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“WRITTEN ON THE BODY IS A SECRET CODE” — BODY AS PALIMPSEST IN JEANETTE WINTERSON

In her writings, Jeanette Winterson remaps the formulas of desire, working towards a redrawing of the sexual landscape. The lovers' desire is here contingent upon crossing the boundaries which are usually constituted by taboo relationships, like homosexual and extramarital ones, and the dynamics of gender masquerade that makes identification ambiguous. The erotic tension ensuing from the necessity to cross the boundaries is grounded in the erotics of risk — risk of commitment and intimacy, of loss of control, of loss of the self in the other, and of being left. To delineate eroticism Winterson deploys the tropes of travel, gambling, cross-dressing, food, palimpsestic body, and others. This paper's object is to address the depiction of body as palimpsest.

Eroticism appears to Winterson's characters as the *lingua franca*, in contrast to language, since each person employs their own private subjective version of language, tinged with personal history and the individual view of the world. The sensual experience is the only authentic one, ensuring direct intimate contact with the other. The authenticity stems from the fact that the play of bodies is not contingent on the lovers' conscious will but on the inner experience of sexual plethora, as Georges Bataille points out. Violence of the flesh, independent of reason, takes control of the body, enlivens it and pushes to explosion,¹ to the "little death." The body can thereby become more expressive than words, since, as Roland Barthes believes, it is feasible to lie with words but not with the body; what one attempts to hide with their language, their body reveals.² It is the somatic that speaks; as

¹ Georges Bataille, *Eroticism* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), pp. 92–93.

² Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse. Fragments* (London: Vintage, 2002), p. 44.

in the case of Constance Chatterley, where, her breasts becoming eyes and her navel lips, Constance ponders whether the body can have its own life. Wintersonian characters realise that body language is the best way to get to know another human being: "How else can I know you but through the body you rent? Forgive me if I love it too much."³ The body becomes one's laboratory; it is the place where one processes sensations and experience: "We know the world by and through our bodies. This is our lab; we can't experiment without it."⁴ The corporeality is essential in the lovers' exchanges then, and in love the binary opposition body-mind is blurred. Octavio Paz elucidates the apotheosis of the body with the assertion that for a lover the desired body is a soul, therefore s/he speaks to it with a language which can be comprehended only with the body and skin, not with mind.⁵ Margaret Reynolds posits the same: "Love recognises the existence of something beyond the self. It takes many shapes. But as our physical shape is rounded by the body, love must always be known on the skin."⁶

As in an erotic act one loses control of their body, they cover its announcement, nakedness,⁷ for to be naked means to be exposed, as in Winterson's "The Poetics of Sex": "When she sheds she sheds it all. Her skin comes away with her clothes. On those days I have been able to see the blood-depot of her heart."⁸ Or, as she puts it in *Written on the Body*, "I like to keep my body rolled up away from prying eyes. Never unfold too much, tell the whole story."⁹ Nakedness is here far from the exploited and objectified type of female nudity; it is, rather, a state of openness to the other person, and signifies being oneself, unmasked, raw, which entails the risk of rejection and loss of control. In spite of that, one yearns to be naked as it is the condition of genuine feelings: "It's no good wearing an overcoat [...] when what the body really wants is to be naked,"¹⁰ "If this is going to succeed it will take years. I will have to find the years because I want to stand before you naked. I want to love you well."¹¹

The fear of loss of control issues from the fact that a person's body is the diary of their personal history. Their lifetime experiences are layered on

³ Jeanette Winterson, *Gut Symmetries* (London: Granta Books, 1997), p. 217.

⁴ Jeanette Winterson, *Lighthousekeeping* (London and New York: Fourth Estate, 2004), p. 171.

⁵ Octavio Paz, *Podwójny płomień: miłość i erotyzm*, trans. into Polish Piotr Fornelski [*The Double Flame*] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1996), pp. 134–135.

⁶ *Erotica. Women's Writing from Sappho to Margaret Atwood*, ed. Margaret Reynolds (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1990), p. xxviii.

⁷ Bataille, *Eroticism*, p. 18.

⁸ Jeanette Winterson, "The Poetics of Sex," in: Jeanette Winterson, *The World and Other Places* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1998), p. 32.

⁹ Jeanette Winterson, *Written on the Body* (London: Vintage, 1995), p. 89.

¹⁰ Winterson, *Written on the Body*, p. 76.

¹¹ Winterson, *Gut Symmetries*, p. 206.

their body, forming a palimpsest: "Written on the body is a secret code only visible in certain light; the accumulations of a lifetime gather there. In places the palimpsest is so heavily worked that the letters feel like braille."¹² The narrator's body is the register of the past, particularly of the erotic one. The body, a map of one's experience, is also a map of one's identity. The body, which is the source of emotions, fantasies and passions, and where behaviour and actions of the subject are fulfilled, is for Grosz essential in forming identity.¹³ For Sigmund Freud the Ego is first and foremost of bodily nature; it is a projection of the body surface.¹⁴ Also Ellyn Kaschack emphasises the interdependence between the body and mind. She claims that the body stores experiences in the same way as the mind does; experience is reflected on the face, hands, the musculature of the body, and even in the structure of bones. Consequently, we are what we experience, in all the aspects — material and symbolic, visible and hidden. Experience is included and expressed in the body, and the aspects encompass and influence each other. Memory is stored everywhere, not only in the mind.¹⁵

The desire to decipher the partner's body, to anatomise that territory is an attempt to understand the lover through learning about their past and their identity. On the other hand, reading and unravelling can aim at taking control. The narrator of *Written on the Body* refuses to permit to be read as this entails the risk of vulnerability,¹⁶ of being disclosed, naked. As a result, her¹⁷ relationships, both with men and women, appear evanescent. It is only with Louise, a married woman, that "I" feels something deeper. Reluctant to open the book of the body, the narrator strives to read Louise from cover to cover. When "I" learns about Louise's leukaemia, she leaves her with her husband, a cancer specialist, who has offered to properly take care of Louise. The narrator's disappearance is the husband's condition. In despair, the heart-broken lover reads medical literature, about anatomy and the illness, and the story breaks to make room for meditations on them. Each of the four sections, entitled "The Cells, Tissues, Systems and Cavities of the

¹² Winterson, *Written on the Body*, p. 89.

¹³ Elisabeth Grosz, "Corporal Feminism," in: Lynda Nead, *Akt kobiecej. Sztuka, obscena i seksualność*, trans. into Polish Ewa Franus [*The Female Nude. Art, Obscenity and Sexuality*] (Poznań: Rebis, 1998), p. 124.

¹⁴ Sigmund Freud, "The Ego and the Id," in: Nead, *Akt kobiecej*, p. 24.

¹⁵ Ellyn Kaschack, *Nowa psychologia kobiety: podejście feministyczne*, trans. into Polish Jadwiga Węgrodzka [*Engendered Lives. A New Psychology of Women's Experience*] (Gdańsk: Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, 1996), pp. 60, 62, 63, 96, 181.

¹⁶ Carolyn Allen, "Jeanette Winterson. The Erotics of Risk," in: Carolyn Allen, *Following Djuna: Women Lovers and the Erotics of Loss* (Bloomington, Indiana: IUP, 1996), p. 47.

¹⁷ Although the narrator's gender is not revealed in the book, there are a number of reasons for which I read the narrator as a woman. Some of the reasons will be explained later on.

Body,” “The Skin,” “The Skeleton” and “The Special Senses,” begins with a passage from an anatomy book and is followed by the narrator’s memories and musings about the lost lover and her illness. Winterson constructs a textual universe in which all the formulations of the body are simulacral, in contrast to the lover’s absent body.¹⁸ Reading about anatomy and imagining herself inside Louise, “I” strives to find out about Louise’s body as much as possible so as to map it; to come into an even more intimate contact with the beloved, “more intimately than the skin, hair and voice that I craved. I would have her plasma, her spleen, her synovial fluid.”¹⁹ Mapping the body signifies here subjugating, pinning down, categorising. The narrator obsessively longs to possess Louise in all possible dimensions: “I didn’t only want Louise’s flesh, I wanted her bones, her blood, her tissues, the sinews that bound her together.”²⁰

However, “I” only incipiently pursues the masculine paradigms of anatomical explorations, which aim at colonising and fixing; she analyses and parodies them, merely to repudiate them eventually:²¹

Let me penetrate you. I am the archaeologist of tombs. I would devote my life to marking your passageways, the entrances and exits of that impressive mausoleum, your body. [...] I can’t enter you in clothes that won’t show the stains, my hands full of tools to record and analyse. If I come to you with a torch and a notebook, a medical diagram and a cloth to mop up the mess, I’ll have you bagged neat and tidy. I’ll store you in plastic like chicken livers. Womb, gut, brain, neatly labelled and returned. Is that how to know another human being?²²

The cold clinical dissecting language of male science²³ does not suffice to describe a human being:

What are the characteristics of living things? At school, in biology I was told the following: Excretion, growth, irritability, locomotion, nutrition,

¹⁸ Leigh Gilmore, “Without Names. An Anatomy of Absence in Jeanette Winterson’s *Written on the Body*,” in: Leigh Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 2001), p. 134.

¹⁹ Winterson, *Written on the Body*, p. 111.

²⁰ Winterson, *Written on the Body*, p. 51.

²¹ Catherine Stowers, “Journeying with Jeanette: Transgressive Travels in Winterson’s Fiction,” in: *(Hetero)Sexual Politics*, eds. Mary Maynard and June Purris (London: Taylor & Francis, 1995), pp. 150–151. Also the narrator of “The Poetics of Sex” realises that labelling is not the way to learn about people: “Pin her down? She’s not a butterfly. I’m not a wrestler. She’s not a target. I’m not a gun. Tell you what she is? She’s not Lot no. 27 and I’m not one to brag.” (Winterson, “The Poetics of Sex,” p. 33).

²² Winterson, *Written on the Body*, pp. 119–120.

²³ Stowers, “Journeying with Jeanette,” p. 151.

reproduction and respiration. This does not seem like a very lively list to me. If that's all there is to being a living thing I may as well be dead. What of that other characteristic prevalent in human living things, the longing to be loved?²⁴

It transpires that "[t]he logical paths, the proper steps led nowhere,"²⁵ as the traditional lover's discourse does not encompass fatal illnesses or human mortality. Pursuing the masculine models, the narrator rejects the stereotypical role of a woman as a passive object of penetration and exploration, and redefines the formula of heterosexual desire.²⁶ The lack of the narrator's gender expresses the refusal of "the patriarchal regime of names and the identities it compels."²⁷ In so doing, "I" accomplishes distinctly lesbian goals, although she is not rendered as a lesbian.²⁸

The masculine patterns are replaced here with the feminine explorations, figured in terms of labyrinthine interior journeys: "My mind took me up tortuous staircases that opened into doors that opened into nothing,"²⁹ "Doors opening onto rooms that opened into doors that opened into rooms."³⁰ This psychic inward journey is also enacted in Winterson's *The Passion* by means of Venice, consisting in the visible mercurial maze of canals and "the city within the city," "the inner city,"³¹ which constitutes a fluctuation of meanings and border transgressions forming a labyrinth, a rheumy space of liability and peril.³² The female journeys "along the blood vessels" and coming "to the cities of the interior"³³ aim at discovering one's identity, which is not linear but labyrinthine, full of mazes and thus possibilities of interpretation, and whose "geography is uncertain."³⁴ Therefore it cannot be discovered by means of any guiding principles, including medical discourse, "the clinical language, through the dispassionate view of the sucking, sweating, greedy, defecating self."³⁵

Contrary to masculine trophy hunting, demonstrated in the declaration, "I cannot allow you to develop, you must be a photograph not a poem,"³⁶

²⁴ Stowers, "Journeying with Jeanette," p. 108.

²⁵ Winterson, *Written on the Body*, p. 92.

²⁶ Stowers, "Journeying with Jeanette," pp. 150–151.

²⁷ Gilmore, "Without Names," p. 124.

²⁸ Stowers, "Journeying with Jeanette," p. 150.

²⁹ Winterson, *Written on the Body*, p. 92.

³⁰ Winterson, *Lighthousekeeping*, p. 218.

³¹ Jeanette Winterson, *The Passion* (London: Vintage, 2004), p. 53.

³² Judith Seaboyer, "Second Death in Venice: Romanticism and the Compulsion to Repeat in Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion*," *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (1997), p. 485.

³³ Winterson, *The Passion*, p. 68.

³⁴ Winterson, *The Passion*, p. 68.

³⁵ Winterson, *Written on the Body*, p. 111.

³⁶ Winterson, *Written on the Body*, p. 119.

Winterson proffers reciprocity: "No, it doesn't come under the heading Reproduction. I have no desire to reproduce but I still seek out love."³⁷ In this yearning, the narrator becomes an exemplification of the Barthesian figure of "fulfilment": "The fulfilled lover has no need to write, to transmit, to reproduce"; she is satisfied with what she has, and wants to keep it eternally the same.³⁸ "I" does not long to colonise the other, but offers herself as a source of pleasure,³⁹ which becomes, according to Helene Cixous, the augmentation of the results of desire's imprint on every part of the body and the lover's body.⁴⁰ Such intimate erotic exchanges between the bodies generate the erotogenic surface and imprint it, subsequently producing a singular intensity, which constitutes a process common to all lesbian relationships, as Elizabeth Grosz points out. Drawing on Deleuze, Guattari, Lyotard, and others, she perceives desire and sexual exchanges in terms of bodies, pleasures, intensities, energies, surfaces, movements, inscriptions, and not in terms of lack, yearnings and wishes, characteristic of traditional psychoanalytical discourses of desire. Like Winterson, Grosz draws attention to the patterns and quality of the intensities, which are submitted to metamorphoses, evoke further intensities, and open up new spaces.⁴¹

The narrator converts the medical language into "a love-poem,"⁴² the language of intimacy that turns into the language of self-recognition:

"Explore me," you said and I collected my ropes, flasks and maps, expecting to be home soon. I dropped into the mass of you and I cannot find the way out. Sometimes I think I'm free, coughed up like Jonah from the whale, but then I turn a corner and recognise myself again. Myself in your skin, myself lodged in your bones, myself floating in the cavities that decorate every surgeon's wall. That is how I know you. You are what I know.⁴³

Rendering the trauma of lost love is juxtaposed with rendering the self; the turn toward the other by means of memory entails a turn toward the self as the subject of mourning.⁴⁴ The narrator's body appears to be the register of the lover's presence and absence: "It was a game, fitting bone on bone.

³⁷ Winterson, *Written on the Body*, p. 108.

³⁸ Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, p. 56.

³⁹ Stowers, "Journeying with Jeanette," p. 151.

⁴⁰ After Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (Princeton, New York: Princeton UP, 1977), p. 152.

⁴¹ Elizabeth Grosz, "Refiguring Lesbian Desire," in: *The Lesbian Postmodern*, ed. Laura Doan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 72, 76–78, 81.

⁴² Winterson, *Written on the Body*, p. 111.

⁴³ Winterson, *Written on the Body*, p. 120.

⁴⁴ Gilmore, "Without Names," p. 134.

I thought difference was rated to be the largest part of sexual attraction but there are so many things about us that are the same. Bone of my bone. Flesh of my flesh. To remember you it's my own body I touch. Thus she was, here and here."⁴⁵ The body of "I" is a map of the relationship; Louise left some marks including "hand prints all over my body,"⁴⁶ Louise's face "embossed on [the — S.F.] hands"⁴⁷ and "the L that tattoos me on the inside" which "is not visible to the naked eye."⁴⁸

The reciprocity and intimacy produce such a strong bond that, together with resemblance, they pose a threat of shifting body boundaries to the point of losing the self in the partner. Resemblance is rendered by the tropes of mirroring, twinning, subsumption and engulfment, which can be read as a prompt to the narrator's gender but does not determine it univocally. The narrator declares the perfect communion of bodies with the lover:

You said, "I'm going to leave him because my love for you makes any other life a lie." I've hidden those words in the lining of my coat. I take them out like a jewel thief when no-one's watching. They haven't faded. Nothing about you has faded. You are still the colour of my blood. You are my blood. When I look in the mirror it's not my own face I see. Your body is twice. Once you once me. Can I be sure which is which?⁴⁹

Likeness imposes the narrator's body being the palimpsestic record not only of its owner's experience, but also of the lover's, since the partners are similar: "Your face, mirror-smooth and mirror clear. Your face under the moon, silvered with cool reflection, your face in its mystery, revealing me."⁵⁰ Having been the twins, the narrator ascertains to experience the same emotions as Louise: "[...] if Louise is well then I am well," "[...] if you are broken then so am I."⁵¹ Also disease can be felt in both bodies; Louise has fallen ill but her lover suffers from bodily disintegration, too: "I am fighting helplessly without hope. I grapple but my body slithers away," "I am rid of life."⁵²

Yet, the sameness and unity of feeling must turn out illusory in the end for there are no two people who are the same. The power of love cannot change it, as Barthes claims, and although one identifies oneself with the other's suffering, in fact the suffering takes place without them, dissociating

⁴⁵ Winterson, *Written on the Body*, pp. 129–130.

⁴⁶ Winterson, *Written on the Body*, p. 106.

⁴⁷ Winterson, *Written on the Body*, p. 189.

⁴⁸ Winterson, *Written on the Body*, p. 118.

⁴⁹ Winterson, *Written on the Body*, pp. 98–99.

⁵⁰ Winterson, *Written on the Body*, p. 132.

⁵¹ Winterson, *Written on the Body*, pp. 154, 125.

⁵² Winterson, *Written on the Body*, pp. 101, 119.

them from the amorous subject so she can only feel compassion⁵³ or empathy. The narrator thus realises she made a mistake leaving Louise, even if she "meant her good." In fact, she made the decision without Louise but now she reflects: "What right had I to decide how she should live? What right had I to decide how she should die?"⁵⁴ Therefore, she tries to find her; yet, to no avail.

Although the boundary loss is framed as risk, Winterson eroticises it, defining it as both danger and temptation.⁵⁵ The temptation relies upon the kind of unity in which the partners retain their singularity:

I was holding Louise's hand, conscious of it, but sensing too that a further intimacy might begin, the recognition of another person that is deeper than consciousness, lodged in the body more than held in the mind. I didn't understand that sensing, I wondered if it might be bogus, I'd never known it myself although I'd seen it in a couple who'd been together for a very long time. Time had not diminished their love. They seemed to have become one another without losing their very individual selves.⁵⁶

In the case of Louise, "I" hopes to achieve the kind of intimacy asleep in the body and woken in the act of recognition, like in Winterson's short story "How to Die:" "'I love you' he said. 'You don't know me.' 'I recognise you.' I nodded. Love is recognition. Love is re-cognition; a re-thinking of all we know, and all we are, because someone stands in front of us like a mirror."⁵⁷ The narrator of *Written on the Body* feels similarly about Louise: "The odd thing about Louise, being with Louise, was *déjà vu*. I couldn't know her well and yet I did know her well. Not facts or figures, [...] rather a particular trust. That afternoon, it seemed to me I had always been here with Louise, we were familiar."⁵⁸ It is perhaps this familiarity, this act of re-cognition that makes Louise capable of decoding the narrator's body, contrary to the previous numerous partners: "I didn't know that Louise would have reading hands. She has translated me into her own book," "You deciphered me and now I am plain to read."⁵⁹ The narrator hopes that lesbian reciprocity will be a release, "a space uncluttered by association"⁶⁰ offering freedom: "[...] you will redraw me according to your will. We shall cross one another's

⁵³ Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, pp. 57–58.

⁵⁴ Winterson, *Written on the Body*, p. 157.

⁵⁵ Allen, "Jeanette Winterson. The Erotics of Risk," p. 76.

⁵⁶ Winterson, *Written on the Body*, p. 82.

⁵⁷ Jeanette Winterson, *How to Die*, at: 10 October 2009 <www.jeanettewinterson.com>

⁵⁸ Winterson, *Written on the Body*, p. 82.

⁵⁹ Winterson, *Written on the Body*, pp. 89, 106.

⁶⁰ Winterson, *Written on the Body*, p. 81.

boundaries and make ourselves one nation. Scoop me in your hands for I am good soil."⁶¹

The liberty comes from the fact that lesbian eroticism turns out the territory outside the dictate of patriarchal culture. It is a "wild zone" defined by Shirley Ardener as the area of female consciousness that does not overlap with that of the dominant male group since the dominant discourse lacks structures to articulate the female experience.⁶² The women's, and especially lesbian, territory is thereby unmapped, unknown, undefined: "Some of the territory is wilder and reports do not tally. The guides are only good for so much. In these wild places I become part of the map, part of the story, adding my version to the versions there. This Talmudic layering of story on story, map on map, multiples possibilities but also warns me of the weight of accumulation."⁶³ Becoming "part of the map" and adding her "version to the versions there" may express the wild territory's respect for individuality, subjectivity and freedom. This is the territory that is not going to be tamed and colonised: "That's all right boys, so is this. This delicious unacknowledged island where we are naked with each other. The boat that brings us here will crack beneath your weight. This is territory you cannot invade," "On this island where we live, keeping what we do not tell, we have found the infinite variety of Woman."⁶⁴

Freedom without boundaries is also emphasised in the final scene of the book in which Louise comes back into bursting space replete with tropes of textuality and circularity:

This is where the story starts, in this threadbare room. The walls are exploding. The windows have turned into telescopes. Moon and stars are magnified in this room. The sun hangs over the mantelpiece. I stretch out my hand and reach the corners of the world. The world is bundled up in this room. Beyond the door, where the river is, where the roads are, we shall be. We can take the world with us when we go and sling the sun under your arm. Hurry now, it's getting late. I don't know if this is a happy ending but here we are let loose in open fields.⁶⁵

The ending of the narrative, open, ambiguous and undefined, becomes the spiralling return to the beginning, the figure often deployed by female travellers,⁶⁶ as well as the "green world" metaphor and journey to the uni-

⁶¹ Winterson, *Written on the Body*, p. 20.

⁶² After Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*, p. 322.

⁶³ Jeanette Winterson, *The PowerBook* (London: Vintage, 2001), p. 54.

⁶⁴ Winterson, "The Poetics of Sex", pp. 39, 41.

⁶⁵ Winterson, *Written on the Body*, p. 190.

⁶⁶ Stowers, "Journeying with Jeanette," p. 152.

verse of "liberated desire and female authenticity, crossing to the other side of the mirror."⁶⁷ Being "loose in the open fields" may be construed as the longing to experience the limitlessness similar to that expressed by the lack of the narrator's gender or name.⁶⁸ It may be also interpreted as putting a woman back to her body, at the centre of her own sexuality, to explore the "wild zone."

Winterson's imagery of circularity, textuality and labyrinthine interior cities, set against the masculine paradigms, may be read as a response to Mary Jacob's appeal for women's writing to work within "male" discourse but trying incessantly to deconstruct it,⁶⁹ breaking free from "a prison-house of language."⁷⁰ Winterson's attempt to write in "white ink"⁷¹ is an attempt to write "outside of the specular phallogocentric structure," and establish "the status of which would no longer be defined by the phallacy of masculine meaning,"⁷² as advocated by Shoshana Felman. The signature of feminine writing should be sought, according to Nancy Miller, in those places of the text where writing and female body meet,⁷³ since a distinctly female writing should articulate the body, reconnect "the book with the body and with pleasure," as Chantal Chawaf argues.⁷⁴ This assumption echoes Barthes's idea of interpretation depicted in *The Pleasure of the Text* where he asserts that the text can be made an object of pleasure either through connecting it to the pleasures of life, and later adding "the personal catalogue of our sensualities," or through inducing the text "to breach bliss [...] thereby identifying this text with the purest moments of perversion."⁷⁵

In Winterson, the reconnection of the text, the body, and pleasure takes on the shape of the textual body. The body is translated into text and sexuality into textuality. In *Written on the Body* Winterson employs different forms in the three sections of the book, which represent different patterns of writing on the body, and constitute an experiment in the morphology of sexu-

⁶⁷ Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*, p. 324.

⁶⁸ Gilmore, "Without Names," p. 141.

⁶⁹ After Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*, p. 316.

⁷⁰ Winterson, *Written on the Body*, p. 318.

⁷¹ Helene Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," in: *Feminisms. An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, eds. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), p. 352.

⁷² Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*, p. 316.

⁷³ Nancy K. Miller, *Subject to Change. Reading Feminist Writing* (New York: Columbia UP, 1988), p. 129.

⁷⁴ After Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*, p. 316.

⁷⁵ Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, at: <www.tasc.ac.uk/depart/media/staff/Is/Modules/MED2350/Text.htm>

ality, of the lover's body and of the body of text.⁷⁶ The body becomes thus a fetish, as the displaced locale of embodied knowledge,⁷⁷ which becomes the reflection of Barthes's conviction that text is a fetish that desires the reader. The text having a human shape, corpus, it is the anagram of the body, but of the erotic one. Considering the implications of the etymology of the word "text," as the Latin word "textum" signifies "web," Barthes claims that "Text means tissue" that is generated in a constant interweaving, therefore interpreting the text is not tantamount to giving it a meaning, but appreciating "that plural which constitutes it. In this text, the networks are many and interact, without any one of them being able to surpass the rest; this text is a galaxy of signifiers."⁷⁸

By the same token, to read the Wintersonian palimpsestic body with its personal history and identity inscribed on it, cannot result in granting it a "meaning" that is a label. The masculine paradigms must be repudiated because of "a galaxy of signifiers," the plurality of interpretations of the body and thus identity consisting in "interior cities," mazes and "zig-zags."

⁷⁶ Gilmore, "Without Names," p. 140.

⁷⁷ Gilmore, "Without Names," p. 135.

⁷⁸ Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*.

Sonia Front

„Na ciele zapisany jest tajemny kod” — ciało jako palimpsest w prozie Jeanette Winterson

Streszczenie

W swojej twórczości Jeanette Winterson dąży do przepisania dyskursu pożądania. Palimpsestyczne ciało to jeden z tropów, za pomocą którego pisarka oddaje erotyzm, wierząc, że kontakt cielesny to jedyna autentyczna forma komunikacji. Ciało stanowi tekst złożony z warstw osobistej historii, zwłaszcza erotycznej, a próba jej odszyfrowania to wejście w bardzo intymny kontakt z drugim człowiekiem, ale jednocześnie ryzyko bycia podporządkowanym. Artykuł omawia to zagadnienie głównie na podstawie powieści *Zapisane na ciele*, w której początkowe, identyfikowane jako męskie, paradygmaty pożądania, mające na celu kolonizację, ustępują miejsca kobiecym eksploracjom, oddanym za pomocą labiryntowych psychicznych peregrynacji. Zamiast pożądania stanowiącego wykładnię braku, jak w tradycyjnym dyskursie, Winterson proponuje wzajemność (*reciprocity*), gdzie jednostka nie dąży do kolonizacji partnerki, ale oferuje siebie jako źródło przyjemności. Łącząc tekst, ciało i przyjemność, Winterson stawia sygnaturę kobiecego pisarstwa, które według teorii feministycznych powinno mieścić się tam, gdzie spotykają się ciało i tekst.

Sonia Front

**„Am Leib ist ein Geheimkode aufgeschrieben“ –
der Körper als ein Palimpsest in den Prosawerken
von Jeanette Winterson**

Zusammenfassung

In ihren Werken bemüht sich Jeanette Winterson, den Begehrensdiskurs zu verschreiben. Palimpsestes Leib ist eine der Spuren, mit Hilfe deren die Schriftstellerin den Erotismus wiedergibt; sie glaubt nämlich, der Geschlechtsverkehr sei die einzige authentische Form der Kommunikation. Der Körper bildet einen Text, der aus den Schichten der persönlichen und besonders erotischen Geschichte besteht. Der Versuch diese Geschichte zu entschlüsseln bedeutet einen sehr intimen Kontakt mit dem anderen Menschen und gleichzeitig die Risiko, sich dem Anderen zu unterstellen. Das Thema wird im vorliegenden Artikel am Beispiel des Romans *Am Leib aufgeschrieben* erörtert. Die zuerst mit den Männern identifizierten und eine Kolonisierung bezweckenden Begehrensparadigmata weichen den, mittels labyrinthähnlichen psychischen Peregrinationen wiedergegebenen weiblichen Explorationen. Statt des mit dem Mangel verbundenen Begehrens schlägt Winterson die Gegenseitigkeit (*reciprocity*) vor, wenn ein Partner seine Partnerin nicht zu kolonisieren versucht, sondern sich selbst als eine Genussquelle anbietet. Den Text, den Körper und den Genuss miteinander verbindend gibt Winterson der weiblichen Literatur den neuen Wert (laut feministischer Theorien ist diese Literatur im Treffpunkt des Körpers mit dem Text zu lokalisieren).