Trabajo Fin de Grado

La pasión de Jeanette Winterson: el estímulo de la ambivalencia y la reescritura del estereotipo de la *femme fatale*

Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion*: Boosting Ambivalence and Rewriting the Femme Fatale Stereotype

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INTRODUCTION

Jeanette Winterson is one of the most prominent novelists in England today. She has been awarded with the Whitbread Prize and the E.M. Foster Award, among others. Besides being a famous and very controversial figure, her works offer an innovative perspective and style. This makes her a very interesting author, who has also been very original in terms of narratology and has experimented with gender issues, which we can see in her novels *Written on the Body* (1992) *and Art and Lies* (1994). Her fame started with her autobiographical novel, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, published in 1985. From this point onwards, her recognition as a lesbian and postmodernist writer soared and has not stopped growing ever since. Despite of refusing to identify with the labels "lesbian writer" or "postmodernist writer", she continued to use lesbian love as a main theme in her novels and to have an attitude of "ambivalence to storytelling: she wants both tell stories and deconstruct them" (Andermahr 27), which is considered to be a highly postmodernist attitude. As Onega explains: "one of the defining traits of postmodernist fiction is its problematic and ambivalent relationship to storytelling" (10-11). In fact, the novel that I will focus on, *The Passion*, published in 1987, is a perfect example of a postmodernist historiographic novel. Besides, the novel contains a lesbian love story. As it seems, the love theme is the most recurrent one in Winterson's fiction. According to Onega, "Jeanette Winterson is a hedgehog type of writer, with love as the single central vision around which all her fiction develops" (8), so, this theme is very deep-rooted and recurrent in fiction and acts as the axis of her work. This novel is therefore a postmodernist fiction in which she "rewrites" history, because the plot is set in Napoleonic Europe. This alternative narration and account of the Napoleonic wars at the beginning of the 19th century gives voice to silenced people, to subaltern voices such as those of the protagonist, Henri, who is a soldier and will become Napoleon's cook, and the second main character, Villanelle, who is a poor casino worker and a sold prostitute in the French army. The main protagonist, Henri, tries to survive this cruel and crude world with the help of Villanelle, with whom he will fall in love. Interestingly, by giving visibility and voice to these characters and lesbian love stories, the novel can be classified as postmodernist.

Throughout history, love has overtly been present in literature, but this is not the case of lesbian love. As Sarah Parker argues, traditionally, lesbianism has been "subject to extreme repression, rendered shady and invisible in history and literature" (4), as "lesbianism threatens cultural order" (4). In Western literature, lesbianism as a sexuality first appears in the Gothic genre as a result of what Parker calls "lesbian panic". Lesbianism was treated as something monstrous, which denaturalised and "abjectified" their sexuality and completely erased the possibility of lesbian love. In those days, lesbianism was depicted as sinful and depraved so as to preserve patriarchal order. In other words, lesbianism and lesbian relationships were depicted in these Gothic settings as "the Other". This is a position that occurs outside the binary oppositions that, according to Kristeva, define "the Subject". In fact, women bodies, independently of their sexuality, already produce abjection, as Creed suggests, paraphrasing Kristeva: "the image of woman's body, because of its maternal functions, acknowledges its 'debt to nature' and consequently is more likely to signify the abject" (11). Then, it is clear that women bodies are othered by merely existing. Furthermore, the sexual existence of women bodies threats patriarchy, and this is shown for example by another character in Winterson's fiction, the Dogwoman, from *Sexing the Cherry* who falls into the categories of the Gothic and the grotesque as well as other women, lesbian or queer bodies of her fiction. As William Hughes defines in his book *Key Concepts in the Gothic*, "Gothic frequently treats the human body as a disturbingly aesthetic commodity, dwelling on its excess, its capacity for modification, its degeneration and its abjection and fragmentation…and it is rendered uncanny for the reader" (81). He also defines the grotesque in similar terms, describing it as the quality of relying on the blurry and unstable boundaries between the self and the other or between life and death itself (Hughes 87). As Parker states, the Gothic has the "disruptive power to transgress boundaries" (7), that is to say, it walks along the liminal boundaries between the Subject and the Other and even transgresses them. Then, the main objective of many women and lesbian authors interested in the Gothic is "to wield the Gothic for their own ends" (8) and I believe Winterson is no exception. She purposefully fills *The Passion* with abundant Gothic elements, like the palace or castle-like building which the Queen of Spades lives in or the "bed" she sleeps in, which will be explained later. She uses all these elements in her own way, reappropriating and rewriting the genre, which is what postmodernist authors like Winterson tend to do.

Bearing these ideas in mind, the main objective of this essay is to show how Jeanette Winterson's postmodernist writing challenges the femme fatale tradition by owning the abject, which I will show through Villanelle and the lesbian relationship between her and the Queen of Spades. Winterson uses the femme fatale figure in her own way and benefit, rewriting and reusing it. She resorts to monstrosity as crucial to remodel the Symbolic and, as Andermahr explains, referring to her novel *Sexing the Cherry*, "Winterson does not merely reproduce the female grotesque as the exemplar of abjection…but rather transforms it into an image of power" (72). In order to understand this, before the in-depth analysis, I will first offer a brief overview of the femme fatale stereotype, starting with the outmost exponent of this tradition, Carmilla, the character of the novella of the same name by Irish writer Sheridan Le Fanu and published in 1872. Secondly, I will relate her to the character of the Queen of Spades, and I will illustrate this female stereotype within the novel. Once I have set the principles of this essay, I will move on to the analysis, focusing on Villanelle and the lesbian relationship as my thesis statement previously states, and I will explain the different possible sources of abjection that Villanelle produces and the reaction of the rest of the characters. Finally, after carrying out the analysis, I will provide the conclusions that I have reached, defending how she accomplishes to own this abjection and how she is not abjected by every character in the novel. This, together with the recapitulation of the most important arguments for and against Villanelle's stereotypical portrayal as a femme fatale, will close the essay.

I have chosen this topic and thesis for different personal reasons: first, I have always found feminism and women stereotypes very interesting and an issue that I would like to study and focus on in a future assignment; second, I am very interested in the notion of the abject and its ambivalence, as I believe in the hybridity and fluctuation of the subject, and I oppose the dual characterisation which has traditionally defined the normative subject. In this essay I will explore this ambivalence as one of the main issues. Third and lastly, I have chosen this novel, *The Passion*, among all the works we can analyse under the scope of feminist criticism and the abject theory, because I find it fascinating in every sense, from the complexity of the characters to the narratology and structure of the work itself. I find it a very well-crafted masterwork, which is easy to read and results into a great variety of interpretations. As for the method of analysis and the theoretical frameworks that I will employ in this essay, they are mainly the theory of the abject by Julia Kristeva, the ideas of lesbian monstrosity by Gina Wisker and Barbara Creed, psychoanalytic theories of castration and identity, the different facets of the individual by Freud and Lacan and also several other literary critics to inform myself about Jeannette Winterson's work and *The Passion* itself, the most important ones being Susana Onega's and Sonya Andermahr's thorough studies on her works.

ALWAYS ON THE PROWL: THE FEMME FATALE

The figure of the femme fatale has been in our culture for a long time, since men needed women to be docile and not get out of their assigned paths in life. It can be traced back to chivalric romances, in which there would be temptresses who would try to make the Knight fail in their quest. This figure has been mainly used as a tool to repress women's desires or rebellious attitudes, which succeeds by using these female characters to show women the consequences and punishments that those actions entail, suggesting what would happen if their behaviour should follow theirs. The femme fatale characters exploded during Romanticism and, above all, within the Gothic subgenre. This is in part due to the Romantic's fascination with the sublime because the femme fatale is "an object of simultaneous horror and fascination" (172), as Steel quotes from Jermyn's "Rereading the Bitches from Hell: a Feminist Appropriation of the Female Psychopath" (1996). In this oxymoronic equation of horror and fascination, the horrid is granted with those qualities that make women deviant from the norm and hence, dangerous, and the fascinating part is what makes them so desirable for men. In fact, femme fatales are subjected to what we know as "the male gaze", because being "different" or not "normal" makes them exotic and therefore, they become fetishized by men. The representation of the femme fatale varies, depending on the literary genre and time; for instance, the common characterisation in Gothic literature is a monster-like creature. This is the case of Carmilla, one of the most famous femme fatales in history. Carmilla is the first representation in literature of a female vampire. She is the second main character of the novella Carmilla by Sheridan Le Fanu, in which she is described as a dark, monstrous and ghost-like creature. In the novella, Laura, the main protagonist, sees her as an animal figure: "I soon saw that it was a sooty-black animal that resembled a monstrous cat" (Sheridan Le Fanu 46). Her representation as a predatory feline is partly motivated by her "deviant" sexuality because she is a lesbian, which clearly threatens patriarchal order. As Paulina Palmer defends, there is a "tradition of the murderous, predatory lesbian" and a "tendency of hetero-patriarchal culture to displace female violence on to lesbian identity" (14). Hence, monstrosity (in this case, vampirism) and lesbianism tend to be closely related in literature. Carmilla is a temptress, she preys on Laura, seducing her: "She used to place her pretty arms about my neck, draw me to her, and laying her cheek to mine, murmur with her lips near my ear, ...And when she had spoken such a rhapsody, she would press me more closely in her trembling embrace" (Sheridan le Fanu 29). The temptress and vampiric nature of Carmilla causes an immediate repulsion to the reader, as she is the Other, she becomes "the abject". According to Julia Kristeva, responsible for coining this term, "the abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to I" (1). Carmilla is a vampire, a living corpse that walks along the borders of humanity and normalcy, which is the perfect exemplification of the term. Carmilla stands between the Subject and the Other, and this ambivalent, hybrid and liminal nature is what causes her "abjection". This "abjected nature" is also present in *The Passion*, in characters like Villanelle or the Queen of Spades. In what follows, I will focus on explaining the Queen of Spades who, I believe, is the maximum exponent of the femme fatale stereotype in this novel, and then I will analyse the protagonist of this essay, Villanelle.

The Queen of Spades and Carmilla are very similar in spite of being set in very different contexts, Carmilla in 19th century Ireland and Villanelle, in 19th century Venice. Both of them belong to powerful and rich families, for instance, Carmilla belongs to an aristocratic Gaelic lineage. In the case of the Queen of Spades we do not know for certain if they are from the aristocracy, but neither her husband nor herself work and they are very rich, so it is very likely. Furthermore, the Queen of Spades's husband devotes his life to being an adventurer and looking for treasures, and they live together in a very big house. This house, which is most probably a palace, highlights even more similarities between Carmilla and her. Both of them share similar living spaces, because they are Gothic settings, Carmilla's castle, in which most of the novella is set, and the Queen of Spades's palace. The presence of this Gothic aesthetic is made clear when Henri describes the Queen of Spades's place: "I left her and stepped into the wide hall…The third had no windows and on the floor, side by side, were two coffins, their lids open" (Winterson 119). This also makes even more explicit the femme fatale stereotype, as we discover the vampiric and monstruous nature of Villanelle's ex-lover. Furthermore, very much like Carmilla, the Queen of Spades also tempts a young woman. When Henri reaches "the woman's room" he acknowledges that "I wanted to bury my face in the clothes and lie on the floor with the smell about me" and, referring to Villanelle, he also "wondered if that was how she had felt with this sweet-smelling, seductive woman" (120). This hints at the charm that the Queen of Spades produces on her victim. Only by being in a room smelling of her, Henri can already imagine how irresistible she might have been for Villanelle. But the last and definite proof of the Queen of Spades's vampirism, is that she steals Villanelle's heart, not only metaphorically, but literally. We can see this unreal deed when Henri finds the heart hidden in a jar it in the same scene at the palace: "The jar was throbbing. I did not dare to unstopper it. I did not dare to check this valuable, fabulous thing and I carried it, still in the shift, down the last two floors and out into the empty night" (120). Henri carries Villanelle's heart and gives it back to the rightful owner. All in all, there is no doubt that temptation and passion are a constant in both works of fiction and that both characters, Carmilla and the Queen of Spades perfectly follow the femme fatale stereotype. However, this is not exactly what happens with the protagonist of this essay.

VILLANELLE'S UNQUESTIONABLE AMBIVALENCE

Villanelle is a very complex character and Winterson devotes a great part of the narration to form her, even though she is not the main protagonist. Her characterisation is done carefully throughout the novel as she evolves as a person. She has a very prominent role in narrative terms. In the second chapter, she is at the same level of narration as Henri because she becomes a homodiegetic narrator. Both of them have equal interventions which take place simultaneously, until the third chapter. From this point onwards her relevance as a narrator begins to decline, until it disappears. Villanelle's narration becomes embedded into Henri's in the third chapter and, although we can still appreciate the plot through her perspective, she has evidently lost power in narratological terms. Apart from being the main narrator in the second and third chapters, she is also an internal focalizer, which makes her occupy a prominent narratological position. In this sense, I believe that the narrative structure of this novel emphasises the power of Patriarchy. Villanelle has her own voice, but it is castrated and silenced by external forces, leaving Henri's voice the one who remains and is finally heard. It is even him who writes the diary as a valuable source of information because he uses it as scriptotherapy, and I believe this narratological structure is a feminist form of denouncing women's silenced voices.

Villanelle is present in every chapter but the first one, so even if she is not the protagonist and is downgraded in narrative terms, she is very relevant in the plot. As I have already mentioned, Villanelle is very complex, and her complexity lies on her ambivalence. She is ambivalent by nature, since she was born. She is born with webbed feet, and, as Andermahr explains, they "serve as a metaphor for hybridity, a break with gender convention and a mark of Villanelle's difference" (63). Her webbed feet are a phallic attribute, and thus represent masculinity, because only boatmen were supposed to have them: “there never was a girl whose feet were webbed in the entire history of the boatmen” (Winterson 51). This means that Villanelle is neither a woman nor a man, symbolically speaking, which demonstrates her ambivalence. This can also be exemplified in physical terms by the androgynous appearance that she will take later on in her life, when she worked at the casino, which I will address later. Her feet are monstruous, and they provoke repulsion to several characters who see them, like Villanelle’s mother and the midwife who assists her birth. Villanelle’s birth is indeed a very shocking scene; as she herself narrates: “but it was when they spread me out to dry that my mother fainted, and the midwife felt forced to open another bottle of wine” (51). They are terrified and disgusted by her feet. This abjection is immediately felt by the reader, who is shocked by the reaction of both characters, because they try to cut the membrane between her toes, that is to say, they decide to castrate her, symbolically speaking in Freudian terms: “the midwife tried to make an incision in the translucent triangle between the first two toes but her knife sprang from the skin leaving no mark” (52). They fail to castrate her, so she preserves what Lacan calls “the phallus”, which does not mean that Villanelle has a Freudian phallus, or that she is not a woman, but that she preserves her power.

According to Lacan, “the phallus is the signifier of an original desire for a perfect union with the Other. The phallus refers to plenitude; it is the signifier of the wholeness that we lack" (Sarup, 19). So, in fact, by not being castrated, Villanelle is a complete individual at birth. Hence, her webbed feet represent the integration of the Other and the monstruous in her own body. In the same light, Barbara Creed argues that Freud’s position can be challenged “by arguing that men fear women, not because women are castrated but because they are not castrated… woman is physically whole, intact and in possession of all her sexual powers.” (5-6). Subsequently, women are in fact whole and in control and possession of their own sexuality, which is the case of our protagonist. Villanelle is whole, she might lack the Freudian phallus but that does not mean she is castrated. In Lacanian terms, she holds the power of being a complete being, because for Lacan, the phallus is not the physical sexual organ but a symbolic attribute of power.

In this way, Winterson manages to create a character that integrates the Other without being incomplete or utterly monstruous, so, Villanelle should not have to be necessarily abjected by the rest of society, in contrast to the Queen of Spades, who can only be perceived as a monster. Villanelle is then, half human and half monster, half woman and half man, which shows again her hybridity and fluidity. Although she is abjected by her mother and the midwife, her feet are not abjected by her stepfather. He seems totally indifferent to them and perceives them as something natural: "He was a man of the world and not easily put off by a pair of webbed feet" (Winterson 52) and "he's never thought it odd that his daughter was born with webbed feet" (61). They are not monstruous either for the Queen of Spades, and when Villanelle tells her story to Henri in the third chapter, she states: "For nine days and nights we stayed in her house… naked and not ashamed. And we were happy" (95). Thus, the Queen of Spades knew about her feet and was still happy and accepted her as she was. So, her feet are directly related to gender, but they embody her sexuality too, because it is monstrous. This is similar to the Dog woman's and the Snakie Sorceress's case, with whom Onega compares: "Similarly…monstrosity is located in her lower half and is associated with her sexual power" (82). So, we could conclude that female monsters' monstrosity is generally directly associated to their sexual power, their sexuality.

In my analysis I consider Villanelle to be bisexual, as she has sex with both men and women, as we can notice when she claims: "I am pragmatic about love and have taken pleasure with both men and women" (Winterson 59-60). For me her bisexuality implies a greater ambivalence and thus, abjection. As Onega explains, "in *The Passion*, homosexual love is recurrently associated with the carnivalesque and with the grotesque body" (63). Villanelle falls in love with the Queen of Spades and has an intimate emotional and sexual relationship with her. By being in love and having sex with a married woman, she becomes entangled in a very delicate position. This relationship is perceived as ambivalent by the readers, but they are not necessarily abjected by it. The readers are subjected to Villanelle's internal focalization which makes them empathise with her and forget about the ambivalent and possibly abjective nature of their relationship, as evidently, adultery is a crucial part of it. In contrast to the Queen of Spades, Villanelle feels devastated about her having a husband, and she feels betrayed by her, which involves again an emotional response by the reader. This can be seen when Villanelle witnesses this scene: "He kissed her forehead and she smiled. I watched them together and saw …They did not live in the fiery furnace she and I inhabited, but they had a calm and a way that put a knife to my heart" (Winterson 75). This results again into the reader's sympathy for Villanelle, and the consequent realisation of the antagonist nature of the Queen of Spades for the rest of the plot, who becomes the dangerous woman, the temptress, that is to say, the femme fatale. We could also define Villanelle's sexuality as queer, since her sexual relationship with a woman is already out of the norm and against the status quo, and this makes her body be abjected by society. As Sue-Ellen Case suggests, the monstrous and the queer are intimately related: "queer revels constitute a kind of activism that attacks the dominant notion of the natural. The queer is the taboo-breaker, the monstrous, the uncanny" (Case 3).

Villanelle's identity is fluid and ambivalent because of her sexuality and gender, but also because of her origins. We can also relate her sexuality to the core of her identity, being a Venetian. Interestingly, the novel makes it very explicit that Villanelle embodies

Venice, as she "is constantly associated with darkness and water…and her natural element is Venice, a watery and uncanny world with mysterious dark lanes" (Onega 60). She is the daughter of a Venetian boatman, so this brings her even closer to the canals of her city. Being a Venetian is very significant, and it opposes symbolically the world that Henri is used to, the rational Napoleonic France. Venice is fluid, watery and above all, ambivalent and irrational, and in Freudian and Kristevan terms, the semiotic, a feminine world which, according to him, the mother belongs to. In Lacanian terminology, the semiotic is the imaginary world. This irrational, mysterious and even fantastic nature of the city is shown repeatedly by the narrators' descriptions: "This is the city of mazes", "rumour has it that inhabitants of this city walk on water" (Winterson 49), "an enchanted island" (52), "the old venetians had eyes like cats" (57) and "in this enchanted city all things seem possible…the laws of the real world are suspended" (76). This proves that the limits between reality and fantasy are blurred in Venice, which affects Villanelle's fantastic and monstruous identity. Villanelle is as ambivalent as Venice itself. A symbol of Venice's ambivalence is, for example, the bridge, which crosses the canals of this watery world and "is a meeting place. A neutral place" (57). Bridges can "join but they also separate" (61). However, contradictory this may be, being a Venetian makes her feel whole and connected with her ancestors. So, her monstrosity allows her to be even closer to her roots. This ambivalence does not make her fall into the category of the femme fatale or into abjection; on the contrary, she is a whole person, "the Subject", who respects her ancestors and feels connected to them and follows their footsteps. As she puts it: "the ancestors cry from about the water" (76) and "no family would be complete without its ancestors. Our ancestors" (62). Besides, it should be noted that her daughter will continue embodying her ambivalent Venetian legacy, as she is even more ambivalent than her mother. She is the daughter of a rational normative French man and an irrational half-monster, half human Venetian woman.

Another important quality that she is endowed with is her ambivalent gender expression. As I have mentioned earlier, her gender expression is a bit androgynous. In fact, she cross-dresses as part of her job at the Casino: “I dressed as a boy because that’s what the visitors like to see. It was part of a game trying to decide which sex was hidden behind tight breeches and extravagant face-paste” (Winterson 54). The carnivalesque and the masques in general are very typical of Venice, and we can appreciate it in this context. Cross-dressing is a daily game for the costumers, and she and her identity are part of the product that is sold to a general male audience. Her body and the clothes attached to it are exoticized and fetishised by the male-gaze. She is nothing else but an entertainment object, not even an entity or a “self”. This is noticeable, for instance, when the cook, also known as the King of Hearts, who will become Villanelle’s husband, “admires her”. Instead of admiring her beauty, he makes her an object. He is obsessed to find out her sex, which is part of this cross-dressing game, so as Villanelle says, he started “staring at my crotch and now and again I wear a codpiece to taunt him. My breasts are small, so there's no cleavage to give me away, and I'm all for a girl” (56). Her physical characteristics makes her a perfect candidate to avoid being identified as belonging to the female sex. This leads to Villanelle’s relegation to the realm of the Other and she is not considered to be a person or a Subject. This abjection comes from this obsession to fetishize women, which contrasts radically with the Queen of Spades, who is not interested much in the game itself but in the female and woman below the costume. However, Villanelle is still terrified to show her own identity, her real sex and gender behind the costume, behind the masque. At this point, we can draw an analogy with her webbed feet. The decisive summit comes when Villanelle is brave enough to show her breasts to the Queen of Spades: "'I'm a woman,' I said, lifting up my shirt" (71). Although she is relegated to the realm of the Other, unlike other qualities or aspects of herself, crossdressing does not cause any direct repulsion to the characters. Her father, for example, does not find it repulsive or strange that she cross-dresses: "he's never thought it odd that his daughter cross-dresses for a living" (61). However, it is true that this type of ambivalence might cause abjection on the reader as she is no longer herself but a "sexual product" for the casino.

Furthermore, Villanelle's physical characterization as a red hair person is already pointed out when she narrates her birth: "as I am now and I forced my head out ... A fine head with a crop of red hair" (Winterson 51). Red hair can also be of a very ambivalent nature, and the people who have it can be deemed as liminal creatures, which cause utter abjection. For instance, in this novel the Queen of Spades also has red hair, and as I have commented earlier, she is completely abjected. Redheads have been othered and discriminated against throughout history. As Cooper says: "At the height of Europe's witch hunts, in the 16th and 17th centuries, many women suffered the shame and pain of being stripped, shaved, and 'pricked' by a witch-hunter, endured torture, and were put to death, simply because they were redheads" (75). This horrible chapter of Europe's history reflects the hatred upon red hair in our society and its association with witchcraft, that is to say, with the fantastic and with the monstruous. At that time, they associated red hair with the colour of the devil, and as Roach states, red hair was the "personification and colorization of Satan" (58). Hence, red hair is not seen as beautiful, but quite the contrary. This element adds further monstrosity to her already ambivalent and liminal nature, which makes it easier for her to be abjected by the rest of the characters and even by the readership. However, in my opinion, rather than direct repulsion, Villanelle produces attraction to the characters and to the reader in general because of being a ginger. So, as well as with crossdressing, she might be exoticized and fetishised by the men around her, in this case because of the colour of her hair. As she puts it: “I could buy him out for money and sex. My red hair is a great attraction” (Winterson 148). Also, her red hair belongs to the fantasy realm, as Henri describes it, “Her hair was down. I was in the red forest, and she was leading me home” (129). So, her hair makes us question reality itself. In fact, she shares the same hair colour with her daughter, which means that part of her will also be as monstrous, despite of not having her same webbed feet: “the baby who is a girl with a mass of hair like the early sun and feet like his” (Winterson 150). This does not mean that she is no longer monstruous, but rather that her daughter has been taught to hide her femme fatale nature. Her daughter is the ultimate symbol of the integration of the Abject within the self, she is the personification of ambivalence.

The last aspect that I will discuss is Villanelle’s attitude towards life, the decisions she makes, and how they produce abjection. She is an active woman, which is inevitably related to her sexuality. Her “active” attitude entails that she has her own agenda and makes her own decisions. This means that she is not a passive damsel whose decisions are made for her or who needs saving. This type of woman which she embodies is seen as an aberration, a monster, according to the patriarchal world we live in, as women, according to this world, should be subjugated to men in every aspect and should not be allowed to be independent and make their own choices. Hence, in this sense, Villanelle is also portrayed as the femme fatale. She has great agency and a voice in narratological terms. For instance, she chooses to hug the Queen of Spades: “As we stood up and she moved to get something I stretched out my arm, that was all, and she turned back into my arms”; she chooses to kiss her: “I had courage enough to kiss her neck very lightly. She did not pull away. I grew bolder and kissed her mouth” (Winterson 67), and she also decides to reveal her “true” nature to her, when she shows her breasts to the Queen of

Spades, being very conscious of the risks that entailed making this choice: “Not my shirt, if I raised my shirt she’d find my breasts” (70). Therefore, she is a determined, mature, independent and brave woman. She is self-conscious, smart and resourceful, and she helps Henri, a man, in his journey. She explains: “I got odd jobs on ships and in grand houses, learned to speak five languages” (98). Regarding her relationship with the protagonist of the novel, she seems to be the one who “calls the shots”, which is unthinkable in a patriarchal society. For example, she asks Henri to go look for her heart, and he accepts to do it, she protects and tries to prevent Henri from being caught by the police when he kills the cook: “to conceal some of the blood on my clothes. When we passed anyone she threw me against the wall and kissed me passionately blocking all sight of my body. In this way we made love.” (136). Her “activeness” can also be seen when she has sex with him: “One night she turned over suddenly and told me to make love to her. 'I don't know how.' 'Then I'll make love to you'” (103). Surprisingly, it is her who proposes to have sex, not him, which is very shocking in that patriarchal society, and she is, thus, seen as a dangerous and powerful sexual entity, even by Henri, who alienates her: “I will always be afraid of her body because of the power it has. I think about her body a lot; not possessing it but watching it twist in sleep” (123)”. Furthermore, there is another issue related to their sexual relationship that provokes further abjection, which is their incestuous relationship, symbolically speaking: “He loves me, I know that, and I love him, but in a brotherly incestuous way” (146). Subsequently, this causes even more repulsion and confusion in the reader.

CONCLUSION

Villanelle is without doubt ambivalent, and hence, she is monstruous and abjected by many members of her society. However, I disagree with considering Villanelle as solely a femme fatale. Villanelle is a new woman, and she is punished for it. She has been able to integrate and own her femme fatale nature within her personality, as part of herself, not allowing this stereotype to rule her perception as a woman by society. The novel rewrites this stereotype by giving Villanelle the choice to present herself as she wants to, and not as society does. However, she also knows that suppressing her femme fatale nature is key to survive in this world. This is reflected in the apparent hiding of her daughter's monstrosity by not having webbed feet, which contrasts with the other characters that I have analysed in this essay: Carmilla and the Queen of Spades. I have used both characters to establish a clear parallel between them and Villanelle, as they are the personification of the femme fatale stereotype and, unlike Villanelle, they are no more than monsters. These two characters are completely dehumanised and demonised, to such an extent that we cannot see anything else besides their monstrosity. Monstrosity is not only part of their selves, but the whole of it. This stereotypical conception of women who deviate from the norm and are conceived of as monsters is against which I believe this novel reveals. Hence, for me the objective of *The Passion* is to show that women need to accept themselves and teach their daughters to embrace their monstrosity and femme fatalness, even if that means being othered. Because for a woman, being half human and half monster and accepting their hybrid nature is the only way they have to achieve completeness, something that Villanelle beautifully does and that we can observe throughout the plot. She exposes her femme fatale nature as something natural and part of her ancestry; for instance, she is not abjected by her stepfather, she is accepted by both a female and a male lover and she is not abjected because of her feet by either of them, or the fact that she also uses her feet to connect with her ancestors who help guiding her through the city of mazes. She resists classification and being stereotyped in a beautiful way, because she cannot fit into our prejudiced and automatic stereotypes, she embodies a sheer ambivalence. Villanelle doesn’t want to be associated with a stereotype or tag, and she is rebellious in every aspect. Even though in some cases Villanelle is presented as a product and she is fetishised, like in the casino as a crossdresser or being a red hair woman, she chooses how to present herself, and I believe it is her who has the power to show her real self, like when she shows herself to the Queen of Spades or Henri. To conclude, I would like to make an analogy between the lesbian relationship of the novel, Villanelle and the Queen of Spades and the relationship between Jeanette Winterson and the femme fatale stereotype. It could be said that the development and ending of the lesbian relationship acts as a metaphor for Winterson’s detachment from the femme fatale tradition. This tradition is a binary and polarising stereotype that relegates women to the Other, and she, as a postmodernist writer wants to do away with dualities. Winterson wants her character to be free from that toxic and power lesbian relationship as well as she wants women to free themselves from this stereotype and own their monstrosity, which she will splendidly show. The integration of this stereotype is a very intricate process, but it is undoubtedly necessary.

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