where it is claimed that there is no "pure" representation and that "facts" are constructed ideologically, the discussion concerning the role of language in normalizing certain facts in accordance with dominant discourses comes to be a significant issue. Winterson's play with language is a means of questioning the very basis of the metaphysics of language, which is in line with Derrida's claim that the old concepts of language can be used as tools "to destroy the old machinery to which they belong and of which they themselves are the pieces" (qtd. in Marshall 1992, p. 67). In order to do so, Winterson's re-literalized metaphors

[19] In his book, Hayden White maintains that narrative form is the only possible form of representation in the writing of history (1973, p. 9). Traditional historiography uses the narrative form in which historians convey the knowledge of the past. Analyzing in his book the "deep structure of the historical imagination," White claims that all history contains a deep verbal structure and that a formal theory is needed to analyze the deep structure (1973, p. 9).

[20] Korkut-Nayki claims that "this is an important strategy serving to foreground corporeality and contributing to the feminist project of writing through the body" (2014, p. 233).

destabilize the naturalness of language by problematizing its power of representing empirical facts objectively.

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