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# Bone of my bone. Flesh of my flesh : Sexual (non)identity, idealistic cannibalism, and erotic love in Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the body*

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“Bone of my bone. Flesh of my flesh”: Sexual (Non)Identity, Idealistic Cannibalism,  
and Erotic Love in Jeanette Winterson’s *Written on the Body*

by

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Date

Thesis Advisor

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## Abstract

### **“Bone of my bone. Flesh of my flesh”: Sexual (Non)Identity, Idealistic Cannibalism, and Erotic Love in Jeanette Winterson’s *Written on the Body***

Idealistic cannibalism is often represented metaphorically in literature. A character desires a “mythical state of union” that parallels the infantile cannibalism stage in Freudian identity development, in which an infant cannot distinguish itself from its mother’s body, and the suckling of its mother’s breast brings great gustatory and erotic satisfaction. The origin of adult sexuality is established during this time. According to Freud, idealistic cannibalism manifested in an adult is an unhealthy drive, because it represents an arrest in one’s psycho-sexual development. Such an unhealthy appetite, which is normally sublimated into art and culture (i.e. civilization), may lead to fantasy incorporation, in which one human being metaphorically devours another. Fantasy incorporation is especially evident in, but not exclusive to, heterosexual relationships in which the male naturally consumes the female, because the male’s identity development depends upon a more rigidly defined ego than the female.

In Jeanette Winterson’s *Written on the Body*, I argue that Winterson’s sexually (non)identifying construction of the narrators remains consistently ambiguous throughout the novel and that the narrator’s sexual ambiguity enables Winterson to emphasize a passionate, intense, and intimate eroticism that transcends both centralized (heterosexual) and marginalized (homosexual) roles. Winterson illustrates this distinctively unsexed but, nonetheless, erotic experience, by employing the metaphor of idealistic cannibalism, which she foregrounds as a salutary cannibalism based on a

mutual sharing and an arrested psychic experience that locates the lovers outside of the Lacanian Symbolic and in the fluid Imaginary, whereby the boundaries, norms, and order of the social world are dissolved. The body in the Imaginary is not only a site of an unsexed eroticism, it is also a site of intimacy that is spiritual in its depth. Thus Winterson, in addition to subverting such binaries as male/female and heterosexual/homosexual created by traditional psychoanalytical theories of identity development, also subverts the traditional body/spirit binary. Winterson's lovers, therefore, fully escape the regulatory schemas that perpetuate the production of fixed bodies that fulfill these schemas.

Of Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body*, Andrea L. Harris<sup>1</sup> asserts that although "Winterson's narrator is technically ungendered, there are many wry hints that 'it' is in fact a 'she'" (143). She also looks to "extratextual" evidence "for reading the narrator's gender as female" and cites the author's discussion of her lesbianism and the "autobiographical nature of all her texts" (143). Making a similar assertion about the biological sex of *Written on the Body's* narrator is Carolyn Allen<sup>2</sup>, who writes that "Winterson's self-identification as a lesbian together with her fame as the author of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985), an explicitly lesbian narrative, drives the decision to imagine 'I' as Louise's woman lover" (48). While both critics seem to grant the sexual ambiguity of the narrator, they clearly make an effort to determine the sex of the speaker.

In contrast to these two readings that attempt to assignate the narrator's gender as female, I propose that the reader cannot determine the narrator's biological sex and that Winterson's sexually ambiguous construction of the narrator remains consistent throughout the novel. Indeed, the reader who assigns a biological sex to the narrator forecloses alternative and potentially enlightening interpretations. I would argue that the narrator's sexual ambiguity plays a key role in the narrative; it enables Winterson to

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<sup>1</sup> Harris, Andrea L. *Other Sexes: Rewriting Difference from Woolf to Winterson* (2000). Harris argues that the reason Winterson leaves the narrator ungendered (i.e. not marked as "she") is so that a woman can be granted "the status of the universal, a position historically available to men" (145). Based on this argument, however, the reader is still reading the narrator as a "she," which I claim is not possible since the text itself works against this reading.

<sup>2</sup> Allen, Carolyn. *Following Djuna: Women Lovers and the Erotics of Loss* (1996). Allen claims to "read [the narrator] as a woman," and asserts that the narrator's sexual ambiguity functions as a "defense against the language of incorporation and loss of boundaries that both entices and threatens two lovers whose bodies are similar (i.e. both women). Again, I think the text itself of *Written on the Body* prevents the reader from assigning any definite gender to the narrator.

emphasize a passionate and intense eroticism that transcends both centralized (heterosexual) and marginalized (homosexual) sexual roles.

In order to illustrate this distinctively unsexed but, nonetheless, erotic experience, Winterson employs the metaphor of "idealistic cannibalism" (more fully defined below), which finds its parallel in the infantile cannibalism phase of identity development. Infantile cannibalism represents the stage in identity development when, from the infant's viewpoint, its body and its mother's are virtually indistinguishable, and eating (sucking on the mother's breast) is the baby's first non-genital erotic experience. Therefore, the metaphor of idealistic cannibalism enables Winterson to create a space that is genderless, boundary-dissolving, fluid, and imagistic. I suggest that this 'space' is the equivalent of the Lacanian Imaginary realm. Thus the novel's lovers are released into the Imaginary realm from the Lacanian Symbolic (the domain of language in which "naming" sets boundaries, inculcates norms, and constructs deviances from such norms). Moreover, Winterson's construction of the Imaginary through cannibalistic metaphor enables her to subvert the binaries (male/female and heterosexual/homosexual) of traditional psychoanalytical theories by resisting the Freudian/Lacanian or "Western concept of identity" that "reduces and confines sexuality to a [any] single dualism" (qtd. Kilgour 245).

Because the narrator's sexual ambiguity is essential to my argument, I will first counter the claims offered by Harris and Allen that attempt to construe the narrator's sex as female even as they assert it is "ungendered." First, both resort to "extratextual" evidence (Winterson's lesbianism and/or fame) to support their 'narrator-as-female'

arguments, but Winterson, herself, as Lauren Rusk informs us, “eschews the emptiness of labels” [and] “avoids the hotbutton word [lesbian] that narrows many readers’ attention before they have a chance to experience the fullness of the text” (112). In addition, Rusk relates Winterson’s reaction to interviewers who focus on her sexual orientation: “It would seem that, if you’re lesbian, ‘What you fuck is much more important than how you write’ . . . ‘This may be because reading takes more effort than sex’” (qtd. in Rusk 112). Apparently, Winterson does not want her own sexual orientation to interfere with the reading, interpretation, or appreciation of her texts.

Just as “extratextual” evidence cannot adequately support any definite claims about the narrator’s sex, I would argue that textual evidence itself fails in the same way. Because Winterson crafts the text as to make any definite assignation logically impossible, the text itself undermines Harris’s and Allen’s claims that it presents “wry hints” or “drives” the reader to perceive the speaker as female. For, as soon as a reader believes he/she has found textual support of a female (or male) narrator, the text immediately counters by embedding a meaning that reverses the original assessment. The text thereby challenges and exposes the reader’s own biased assumptions underlying the nature of sexual identity and the extent to which “naming” produces that which it names.

Moreover, Winterson works to frustrate the reader’s notions regarding gender identity from three different perspectives: the physiological (at the genital level), the (non)reproductive, and most importantly, the linguistic. In so doing, she thoroughly destabilizes any ground upon which the reader may attempt to stand in order to assign a

specific gender. At the level of basic physiology, Winterson appears to be toying with the reader; the tone is often lighthearted and humorous, and the focus is on genital anatomy. For example, the narrator describes the time s/he visited an ex-girlfriend who sets a mousetrap (shaped like “the head of a yellow and green serpent”) for her bothersome postman in the “letter-box just at crotch level” (Winterson 41-1). As the narrator approaches the door, s/he states, “I hesitated to ring the bell . . . because to reach the bell meant pushing my private parts right *into* the head of the snake” (Winterson 41 italics mine). Thus, the preposition “into” makes the reader believe that the narrator is male, especially since the author could have chosen (but doesn’t) the words “against” or “toward” in order to clear up any doubt about gender that the scene might cause. Just a few lines later, however, after the narrator’s girlfriend casually states, “It won’t hurt you,” the reader’s perception is altered, and, as Harris reasonably asserts, readers now believe that the narrator is, in fact, female (supposedly because ‘she’ has no external genitalia to get trapped inside the snake’s head). The snake as a traditional phallic symbol might also support that the narrator is female, since it suggests possible penetration. But Harris cites evidence that overlooks the part of the text that implies the narrator’s genitalia has the potential to penetrate the snake’s head.

In another passage, Winterson once again ‘plays’ with the reader’s preconceived notions of the sexual organs and the extent to which they and they alone can mark difference and sameness in gender. Harris asserts that the following “plot hint” compels the reader to interpret the physical body of the narrator as female (again, not unreasonable): “It was a game, fitting bone on bone. 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” (Winterson 129). The word “same” can imply two females: if the narrator is the ‘same’ as Louise, then the narrator must be female. The word “same,” however, can also be interpreted from a male perspective: a male speaker is simply acknowledging the surprising number of similarities (since there are actually more than less) between the male and female body, thereby demythologizing in his own mind the emphasis on difference as the root of sexual attraction. Thus the text refuses to represent the body as either a site of difference or sameness. Instead, Winterson presents it as a site of erotic pleasure and intimacy, as I will illustrate later.

Winterson also refuses to allow reproductive capability to define heterosexual relationships, even as she refuses to allow reproductive inability to define homosexual relationships. For example, Harris cites as evidence that “the narrator’s refusal to equate love with reproduction suggests that her brand of loving is nonreproductive, that is, lesbian” (144). I think that this is an assertion that Winterson would find very troubling, since it exemplifies reductive thinking, especially in light of the fact that lesbian couples do have children (there are ways other than the traditional), and because many heterosexual couples willingly choose not to have children. “Non-reproductive” loving, therefore, cannot help the reader to resolve the sexual ambiguity of the speaker. Thus the sexual ambiguity of the narrator suggests that Winterson’s text has a purpose other than privileging lesbian relationships or marginalizing heterosexual ones.

Finally, Winterson resists language itself as a marker of difference or of sameness – or of any kind of structure, be it hierarchical or equal. To illustrate, Harris

cites the following words of the narrator as an example of 'sameness' and draws the conclusion that the narrator must be female (again, not an unreasonable assumption): "Bone of my bone. Flesh of my flesh. To remember you it's my own body I touch. Thus she was, here and here" (Winterson 129-30). Yet, note the similarity of Adam's words to Eve: "At last, here is one of my own kind – Bone taken from my bone, and flesh from my flesh" (Genesis 1, 2.23). Therefore, once again, the words turn on the reader and suggest that the narrator is male. Without a doubt, this language does not refer to either a female or male, but instead it refers to an ungendered and unfixed body that is a site of both pleasure and intimacy.

Winterson's refusal to 'name' the biological sex of the narrator enables her to situate the novel's lovers in a metaphorical space of pleasure that is fluid, boundary-less, and outside of acquiring a genital identity – a space that I argue is represented through "idealistic cannibalism" as the Lacanian "Imaginary." Thus, the lovers participate in what in psychoanalytical theory may be perceived as negative and destructive; however, I believe that Winterson frames idealistic cannibalism positively. In *Food, Consumption and the Body*, Sarah Sceats distinguishes "idealistic cannibalism" (also known as "benign cannibalism") – the type of cannibalistic desire frequently presented metaphorically in literature – from "ritualized cannibalism" (the eating of one's enemies to destroy them or the eating of one's friends to honor them) and "survival cannibalism" (eating another's flesh to prevent starvation). Sceats defines idealistic cannibalism as "an unconscious yearning to consume a loved one in nostalgic pursuit of a mythical state of oneness" (Sceats 34-5); it is a "nostalgic pursuit" in that it

seeks the pleasure, although a “distorted pleasure,” of infancy (Freud’s “oral/pre-Oedipal stage” or Lacan’s “Imaginary<sup>3</sup>”), a period in which a baby cannot distinguish itself from its mother’s body, and the suckling of its mother’s breast brings great gustatory and erotic (sensual) satisfaction (34-9). The basis of adult sexuality is established at this time. According to Freud, the infant eventually comes to see itself as separate from the mother and acquires an “ego” (the “mirror stage” in Lacanian theory). Thus, as Sceats points out, the infant’s gradual awareness of its separateness from the mother causes “ambivalence” in its desire to eat, while simultaneously fearing that it will be eaten, by the mother (39). Finally, after a period of latency, the child/adolescent develops a sexual (i.e. a “normal” genital) identity. As sexual gratification is “ultimately unsatisfying in comparison with the fantasy of cannibalism” (Sceats 35), the drive to return to the “mythical state of oneness” sometimes remains in an individual’s psyche (what Lacan calls “desire”). Freud argues that civilization itself (the Lacanian “Symbolic”) is the positive by-product of achieving sexual identity, whereby an individual’s insatiable desires (stemming from the oral stage) are sublimated through art and culture (Sceats 35). Therefore, according to Freud, idealistic cannibalism manifested in an adult represents an unhealthy drive, because it reveals an arrest in psychic development and has the potential to lead to “fantasy incorporation” (defined below) (Sceats 39).

Significant, too, is that Freud believes that males and females negotiate the process of identity differently. Males identify with the “absent father who represents

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<sup>3</sup> I do not mean to suggest that the stages of identity development that Lacan lays out are identical to Freud’s. For simplicity’s sake, I draw parallels, since the focus of this paper is not to contrast Freud and Lacan’s identificatory processes.

separation” from the mother, whereas females continue to identify with the mother – “the first love object” (Kilgour 244). While Freud was both troubled and mystified as to exactly how a female (as opposed to the male) negotiates the oedipal stage and thereby achieves a stable genital identity, certain feminists now assert that “women tend to develop a less rigid sense of ego boundaries than men, and a more fluid sense of the relation between the self and the world (Kilgour 244). This “asymmetry of development,” as Maggie Kilgour describes it in *From Communion to Cannibalism*, results in the “sexual binary opposition” of male/female, in which the male naturally “subsumes” the less egoistically defined female (245). According to Kilgour, heterosexual relationships entail the complete devouring or “fantasy incorporation” of the female by the male.

In literature, cannibalism as a metaphor can also be destructive in that one character compulsively seeks to “incorporate” the other; both males and females are capable of “devouring” (dominating) others. But Sceats also points out that idealistic cannibalism can be viewed as positive inasmuch as it is the means to a transformation in the character. In other words, the character may regress for a limited period of time, but eventually he/she returns to the Symbolic. Thus, the character’s movement or progress through the stages of development ultimately aligns with that laid out by traditional (patriarchal) theories of acquiring identity.

In contrast to the conventional movement through the stages of assuming an identity, Winterson text foregrounds what could be termed a *salutary cannibalism* based on *mutual sharing* and an *arrested psychic experience* that locates the lovers outside of

the Symbolic and in the fluid Imaginary where the boundaries, norms, and order of the social world are dissolved. The text, therefore, consciously escapes the regulatory schemas that perpetuate the production of fixed bodies that fulfill these schemas. Furthermore, Winterson's privileging of a biologically non-sexed eroticism framed in overt cannibalistic images strongly suggests that she is purposely writing against what Judith Butler describes as a "sexed body secured through identificatory practices by regulatory schemas," such as Freudian and Lacanian theory (13). Winterson's text rejects the so-termed "normal" process by which male and female infants separate themselves from the mother in the "assumption" of an ego (identity). She, therefore, deconstructs any hierarchies (wherein the male consumes the female) based on biological sex and the identificatory practices that produce such fixed sexual categories.

Strongly conveying positive idealistic cannibalism is the communal eating and feeding of the narrator and Louise made manifest by a plethora of gustatory images that pervade the text. In fact, in the first part of the narrative (before Louise is reclaimed by the Symbolic), the text is inundated with *gustation* imagery that speaks of the narrator's and Louise's entry into the Imaginary. In these scenes, action or plot momentum is negligible, epitomizing the atemporal mode of the Imaginary. These cannibalistic and fluid images are only occasionally interrupted by the narrator's humorous digressions on bad and unsatisfying relationships of the past (which, interestingly, the narrator equates with such anorexic and non-cannibalistic terms as "meager diet" and "starv[ation]").

In order to display the lover's mutual eating and feeding or their idealistic cannibalism, which, as stated above, metaphorically parallels the infantile cannibalism of the Imaginary realm, Winterson positions one, then the other, as either the maternal figure (the feeder) or infant (the eater) in the exchange. In one bedroom scene, the narrator describes the following: "We lay on our bed in the rented room and I fed you plums the colour of bruises" (Winterson 17). Here the narrator plays the mother, while the passive Louise (infant) receives plums directly into her mouth. Later on, the maternal Louise cooks for the narrator (as infant), who then attempts to "taste" Louise in her soup: "When I ate my own soup I strained to taste her skin. She had been here, there must be something of her left. I would find her in the oil and onions, detect her through the garlic" (Winterson 36-7). Both, in turn, are either feeding or being fed by the other, revealing a kind of Derridean "play" in that both lovers, in turn, slip easily back and forth into each role. Worth mentioning, too, is the way the narrator's position as the archetypal maternal figure upsets the reader's notions regarding gender yet again; for if the reader attempts to interpret the narrator as male, then he/she tends to resist assigning the male a maternal role. The text repeatedly confronts the reader while in the act of his/her own biased and conditioned thinking.

Moreover, food often reminds the narrator of Louise when they are apart. For instance, upon returning home after a passionate session of lovemaking with Louise, s/he tells us: "Well, here I am at half past four with fruit bread and a cup of tea and instead of taking hold of myself I can only think of taking hold of Louise. It's the food that doing it. There could not be a more unromantic moment than this and yet the yeast

smell of raisins and rye is exciting me more than any *Playboy* banana” (Winterson 39)<sup>4</sup>. Also, once their coupling routine becomes more established, the narrator describes the post-coitus Sunday ritual: “On Sunday, when she’s gone, I can open the curtains, wind my watch and clear the dishes stacked around the bed. I can make my supper from the left-overs and think about her at home for Sunday dinner” (Winterson 73). Also remarkable in this passage is that the narrator and Louise combine eating with lovemaking, since the narrator must “clear the dishes stacked around the bed,” revealing the “slippage [in meaning] between the desire to eat and sexual desire” (Sceats 36). Undoubtedly, the text constructs a relationship between food and erotic desire, recalling the infantile cannibalism of the Imaginary realm. And through this imagery, Winterson destabilizes any dualisms based on biological sex and the identificatory practices that produce such fixed sexual categories.

Even as the act of eating embodies their “mythical state of oneness,” so, too, does the prevalence of imagery that implies a maternal bodily presence that is not consciously recognized by the lovers. A primary example of this is the narrator’s description of the attic bedroom in which they make love for the first time:

There was a small bed with a patchwork quilt. The floor sheered to one side, one board prised up like a wound. The walls, bumpy and distempered, were breathing. I could feel them moving under my touch. They were damp, slightly. The light, channeled by the thin air, heated the panes of glass too hot to open. We were magnified in this high wild

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<sup>4</sup> Again the reader’s notions regarding gender are challenged. A “*Playboy* banana” suggests that the speaker is male in that ‘he’ reads *Playboy* and that it could easily represent a nude female in the magazine; yet the “banana” also implies that the narrator is female, since a substitute penis would more likely excite a female. Yet, the very process of making any gender argument reveals one’s own social conditioning, since it is just as likely that a lesbian would read *Playboy*, and a gay man would become excited by the phallic banana. In the end, Winterson wants to avoid any of these labels and to focus on erotic desire itself.

room. You and I could reach the ceiling and the floor and every side of our loving cell. (Winterson 51)

There is an organic quality in this psychic (Imaginary) realm (irregular surfaces, breathing, movement, dampness, heat) that indeed evokes the proximity of a maternal body. Also, "loving cell" strongly suggests a kind of delicious confinement that the lovers have created for themselves in this realm. The umbilical cord further attests to the lover's mystical connection; the narrator describes their euphoric union as being "held by a single loop of love" and that "the cord passing round [their] bodies had no sharp twists or sinister turns" (Winterson 88). Indeed it is a connection that is non-threatening. Also contributing to this shared fantasy of communion is their infantile awareness of the world: "We were surrounded by hands and faces shifting and connecting, now looming into focus vaporous and large, now disappearing like the bubbles children blow" (Winterson 69). Their perception is one of an infant's who lacks muscle coordination and so is not yet able to focus its eyes. Further expressing the dissolved boundaries between the narrator and Louise is the narrator's statement that s/he is never sure whether s/he is "a lover or a child" or a "lover and a child" (Winterson 80-1). Such pleasurable confusion signifies the mystical union that occurs between the maternal figure and infant in the Imaginary realm, but once again it emphasizes Derridean "play," since both lovers, in turn, slip easily back and forth into each role. Winterson purposely projects this idealistic cannibalism onto adult eroticism in order to imagine a healthy 'mystical union' that is possible for two people who have not been compelled to a subjectivity whereby one person (the male) naturally (by the

very nature of a process that almost excuses such domination) consumes the other (the female).

In addition to rejecting the “asymmetry of development” in male and female infants in identity realization, Winterson’s text also subverts the concept of “fantasy incorporation” – the negative by-product of idealistic cannibalism. Rather than using it as a metaphor for, as Sceats describes, “a monstrous appetite for absolute power,” she rewrites it to mean *a heightened and sensitive awareness to a lover’s body – a way of knowing* that brings a couple to an entirely deeper level of intimacy that borders on the spiritual. For example, the following passage signifies their mutual cannibalistic desire more than any of the more ‘literal’ food images:

I will explore you and mine you and you will redraw me according to your will. We shall cross one another’s boundaries and make ourselves one nation. Scoop me in your hands for I am good soil. Eat of me and let me be sweet . . . Those brief days and briefer hours were small offerings to a god who would not be appeased by burning flesh. We consumed each other and went hungry again. (Winterson 20)

Such intensified pleasure from eating and feeding cannot be framed as destructive; for it does not represent the ‘consumption’ of one lover by the other, but rather a ‘consummation’ of desire; desire and knowing are united in meaning.

One of the most dramatic of the cannibalistic images is Louise’s ‘reading’ and ‘writing’ of/on the narrator’s body. Although a first reading may lead a reader to believe that Louise has crossed the line into “fantasy incorporation,” as I have already shown, this language represents a way of *knowing another’s body intimately*:

Who taught you to write in blood on my back? Who taught you to use your hands as branding irons? You have scored your name into my shoulders, referenced me with your mark. The pads of your fingers have

become printing blocks, you tap a message on to my skin, tap meaning into my body. (Winterson 89)

In fact, I would argue that, for Winterson, the body itself is a site of intimacy that can and does represent the spiritual. After the narrator and Louise make love, the narrator states, "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" (Winterson 82 italics mine). For Winterson, real intimacy (knowing another) "is deeper than consciousness," that is, it is an intimacy that goes beyond sensual or superficial awareness. Interestingly, Winterson relocates this intimacy from the mind to the body. In contrast to Harris' assertion – that the narrator makes a "great mistake [in] privileging the mind over the body – I would strongly suggest that Winterson is deconstructing the body/spirit dualism. In the Imaginary realm (which exists outside of the Symbolic), *body is spirit, spirit is body*.

Critical in this scene, however, is that the narrator does not 'read' or 'write' Louise in return. The narrator only senses "that a further intimacy might begin." In other words, the narrator resists vulnerability, or as Allen describes it, "the reluctance to risk being easily read" (47), which is essential for intimacy. Confirming the narrator's fear of intimacy (in addition to the narrator's prior unsuccessful relationships) is h/er abandonment of Louise to western medicine. In what might be perceived as a defensive or rationalizing act, the narrator's fear causes h/er to abandon Louise before Louise abandons h/er (whether through simply leaving or dying). But I would also argue that it is the loss of Louise that ultimately transforms the narrator and that the "love-poem"

written by the narrator testifies to this transformation in that it manifests h/er willingness to 'read' and 'write' Louise in return.

The "love-poem" section of the text, or what Harris calls the "body parts" section, is one of the most dramatic and thought provoking moments in the novel. While Harris's reading of this segment is one of total violence and destruction as well as one that affirms "the deadening effect of being immersed in the patriarchal economy" (138), I would argue that, once again, Winterson's text is, in fact, subverting patriarchal power (the Symbolic), and, she does this not just in one way, but in two. First, Winterson appropriates the language of the Symbolic and transforms it into the imagistic (non)language of the Imaginary realm. And second, what again appears to be "fantasy incorporation" is really a *life-restoring act and an act of reciprocated intimacy* on the part of the narrator.

The language of cancer is the language of the Symbolic. Louise's cancer will be subjected to the intense scrutiny and anatomization of westernized medicine. Elgin also represents the Symbolic in that he is a doctor of western medicine – a masculinized medicine based on scientific and empirical knowledge of the body's systems. It is not, therefore, the narrator who "murders to dissect" Louise (as Harris claims), but rather it is western medicine that subjects Louise's body to representation in facts and figures – a battleground upon which a war between cells and toxins compete for power. Cancer 'treatment' involves the invasion of the body by science, as the narrator realizes:

Cancer treatment is brutal and toxic. Louise would normally be treated with steroids, massive doses to induce remission. When her spleen started to enlarge she might have splenic irradiation or even a splenectomy. By then she would be badly anaemic, suffering from deep

bruising and bleeding, tired and in pain most of the time. She would be constipated. She would be vomiting and nauseous. Eventually chemotherapy would contribute to failure of her bone marrow. She would be very thin, my beautiful girl, thin and weary and lost. There is no cure for chronic lymphocytic leukemia. (Winterson 102)

Whereas science invades and destroys Louise's body, the narrator's "love-poem" reintegrates it.

The narrator transforms the sterilized language of medicine (the Symbolic) into a "love-poem" that restores the wholeness (body *and* spirit, since as stated above, the body is spirit) of her lover by relegating it to, and re-imagining it in, the Imaginary realm. To demonstrate, the narrator cites the medical body part or parts at the top of the page in all caps, first revealing its empty, indifferent, and factual tone:

TISSUES, SUCH AS THE LINING OF THE MOUTH, CAN BE SEEN WITH THE NAKED EYE, BUT THE MILLIONS OF CELLS WHICH MAKE UP THE TISSUES ARE SO SMALL THAT THEY CAN ONLY BE SEEN WITH THE AID OF A MICROSCOPE.

Next she proceeds to re-create it by re-conceiving it in a way that restores Louise's humanity. The symbolic is translated into the semiotic:

The naked eye. How many times have I enjoyed you with my lascivious naked eye. I have seen you unclothed, bent to wash, the curve of your back, the concurve of your belly. I have had you beneath me for examination, seen the scars between your thighs where you fell on barbed wire. . . My eyes are brown, they have fluttered across your body like butterflies. I have flown the distance of your body from side to side of your ivory coast. I know the forests where I can rest and feed. I have mapped you with my naked eye and stored you out of sight. (Winterson 117)

Thus the "naked eye" of the scientist becomes the "naked eye" of the intimate lover who knows and appreciates every square inch of a lover's body ("I know the forests where I can rest and feed"). "Examination" becomes the process of exploring a lover's

body. "Tissues" – a part of a body – are transformed into a whole body ("I have flown the distance of your body from side to side"). And finally, the narrator commits her lover to memory ("stored you out of sight"). Surely the narrator's "love-poem" reflects an appreciation and intimate knowledge (that goes "deeper than consciousness") of h/er lover's body (and thus her spirit) that s/he is intent on remembering – not just as a body that arouses – but as a human being.

Further demonstrating the narrator's objective of reintegration is the question s/he asks in another section of the poem. S/he questions such scientific processes as "bagging," "recording," and "analyzing" – "Is [this] how to know another human being?" (Winterson 120). The narrator answers h/er own question thus illustrating what true knowledge of another is:

I dropped into the mass of you and I cannot find my way out.  
Sometimes I think I'm free, coughed up like Jonah from the whale, but  
then I turn a corner and recognize 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. (Winterson 120)

And later, in subsequent sections, the transformative power of the Imaginary changes Louise's "clavicle or collar bone" into a "musical instrument"; her "shoulder blades" into "wings;" and relocates her "dermis" (a site of sensation) to a place "deeper down" or "the live place;" for it is in the fluid and dynamic Imaginary realm that the sterile and masculinist language of science is transformed into metaphor and that which was once divided is now whole.

My reading of this "body reintegration" part of the novel aligns with Nicholas Abraham's and Maria Torok's concept of "introjection" as described by Kilgour in

*From Communion to Cannibalism*. They describe introjection as “metaphorization” in which the object of desire is metaphorically substituted and so desire is healthily “deferred” or “sublimated.” Abraham and Torok also describe it as “a putting of the mouth into words” (Kilgour 169). And, as Melanie Klein sees it, “the process of mourning loss begins with a belief that the lost loved object can be preserved within,” and so the “adult allows another figure to represent the mother” (Kilgour 169). In the case of the narrator, the “love-poem” itself stands in for Louise. Furthermore, introjection is “a positive model for recreating the past” in that “antagonism between parent and child” and “the lost objects are *re-membered* and *restored*, even *redeemed*, through an act of gratitude” (Kilgour 169). Through this act of gratitude, as Klein sees it, “the dead can be recalled to a new life without haunting us” (169). Indeed Louise is “re-membered,” “restored,” and “redeemed” in the narrator’s effort to re-humanize a scientifically dismembered Louise. Furthermore, it represents a token of gratitude for a shared intimacy that celebrates both the material and the metaphysical.

While the ending of the novel is often debated on the issue of whether or not the narrator is actually reunited with Louise or if the narrator merely fantasizes her presence, there is evidence to make the argument that their reunification is at least plausible. First and foremost, the “love-poem” that the narrator creates as an act of introjection “redeems” the lost love object (as explained above). In light of this interpretation, then, it is not unreasonable to expect that the two lovers be reunited in the metaphorical sense. If the “love-poem” is interpreted as an act of “incorporation,” in which the lover is “annihilated,” then the logic of the text would require that the

narrator's vision of Louise be a fantasy or a "haunting" or "possessing" as Torok and Abraham argue (Kilgour 171). Also, the fact that the narrator questions her own mental state – "Am I stark mad?" – leads the reader to believe that s/he is not mad, because s/he has the presence of mind to question h/er own perception. Another telling clue is the narrator's sentence, "She's warm." If this short but potent sentence was omitted, I think then that the reader can more easily question the reality of Louise's presence; for the fact that it stands alone makes the reader believe Winterson is calling the reader's attention to it. It connotes a living physical body – not a potential apparition from incorporation. Furthermore, as it can be argued that the story's setting is the psyche, then an ending that reflects absolute reality would be inconsistent. For that matter, it would be uncharacteristic of Winterson, since her writing always exceeds the reader's expectations.

The final scene itself lends support that they are reunited; for upon seeing and touching each other, they once again break out of the Symbolic realm and enter the Imaginary:

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. (Winterson 190).

I must agree with Harris that this scene is no less 'fantastic' than the attic bedroom scene described earlier in this paper. Yet, there is one crucial difference. As the reader might recall of the bedroom scene, the narrator related the following: "We were magnified in this high wild room. You and I could reach the ceiling and the floor and every side of our loving cell" (51). The narrator and Louise are clearly too large

("magnified") for the room; it barely contains them. While I interpreted this earlier as representative of the lovers' delicious confinement, it could also be read as an implicit limitation on the experience, because of the narrator's (not Louise's) fears of intimacy. But, as also stated earlier, the narrator's "love-poem" represents a turn in the novel and demonstrates the narrator's willingness to accept the risk of loss through intimacy. Therefore, the nature of the reencounter with Louise is characterized differently by Winterson. The experience is *not limited* by the narrator's fears, thus, the room no longer confines them; "The walls are exploding" and they can "reach the corners of the world." This time both time and space are transcended, dramatically symbolizing Louise's *and the narrator's* "deeper" level of intimacy "that [goes] deeper than consciousness" (Winterson 82). The narrator and Louise are once again transported out of the Symbolic, but this time, because the release is so potent due to their reciprocal level of intimacy, it is strongly implied that the Imaginary might actually *displace* the Symbolic. Winterson offers her readers a world in which erotic pleasure and deep intimacy are not mutually exclusive, but are, instead, inextricably linked.

With *Written on the Body*, Winterson provides an insightful, ingenious, and provocative way to challenge her reader's own sense of what it really means to be a sensual being. The 'slipperiness' of the narrator's sex and the fact that the narrator speaks in first person, singular – "I" – results in a kind of 'cognitive dissonance' on the part of the reader, who is compelled to confront the nature of his/her own sexual biases. Hence, her text seems to pose the question: Is bodily pleasure and intimacy inextricably linked to genital identity? Furthermore, she returns her readers to the Lacanian

Imaginary through cannibalistic metaphors in order to highlight an intimacy between two people that refuses such fixed categories of heterosexuality or homosexuality. The lovers are free to give and receive pleasure, and intimacy of bodies is the intimacy of spirits. Moreover, her use of the Lacanian Imaginary and the lover's psychic arrest in this realm implicitly challenges psychoanalytical theory whose discourse on sexuality has so deeply penetrated the consciousness of the modern world. *Written on the Body* challenges the discursive power of psychoanalysis. In other words, the novel questions whether psychoanalytic theory might produce the so-called "normal" sexed bodies it claims it is only explaining (or "citing" to use Butler's term). The novel does seem to argue the position that Judith Butler takes on psychoanalytic theory and its claims about identificatory processes. The Symbolic law (and the concomitant assumption of normative sexual identity) is merely a "citing" of the identificatory process and does not exist "prior to the assumption of sexed positions by a subject, but is [instead] produced through citation of the law" (Butler 14). As Butler so adequately states it, the power of citation, therefore, "consolidates the ruse of its own force" (Butler 15). Is Winterson's text, therefore, an attempt to see what it would mean to "cite the law to produce it differently" – the question Butler raises in her book (15). Indeed the novel does provide its readers with alternative *non-sexed* and *non-fixed* sexual (erotic and sensual) beings whose metaphorical position remains in the Imaginary. Without a doubt, Winterson represents a type of agency that exposes the arbitrary nature of a culture that privileges heterosexuality.

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