

## 75. Emerence from *The Door*, and the 'Dog Woman' as 'Manly-Woman' from *Sexing the Cherry*<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

This paper explores the concept of feminism and the representation of female characters in Hungarian and English novel, pointing out their similarities and dissimilarities regarding the period and different cultures in which they were written. Consideration is given to Magda Szabó's *The Door* (1987) in Hungarian literature, and her contemporary Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* (1989) in English literature. The ways in which these significant female authors deal with women's problems, their position in society and their attributed roles and identities from different perspectives, are examined in detail. In each of these works, the female protagonist takes a stand against the identities and expected duties imposed on her as a woman and the abstract barriers constructed between female and male that aim to control her life. These works of fiction enable the female voice, so often disparaged and disregarded by men, to be heard; and enable us to observe how female writers characterize women. Therefore, these selected novels escape the precedent of male patriarchy and the representation of women in the works of male writers. What differentiates this study is to allow women's voices from different cultures to be heard and their stories' being transmitted from female authors who could provide an insight into the minds of women both in Britain and Hungary. Finally, critical points of feminism and the position of women in Hungarian and British society are compared so as to illustrate the persistent exclusion of women from active social life.

**Keywords:** Feminism, English Literature, Hungarian Literature, Communist Regime, Elaine Showalter, Gynocriticism

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## Erkeksi Kadın Tiplemesi Olarak Kapı Romanında Emerence ve Vişnenin Cinsiyeti Romanından Köpekli-Kadın Karakterleri<sup>3</sup>

### Öz

Bu makale, Macar ve İngiliz romanlarında feminizm kavramını ve kadın karakterlerin temsilini, yazıldıkları dönem bağlamında kültürlerarası benzerlik ve farklılıkları karşılaştırmalı olarak incelemektedir. Çalışmada, Macar edebiyatından Magda Szabó'nun *The Door* (1987) ve İngiliz edebiyatından çağdaşı Jeanette Winterson'ın *Sexing the Cherry* (1989) adlı eserleri ele alınmaktadır. Bu önemli kadın yazarların, kadınların sorunlarını, toplumdaki konumlarını, kendilerine atfedilen rol ve kimlikleri farklı perspektiflerden ele alış biçimleri ayrıntılı olarak incelenmektedir. Bu eserlerin her birinde kadın kahraman, kadın ile erkek arasında inşa edilen ve kadın hayatını kontrol etmeyi amaçlayan beklentiler, dayatılan kimlikler ve roller gibi soyut engellere karşı bir duruş sergilemektedir. Bu kurgu eserler, erkekler tarafından sıklıkla küçümsenen ve göz ardı edilen kadın sesinin duyulmasını ve kadın yazarların kadınları nasıl karakterize ettiğini gözlemlememizi sağlaması açısından önem taşımaktadır. Dolayısıyla, seçilen bu romanlar erkek ataerkilliğinin ve kadınların erkek yazarların eserlerindeki temsilinin dışına çıkmaktadır. Bu çalışmayı farklı kılan ise farklı kültürlerden kadınların seslerinin duyulmasına ve bu kadınların hikayelerinin hem Britanya hem de Macaristan'daki kadınların zihinlerine ışık tutabilecek kadın yazarlar tarafından aktarılmasına izin vermesidir. Son olarak, feminizmin eleştirel noktaları ve kadınların Macar ve İngiliz toplumundaki konumu, kadınların aktif sosyal yaşamdan ısrarla dışlanmasını göstermek için karşılaştırılmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Feminizm, İngiliz Edebiyatı, Macar Edebiyatı, Komünist Rejim, Elaine Showalter, Gynocriticism (Jino-Eleştiri)

### Introduction

*Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer. (Virginia Woolf)*

With Henrik Ibsen's Nora shutting a door behind herself, in *A Doll's House*, in the late nineteenth century, a new life was enabled for women all around the world. She paved the way for other women to acknowledge the modern world; she created an awareness that another life is possible for women apart from their domestic spheres, that play the role as both a nest and a jail. They were cornered by the rules and norms of patriarchal societies and turned into voiceless creatures burdened with the ideal image of womanhood as well as motherhood. These women's physical presence might have belonged to somewhere, but their spirits have always wandered from one place to another looking for a refugee. Some managed to emancipate themselves, some ended up having an identity crisis and feeling out of place.

<sup>3</sup> **Statement (Thesis):** This article has been extracted from my M.A. thesis submitted at University of Miskolc, in Hungary, entitled "A Woman's Place: A Study of Four English and Hungarian Novels".

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Today, although the position and issue of women seems to be one of the most disputable and controversial subjects of the contemporary world, this problem dates back to the story of the creation of Adam and Eve. When God created the first man, Adam, and then Eve to accompany him, “*The Lord God said: It is not good for man to be alone: let us make him a help like unto himself*” (*New International Version*, 2011, Gen. 2:18). However, Eve’s and so, women’s creation, is made more complicated and depreciatory by the statement that Eve was created from the rib of Adam. That God is said to have created Eve out of the rib of Adam has been passed on from generation to generation, and from nation to nation as an indication of women’s inferiority to their male counterparts. Women having been deemed as inferior did not show any signs of decline, but on the contrary, women were regarded as wicked, or even evil. Also, in Ecclesiastes, in the Hebrew Bible, women are condemned and ostracized as having been associated with all the sins that have befallen the world (*Youversion*, Ecc. 7:26).

Surely, this representation of women has been passed down, creating oppression and restraints and so, has reverberated through literary and non-literary works through history. Women had a typical and ideal representation and defined within her own “domestic sphere” taking care of her husband and children, sewing, doing house chores. The possibility of another life would not be offered to them and they could never ever dream of it. Significantly, this idealization of womanhood led women to remain within the domestic sphere, renouncing their identity. Herein, this submissive, passive and meek attitude paved the way for the creation of the *Angel in the House* who then needed to be killed in order for women to exist independently. This idealization burdened women more than ever making women the guardians of nation, family, and morality. The term ‘the Angel in the House’ was coined by Coventry Patmore in a poem dedicated to his wife, Emily. Believing she was the ideal wife and mother in the Victorian era, Patmore writes “The Angel in the House” (1854):

*Man must be pleased; but him to please  
Is woman's pleasure; down the gulf  
Of his condoled necessities  
She casts her best, she flings herself. (p.82)*

Patmore defines the ideal woman and male-female relationship having been enormously influenced by the relationship of Queen Victoria and her husband, Prince Albert. While he degrades women as passive, emotional, and lachrymose, men are presented as powerful, masculine and rational. Patmore’s ideal woman is well aware of the fact that all sins belong to her gender and silently accepts this situation.

However, this idealisation of womanhood was negated by Virginia Woolf in her essay published in 1937, “Killing the Angel in the House” and reconstructed by feminist critics and writers. What is meant by “feminism” is what bell hooks<sup>4</sup> states as the “struggle to end sexist oppression” (2015, p. 28). So, to end this struggle, the significant literary figures from all over the world used their pens. This paper in this respect aims to elaborate the concept of feminism and the representation of female characters in Hungarian and English literature, in Magda Szabó’s *The Door (Az Ajtó)* (1987) and her contemporary, Jeanette Winterson’s *Sexing the Cherry* (1989). Similarities and dissimilarities will be pointed out in the context of the period and different cultures in which they were written, with particular reference to Elaine Showalter’s gynocriticism.

<sup>4</sup> Name and surname of the writer is written in lower case by herself.

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## Feminism in Britain and Hungary

The concept of feminism has arrived at different periods in Britain and Hungary and been perceived discretely. Despite their being located in Europe, they have experienced different issues, socially, politically, and culturally, that hindered or facilitated the feminist movement. It was Mary Wollstonecraft who “spoke up, quite loudly, for what had been until then a largely silent half of the human race” (Chernock, 2010, p.19). Author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Wollstonecraft took the initiative for the rights of women for the first time in Britain. She strongly opposed the idea of women’s submitting themselves to male supremacy. Outspoken and assertive in the way she expressed her ideas on the rights of women, she can be regarded as a founding mother of British feminism and her *Vindication* as the first feminist work. George Eliot, and Virginia Woolf in the nineteenth and twentieth century dealt with this gender discrimination problem and the position of women in society by using their pens on female issues. It was only in the early years of the twentieth century that women and female writers could speak really up about the gender issues and could question the gender roles (Turner, 1913, p.588). Britain is today regarded as one of the pioneering countries, along with France, to initiate the feminist movement. Feminism, or the Woman’s Suffrage movement, emerged as a revolt against the norms and ideals of Victorian society where women had been uncontroversibly excluded from the social and political life in Britain (ibid. p.599-600).

Feminists and scholars divided the feminist movement into three phases, what they call “waves”, and each of the waves aimed at achieving different goals in terms of gender discrimination. The first wave refers to the women’s suffrage movement as it emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly in the UK and in the USA. The second wave of feminism covers the period from World War II to the 1990s and this wave is usually described as the women’s liberation movement: the writers and women of the time demanded the recognition of themselves as free entities and they wanted the change to their position that is designated as “*women should remain at home, sit still, keep house, and bear and bring up children*” (Luther, 1832, p.33-34). In this respect, women focused on attaining legal and social equality with men and putting an end to the discrimination they experienced in daily life. An influential feminist of second-wave feminism, Simone de Beauvoir, marked this wave with her remarkable work, *The Second Sex* (1949). She observes the prison-like lives of women by stating that “a woman is shut up in a kitchen or a boudoir, and one is surprised her horizon is limited; her wings are cut, and then she is blamed for not knowing how to fly. Let a future be open to her and she will no longer be obliged to settle in the present” (2010, p.731). Then, the third wave feminism, which is also called post-feminism, marks the period from the beginning of the 1990s to the present. This wave might be regarded as more radical in comparison with the other waves due to its embracing not only women but also all suppressed and discriminated people including homosexuals, and people of color. From this movement onwards, feminism is not only considered as women’s rights but rather human rights.

While all these improvements regarding the issue of women took place in Britain, Hungary was facing political coerciveness and turmoil. So, unlike Britain, where further legal steps were taken for women, Hungary was preoccupied with the ideas of nationalism and identity construction (Frank, 1995, p.223). Hungary might be divided into four periods: pre-World I, inter-war, and post-World II, when communism took over the country, and the post-communist era. The assigned roles and the position of women are more complicated, in contrast to Britain: women were deprived of some basic rights under the communist regime. Unlike Britain which had a settled and unified empire, Hungary was fighting for the establishment of a Hungarian nation even in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, which led to the intrusion of Russia and the ascendancy of Vienna over Budapest (Kertesz, 1950, p.21). Afterwards, Hungary lost the autonomy for which they had to fight until 1918 when the President, Mihály Károlyi declared Hungary’s

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independence (Eberhardt, 2003, p.267). However, particularly during the inter-war period, the totalitarian regimes and nationalist tendencies showed an increase and these tendencies also intensified in Hungary, paving the way for its being Germany's partner in WWII (Romsics, 2000, p.100). Contrary to expectations, this brought more controversies, causing Hungary to be in conflict with both Germany and the Soviet Union that led to Soviet domination of the country.

Surely, this chaotic environment held back the feminist movement in Hungary until 1989 when the Communist regime fell in the country; yet it could not eliminate it. Although women could not establish an organized movement, they tried their best to find a place in public life for themselves in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. "During the 1848 revolution, a group of young women, students of a girls' school from Pest led by Countess Blanka Teleki, demanded equal rights for their sex" (Schwartz, 2008 p.14). In this respect, women took initiatives to improve Hungarian women's position in society, particularly enabling them to access education and have paid work. Having been inspired by the emerging developments in Europe, "[i]n 1904 the Feminist Association (Feministák Egyesülete, FE) was founded" (ibid. p.14) as well as the umbrella organization of the women's movement in Hungary, the Federation of Hungarian Women's Associations (Magyarországi Nőegyesületek Szövetsége, MNSz). Although Hungarian women were extensively working on the improvements of women's right until 1945, the political takeover of the communist regime, the idea of "feminism" altered in accordance with the socialist ideology of the government. During the state-socialist period which covers the years from the World War II to 1989, gender equality between Hungarian men and women was provided by the job market because of the purely economic reasons of the socialist states, what is considered as "state-feminism" today. So, when the idea of women's emancipation was manifested within the state-socialist campaign in Hungary, women's emancipation was highly dependent on women's being out of their domestic spheres, having paid-work, and in a marriage based on affection rather than economic interest, what is called a "marriage market". Although these so-called improvements addressed the progression and emancipation for women, this was not genuine emancipation, rather "state-imposed emancipation" (Goven, 1993, p.6). In other words, women taking part in the labor-force truly depended on the policy of the Communist regime to improve the country's economic and financial situation rather than bringing an awareness of gender-equality to the country. Juhász (2016) draws attention to the state ideology prioritizing the needs of the country over women by stating that:

Women were required by law to be employed, so they were employed. The stereotypical poster image of the woman tractor driver was mostly state propaganda, a forcibly imposed public representation of the "emancipated" woman working on a collective farm. It became a cliché of socialist imagery but wasn't truly a tribute to women. And while women were promoted in the workplace and in some decision-making bodies – notably never in the decisive one, the Politburo – they remained "domestic slaves" at home and violence against women was never discussed.

So, to say Hungarian women lacked some private rights such as abortion, cohabitation without marriage, freedom of speech, and participation in elections and thus, the so-called equality between men and women, remained only in the field of labor. The participation of women was based on the state ideology and economic model to enhance the situation of Hungary. In this respect, although at first glance the Communist regime might seem to have brought gender equality to the Eastern bloc, including Hungary, it was indeed a misperception: the government's veiling its own hidden policies. Since women could not attain the fully independent body and mind that would have brought them equal opportunities, it is not possible to talk about feminism under the communist regime in Hungary.

### **Theoretical background to Elaine Showalter's Gynocriticism**

In the light of the feminist movement both in Britain and Hungary, women wanted to define themselves, not be defined by their male counterparts. As Hélène Cixous argues: "woman must write herself: must

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write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies – for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement” (1976, p.875). This statement was later reinterpreted and adopted as a feminist literary theory by Elaine Showalter, an American literary critic, feminist as well as writer. In her essay, “Toward A Feminist Poetics” (1979), Showalter puts forward her idea, gynocriticism, a word coined by herself. The word *gyno* is etymologically rooted in Greek meaning “woman”, so the attention is shifted from male-domination to female. Also, she is well-aware of the fact that apart from literature dealing with women’s issues in female discourse, there is no term to define *women as writers*, just *women as readers*. To strengthen the position of women in the literary realm, she explains the reason behind her choice of the word ‘gynocriticism’ as “no term exists in English for such a specialised discourse, and so I have adapted the French term *la gynocritique: ‘gynocriticism’*” (Showalter, 1979, p. 25). Showalter defines what she means by gynocriticism: “the programme of gynocritics is to construct a female framework for the analysis of women’s literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt male models and theories” (ibid. 1979, p. 28).

Taken together, she realizes this deficiency between women and literature, Showalter puts forwards two modes in which she scrutinizes the relationship of women with regard to literature. While she defines the first mode as “concerned with the feminist as a *reader*, and it offers feminist readings of texts which consider the images and stereotypes of women in literature, the omissions and misconceptions about women in criticism, and woman-as-sign in semiotic systems” (Showalter, 1981, p.182), and “the second mode of feminist criticism engendered by this process is the study of women *as writers*, and its subjects are the history, styles, themes, genres, and structures of writing by women; the psychodynamics of female creativity; the trajectory of the individual or collective female career; and the evolution and laws of a female literary tradition” (ibid. p.184). With this aim, Showalter encourages women to be “writers”, define themselves and explain their own stories by their own mouth with their words. So, she describes women who have intention to create their own literary tradition as the “producer of textual meaning, with the history, themes, genres and structures of literature by women” (1979, p. 25)

Herein, Showalter goes against women’s having been defined and represented by men in literary texts that she calls “androtxts”. She not only wants to put an end to men’s literary tradition whose understanding and representation of women is stereotypical, and derogatory, but also to change the female voices that have remained in the shadow of male perspectives. By advocating the idea of Cixous, Showalter believes women must have their own voice, a literary tradition of their own, in order to exist in this patriarchal society and even further destroy male supremacy, because there is no ideal, one typical and universal representation of women, rather different representations of women. Lacan attacks this stereotypical construction of women who feminine, submissive, and weak, “there is no such thing as The Woman,” he declared, “where the definite article stands for the universal” (1983, p.2). At this point, particularly in the 1970s, with increasing awareness of the feminist movement, systematic female literary criticism appeared to reclaim women’s suppressed voices and attempt to change this ideal woman representation. As Eagleton asserts: “increasingly throughout the 1970s, the focus moved to literary representations of women, by women and for women” (Eagleton, 2007, p.107). So, female authors deconstructed the images created for women by men and defined women going against the traditional standards applied by male authors.

Jeanette Winterson’s *Sexing the Cherry* and Magda Szabó’s *the Door* through their unconventional female characters adduce what Showalter puts forward in her theory, gynocriticism. These extraordinary female writers from Britain and Hungary go against the mainstream and disallow men to define them

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in accordance with the rules and norms of patriarchal societies that set the standards for how to be properly a woman and how to behave appropriately. So, Winterson and Szabó alter women's submissive and secondary position as represented in androtexs, into assertive, and manly woman in gynotexs by subverting and de(constructing) gender roles. Although these women were born and raised in different countries and cultures, they were burdened with the expectations of their societies in which they are cornered and against which they rebel. Both women suffered under distinctive circumstances, yet both were deeply affected by the rules of patriarchy that push them to use their pen to write their own stories in their own voices.

### **Emerence as Manly-Woman in *The Door***

Today, Magda Szabó is regarded as one of Hungarian literature's pioneers, born in 1917 in Debrecen, Hungary. It is not by mere luck that Szabó has become an acclaimed poet and novelist. She was fortunate enough to be born into an intellectual family, and was surrounded by intellectual figures, and a large library to improve herself. She was taught French, Latin, German as well as English, all of which added much to her development as a writer. Her works have been translated into more than 40 languages such as "Bulgarian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, Russian ..." (Tezla, 1970, p.677). She is baffled by her international success stating that "longing, suffering, anger and passion are universal; she insisted that she only ever wrote about Hungarian problems, and about her native city of Debrecen" (Hideg, 2020).

However, Szabó was missing the crucial point that she represents the female voice of Hungarian women by expressing their situation in the society and deconstructing the ideal Hungarian woman's image. There would be no one, but only Szabó, who could manage to reclaim the female voice as she was one of the people who was enormously affected by the communist regime in Hungary. The patriarchal structure attempted to sideline her during her lifetime, but this she challenged through her writings. When she was awarded one of Hungary's most prestigious literary awards with her collection of verses "Back to the Human" (1949), "the prize was rescinded on the same day: she had been named as an "enemy of the people" by the recently installed Communist Party" (Zarin, 2016). Also, the same year, she was dismissed from her job at the Ministry of Education as having been defined as an "enemy of the people" (ibid. 2016). Later on, she was banned from publishing her works under Stalinist rule from 1944 to 1956 in Hungary because her writing did not align with the guidelines of Socialist Realism". Instead of pleasing and glorifying the communist regime, Szabó was determined not to surrender and went her own way. Generally, "her writings, concerned with the clash between old and new values, are praised for intellectual analysis, psychological depth, clarity of style, and pertinence of statement" (Tezla, 1970, p.677). She was ahead of her time and never hesitated to put strong and assertive female characters in her novels whom she refers to as "terrible women". These female characters just like Szabó herself were unconventional and rejected whatever was imposed on them. She was a real fighter who did not stop writing, and used her pen to reclaim women's silenced voice under the Stalinist rule.

Having the characteristics of an autobiography, *The Door* brings two distinctive female characters together in Budapest and portrays a very peculiar relationship between an intellectual, female writer, Magda and her cleaning woman, Emerence, "virtually untouched by high culture" (Lengyel, 2022, p.139). Szabó deals with successful and strong female characters who know how to stand on their own feet as in *The Door*'s, Emerence. At first sight, the story seems quite a simple one, a relationship between the writer and her housekeeper, Emerence, but on the contrary, Szabó deals with Hungary's socio-political background and women's position in the story. She does not separate the educated writer from her uneducated housekeeper. She gives a voice to represent their personality as women. The male characters are not at the forefront, but female characters. This way, Szabó explores the construction of

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gender roles, and the position of women in Hungarian society and gives her female characters autonomy to represent themselves not as appreciated by men, but in the way they please themselves.

Everything starts when a writer named Magda is in search of a housekeeper to help her cope with domestic chores. She hires an old lady, Emerence, recommended by a friend who praises her to the skies for her efficiency and hard work. As the story proceeds, it is revealed that she is something of an oddity who is stubborn, foul-mouthed, and never lets any outsider step into her house. However, Emerence is still revered as much as she is feared and becomes irreplaceable in Magda's life. The readers are driven by this strange relationship built over more than twenty years between Magda and Emerence. Meanwhile, we learn about Emerence's tragic past through flashbacks during the story. □ The novel begins with a preface called *The Door* in which Magda's dream foreshadows the upcoming incidents in the novel and hints that this mysterious door would lead to some disastrous event happening to someone called Emerence. As Magda's dream ends, it creates ambiguity about the housekeeper and baffles the reader. Throughout the story, Magda transmits the story as the narrator. Since Showalter supports women's literature that expresses and shapes women's experiences, Magda's definition of Emerence as an outstanding female figure fits into Showalter's understanding of "gynocriticism".

As Showalter discusses the types of feminist criticism, of women as reader and women as writer, Magda's account of Emerence from the beginning of the story generates an unlikely female figure of the time. Magda informs the reader about Emerence's appearance as someone who generally masks herself with a veil, "she always went about veiled" (p.12) as if she was such a pious woman. Indeed, this veil demonstrates not her religious aspect but her being unapproachable and severe. Magda then talks about her being serious and formal: "When we first met, I very much wanted to see her face, and it troubled me that she gave me no opportunity to do so. She stood before me like a statue, very still, not stiffly to attention but rather a little defeated-looking. Of her forehead I could see almost nothing" (p. 12). Emerence does not present herself as woman-like, and feminine, an image that is appealing to men. On the contrary, she has no intention to be liked and desired, pretending to be someone in accordance with society's expectations.

Also, manly-physical features are attributed to Emerence, going against how a woman is supposed to look. Magda Szabó's Emerence is, hereby, illustrated as "tall, big-boned, powerfully built for a person of her age, muscular rather than fat, and she radiated strength like a Valkyrie. Even the scarf on her head seemed to jut forward like a warrior's helmet" (p.13). This untypical woman even may put fear in people's hearts through her appearance and grandeur. Szabó establishes a correlation between Emerence and the powerful female presidents, Golda Meir, who was the first and only female prime minister in Israel, and Margaret Thatcher who was called the Iron Lady due to her uncompromising attitude. "I imagined her [Emerence] alongside Golda Meir and Margaret Thatcher, and the picture did not seem at all strange" (p. 120), Szabó says. All these female figures are attributed manly behaviors; Swatridge comments: "Emerence was a very manly woman - or, as we also say, a 'battle-axe'. Decidedly a feminist" (personal communication, April 21, 2020).

Unlike the image of an Angel in the House who was, in Woolf's words, "intensely sympathetic", "immensely charming" (1931), Emerence is undesirable and an unattractive woman. Therefore, she is represented as a bare and barren woman who "had never had a husband or children" (p. 13) and who will "have no boyfriend problems" (p. 13). Having not married, having no children, is not a typical and common representation of woman in Emerence's time when Hungary was under the communist regime, and this regime is known to be supportive of family units and having children. As the social construction of gender required women to get married and have children, Emerence's attitude was an unorthodox

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way to choose. Showalter (1992) argues the importance of childbirth as finding the correlation between patriarchy and childbirth:

childbirth is a clear symbol of the female condition; the woman becomes an object, deprived of will and stupefied, the utter opposite of the joyous creator, the poet. She is at the mercy of nature, science, and men, made passively to accept the narcotics that will further enslave her, since they make her forget the pain and thus condemn her to relive it. (p.219)

Here, Emerence's not being a mother or wife is indeed what makes her autonomous. She struggles against the traditions and conventions of her society and objects to leading her life according to their rule. She recognizes her female body yet refuses to use it to give birth and rear a child. As the following parts of the story unfold, Emerence is an adoptive mother to Éva, whose Jewish family entrusts Emerence to take care of their children to save her from Germans. The moment Magda thinks that Eva is her child, she takes the offensive and states: "Emerence Szeredás — a clean, respectable girl living a sober life" [and] "no-one had ever laid a hand on me" (p.209). This statement indicates that Magda is a mother who had not given birth to her child and demonstrates her lack of maternal and feminine feelings.

Moreover, it is noteworthy to mention that the idea of an ideal woman who is Angel-like and is aware of her duties towards God is subverted by Emerence. She does not believe in God and His justice and expresses her anger when Magda visits the church. Magda comments on "Emerence's religious objections" (p. 26) by stating that "The old woman opposed the church with an almost sixteenth-century fanaticism; not only the priesthood, but God himself and all the biblical characters," (p.26). Emerence goes further, saying, she needed neither priest nor Church, and she never contributed. "She'd seen enough of God's handiwork during the war (p.27). Considering this, Emerence's harsh attitudes towards God and religion might be explained in political terms as that she was disillusioned due to wars and the communist takeover of the country. □

On the other hand, Emerence was a working woman despite this seeming ordinary under Stalinist rule. However, no matter the government encouraged people to participate in labor to improve the economy, and women as well as men started working in factories and earning their wages, it was still unconventional for a woman from a rural area to come to Budapest and work as a housekeeper. In accordance with the Victorian ideological divide between the public sphere (viewed as the masculine domain concerned with paid work, and national politics), and the private sphere (viewed as the female domain concerned with home and family)" (Digby, 1992 p.195), Emerence was supposed to remain in the domestic field and serve her own husband and children, not be paid to do this by others. She is however good at managing the household chores, to an extent beyond our comprehension of what we expect of a housekeeper. Regarding her qualities, she has extraordinary superhuman abilities that only men are expected to have. "She was washing a mountain of laundry with the most antiquated equipment, boiling bedlinen in a cauldron over a naked flame, in the already agonising heat, and lifting the sheets out with an immense wooden spoon. Fire glowed all around her" (p.13). In this respect, as Showalter encourages a female discourse in which women might create their own ideal being, Magda's depiction of Emerence portrays such a superhuman to prove that women could be as strong as men. "The old woman worked like a robot. She lifted unliftable furniture without the slightest regard for herself. There was something superhuman, almost alarming, in her physical strength and her capacity for work, all the more so because in fact she had no need to take so much on" (p.16).

Furthermore, Szabó deconstructs the ideal woman figure that has been imposed on women for centuries who are expected to be lady-like, kind, and polite through the representation of Emerence as foul-mouthed, stubborn, and even violent. So, Szabó's Emerence is an embodiment of all the non-ideal female

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features. Though it is attributed to a woman that she submit to her father, husband, or father, Emerence, on the contrary, is a rebel. At first, she is a strong-headed woman who does not accept any authority over hers. Her nephew warns people around her: "so, please, never attempt to persuade her of anything. She nearly drove the propaganda people mad" (p.75). Also, she is far from being a polite woman who kicked her nephew out by stressing she "didn't want to see him again for a good long while" (p.75). In this respect, it can explicitly be claimed that she is far away from being an ideal submissive and meek woman. Sometimes, she even scorns Magda by finding her weak and cowardly. In one of her conversations Emerence states that "at least, don't lie to yourself. Admit it. You're scared of the master. I can understand that. But don't try to hide your cowardice by calling things kitsch" (p.72). As a married and ideal woman who respects her husband, Magda seems more obliging, fulfilling the wishes of her husband. She cannot help herself but thinks about what Emerence told her in anger: "The shocking thing was, she had hit on something that was in a way true. I did find the statue repulsive, but that wasn't the real reason I had stuck it behind the mortar. It was as she said. I was afraid of, or rather for, my husband" (p.72). Towards the end of the story, when Emerence falls sick, she does not let anyone enter her house and help her. Suddenly, she started screaming out by claiming that if they didn't leave her in peace, "she would kill the first person who touched her Door" (p.158). Since the neighbors are aware of her violent nature, nobody could attempt to force the door open. After all, Magda Szabo shows herself to be one who does not comply with the conventional social norms but rather creates her own world where she can be the person she is. Therefore, Magda's representation of "feisty" characters encourages other women in society to raise their voices and write their own stories.

### **The Dog-Woman as Manly-Woman in *Sexing the Cherry***

Just two years later after the publication of Szabó's *The Door*, Jeanette Winterson (1959-) publishes her novel, *Sexing the Cherry* where Winterson introduces an unconventional, hilarious woman to the readers. It is not known whether Winterson has been aware of her Hungarian contemporary, Magda Szabo, and been inspired by her novel, *The Door* which has conspicuous thematic and content similarities with her novel. Winterson is one of the pioneers of English post-modernist literature on Virginia Woolf's trail who is known to kill the Angel in the House. Although Winterson bears comparison with Woolf regarding her unique ideas on 'gender' and 'feminism,' she is, indeed, miles apart from Woolf. It would be fair to claim that with Winterson, the second wave of feminism is illustrated in English literature while the first wave of feminism presented us with an idea that does not regard the female voice as superior to the male voice but advocated equal treatment in all senses. However, following Jeanette Winterson, all the constructed norms are deconstructed and reconstructed one more time. The second-wave feminists subverted the formulaic discourse of the patriarchy that the male discourse was privileged over the female discourse. In this respect, Winterson takes feminism one step further by claiming the rights of the third gender. Having been one of the representatives of post-structuralism, Winterson has a tendency, explicitly, to break taboos and replace them with new notions foreign to Woolf. In her novels, she challenges old traditions in sexuality, sexual identity, masculinity, and femininity in gender identities and gender roles. Judith Butler (1988) puts the idea of gender fluidity as:

Gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; instead, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts. Further, gender is instituted through the Body's stylization and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (p.519)

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Jeanette Winterson advocates the idea of gender as being acted and fluid. Her primary motivation is to deny and reverse sexual distinction in her works, and thus she problematizes the gender as performative. Winterson believes that gender is not something we can stereotype but rather that it evolves.

In *Sexing the Cherry* (1989), Winterson presents her reader with two significant characters: the Dog Woman and Jordan who narrate their own stories. Makinen states that “*Sexing the Cherry* has two narrators. ... Jordan and the Dog Woman are seventeenth-century figures, and each has a twentieth-century double or counterpart who displays analogous qualities and attitudes” (2005, p.98). Also, Winterson uses fantastic elements, sexual encounters, and various fruit symbols such as banana, and pineapple during the story; and what strikes the reader of Winterson is her representation of the characters who perform different gender roles in their narrations despite their sexes. In this respect, while Winterson experiments in literature with the idea of “gender fluidity”, she might have had Woolf’s *Orlando* in her mind. Because no matter what, it is undeniable that Winterson has been inspired by Woolf and her significant ideas on feminism. With the increasing interest in women’s writing, Winterson problematizes the gender issue and deconstructs the ideal Woman through her representation of The Dog Woman as an unconventional and hilarious woman, as in *The Door*.

Showalter discusses the underlying reason for the emergence of gynocriticism as “the interest in women’s writing, on the other hand, that is crucial to gynocritics preceded theoretical formulations and came initially from the feminist critic’s own experience as a writer and from her identification with the anxieties and conflicts women writers faced in patriarchal culture” (1984, p.37), and Winterson’s keen interest on the gender roles coming from her being a member of one of the marginal groups of society. So, her writing is more individualistic and idiosyncratic. She aims to deconstruct the mainstream literary tradition of men that relegates women to the position of object, and so create her female plot based on female imagination as well as narration.

Winterson perplexes the audience drawing attention to the title of the novel, *Sexing the Cherry*, that refers to a botanical procedure involving hybridization. By doing so, she alludes to the constructedness of gender representation with the help of the metaphor of grafting. She argues against the clear-cut division between female and male and femininity and masculinity. To her, these terms are interwoven and fused into one another.

Grafting is the means whereby a plant, perhaps tender or uncertain, is fused into a hardier member of its strain, and so the two take advantage of each other and produce a third kind, without seed or parent. In this way, fruits have been made resistant to disease, and certain plants have learned to grow where previously they could not. (Winterson, 1989, p.95)

The metaphor allows Winterson to represent gender identities as fragmented and multiple, like grafting points at the act of reproduction, by offering a third alternative, hybrid sex. Grafting also becomes a symbolic alternative to the dichotomies man and woman, masculine and feminine, male and female. So, as Showalter asserts that “gynocritics begins at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, we should stop trying to fit women between the lines of the male tradition, and focus instead on the newly visible world of female culture” (1979, p. 28). Winterson liberates her female characters from the chains of patriarchal society and the construction of womanhood by men creating the new realm of female culture in her work.

The Dog-woman, who is given such a nickname due to her breeding hounds for dog-fighting, is a grotesque figure. She does not represent the typical female identity and stereotypical image of womanhood, just like Emerence. The Dog-woman describes herself as “hideous” (p.30) and “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” (p. 30). Here, the

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description of the Dog-Woman's her appearance as hideous and unlikeable might indeed rendered as an indication of her concern over her physical appearance outside of dominant aesthetic standards" (Atayurt, 2014, p.75). However, then, she completes her appearance by saying, "but I have fine blue eyes that see in the dark" (p.30). So, she indicates that she is undesirable, and unappealing to the male gaze, yet she is at peace with herself and her appearance. Here, "the Dog-woman counters the hyperbole of her physicality by turning out how she is perceived into how she is the perceiver" (ibid. p.75). Also, she realizes that she has no-one in her life due to her appearance. "I am too huge for love. No one, male or female, has ever dared to approach me. They are afraid to scale mountains" (p.41). It is notably emphasized that the dog woman's sex is female, but her physique makes it impossible for her to act in a feminine way because possessing a body-sexed female does not define one as a woman. Therefore, she defines "feminine women" as "[t]here are women too, hot with lust, their mouths sucking at each other, and men grasping one another the way you would a cattle prod" (p.42). Here, Winterson aims to deconstruct the woman idealization by locating the Dog-woman's Body as one not objectified by the male gaze due to her being hideous. In one of her interviews, Jeanette Winterson reveals her representation of the Dog-woman by asserting:

With the Dog Woman in *Sexing the Cherry*, I wanted to create a woman that was not in any way a female stereotype, who wasn't clean, particularly loveable or desirable or attractive or any of these things, and yet proved to be enormously sympathetic and vulnerable. So that again you couldn't hate her. The Dog Woman's violence is very personal. Although she murders hundreds of people in the course of the novel, she never hits out at anybody that has not hurt her. She murders people whom she sees are hypocritical and are effectively damaging her life. Her violence isn't senseless. (Kay, 1990, p.27)

Winterson subverts the expected and normalized gender roles and the ideal woman image. However, she also problematizes typical gender behaviors; apart from her bodily features, the Dog-woman is quite violent, and rejects the submissive patriarchal role imposed on women. She does not hesitate to use violence and murder towards the men responsible for the wrongs in the society, along with her father. She confesses that her father's was her first victim: "this was my first murder" (p.129). Later on, she continues talking about her neighbors whom she dislikes and uses violence towards, with determination.

I ran straight at the guards, broke the arms of the first, ruptured the second and gave the third a kick in the head that knocked him out at once. The other five came at me, and when I had dispatched two for an early judgement, another took his musket and fired me straight in the chest. (p.80)

Generally, such a statement is considered to belong to men, as they are known for their bodily strength unlike women. Without censoring or euphemizing the horrid aspects of her violent behaviors, she speaks of what she is going to perform. So, contrary to expectations, this time, a female figure perpetrates violence on others whether a woman or man.

Think of the King, 'I said, 'who lay on the block as a lamb to slaughter and never uttered a word.'

Then, without more ado, because I am not a torturer, I took his head off in one clean blow and kicked him off the block.

...

I fetched his leg from by the window and offered it to him, but he only lamented more loudly and begged me to spare him. (p.107)

In this respect, the Dog-woman demonstrates her being against patriarchy by using bodily force and she justifies her violent behaviors saying "my actions are not motivated by thought of gain, only by thought of justice, and I have searched my soul to conclude that there is no person dead at my hand who would be better off alive" (p.153). The resemblance of Dog-woman to Emergence is not limited to their violent nature, grotesque figure and bodily strength. As in the case of Emergence, the Dog-woman is infertile.

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She is a single mother who did not give birth but who adopted a child having found near a river. This situation implies her lack of womanhood. She says, "I would have liked to pour out a child from my body, but you have to have a man for that, and there is no man who is a match for me" (p.14). So, she expresses that she has maternal feelings, yet is unable to conceive a child.

### Conclusion

All in all, *The Door* and *Sexing the Cherry* are products of two extraordinary female narrators, Magda Szabó and Jeanette Winterson who blatantly present two outsize female portraits. Despite Szabó's and Winterson's belonging to different cultures, they are the victims of patriarchal societies that they revolt against, and who deconstruct the idealized female figure through their writings. As Winterson claims in her novel, "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" (p.39). Showalter also believes in women's writing, supporting women's having their own discourse, and literary tradition. In gynocriticism, she emphasizes the importance of constructing female culture and identity in literary works divorcing it from male dominance. So, her study paved the way to decipher the significance of woman and women's writing in the abovementioned works. In this respect, Winterson and Szabó achieve a significant breakthrough in feminism by subverting the ideal woman image and unmaking the male discourse. Instead, they create female literature in which they express woman's view of life and experiences. As put forward by Showalter in her theory, gynocriticism, Szabó and Winterson prove that they are in a better position to endorse women's experiences than men as they prefer to present women from their own point of view. These authors demonstrate that women's voices might differ from one to another and there is no ideal and universal woman image. So, they do not please men and serve their needs. Their characters, Emerence and the Dog-Woman are outstanding, assertive and strong-headed. They do not dress up in accordance with society's expectations and make themselves attractive and desirable to men. On the contrary, they please themselves and act the way they wish. Finally, no matter that Szabó and Winterson come from different backgrounds and live in different periods, they refuse to be determined and defined by men. They aim to elevate female voices in a patriarchal society, empower women, and remove the abstract barriers constructed between females and males to build a more equal, less gender-regulated future. So, to say, "beyond androgony, women have a lot to say" (Showalter, 1992, p.220).

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