

V I N T A G E

eBooks



Written on the Body

JEANETTE WINTERSON

Acclaim for JEANETTE WINTERSON'S

Written on the Body

“Arresting ... a lush story of passion ... an affirmation of the freedom to cast off all prescriptions: social, moral, existential, sexual—and in the writing—aesthetic and literary. We are cut off from our assumptions and groomed to enter Winterson’s unsettling polymorphous world.”

—Richard Eder, *Los Angeles Times Book Review*

“Winterson’s skill with fable and fantasy is not just brilliant plumage in this book.... [Her] representations of desire go far beyond male/female; she moves past all dichotomies into a register of sexual imagery where the body is weapon, flora, fauna, weather, animal, geography, prison, food, light, nest, jagged edge: it is the body as whole world. In this novel she found the spot where the Great Chain of Being breaks and none of us know what will become of us, or where we fit.”

—*Village Voice*

“Brilliant ... Stunning passages of romantic rapture [and] anguished tenderness. *Written on the Body* takes on a certain cinematic splendor.”

—*Boston Globe*

“A bold, controversial new novel ... the story of a white hot passion. [Winterson] is regularly singled out as the most talented writer of her generation.”

—*Mirabella*

“This is a story of the heart, a foray into the emotional imagination. The language [is] elegiac, passionate, reverential,

with echoes of the Song of Solomon. Moving and compassionate, a love letter as much as a love story.”

—*Harper's Bazaar*

“A knockout ... sexual ecstasy is described with surreal sensuality. Fascinating [and] unforgettable. Winterson writes about the state of passion, casting an obsessed eye on the body, mapping its every detail and secret place. Winterson is an exciting writer. She has literary talent of a high order.”

—*Vogue*

“A serious display of literary talent. Winterson broods entertainingly about passion, loyalty, beauty, disease, and decay in a language that draws on Donne, Shakespeare, snippets from anatomy texts, and her own unabashed sexiness. A tour de force, with bravado and heart.”

—*Entertainment Weekly*

“Intense ... an anatomy of sexual love: Winterson takes an interest in the physiology of love, in the ways it makes the body feel and change, in the body's centrality to love. She is a scintillating writer, witty, inventive with language.”

—*USA Today*

WRITTEN ON
THE BODY

Jeanette Winterson

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for Peggy Reynolds with love

My thanks are due to Don and Ruth Rendell whose hospitality gave me the space to work. To Philippa Brewster for her editorial inspiration. To all those at Jonathan Cape who have worked so hard to produce this book.

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Why is the measure of love loss?

It hasn't rained for three months. The trees are prospecting underground, sending reserves of roots into the dry ground, roots like razors to open any artery water-fat.

The grapes have withered on the vine. What should be plump and firm, resisting the touch to give itself in the mouth, is spongy and blistered. Not this year the pleasure of rolling blue grapes between finger and thumb juicing my palm with musk. Even the wasps avoid the thin brown dribble. Even the wasps this year. It was not always so.

I am thinking of a certain September: Wood pigeon Red Admiral Yellow Harvest Orange Night. You said, 'I love you.' Why is it that the most unoriginal thing we can say to one another is still the thing we long to hear? 'I love you' is always a quotation. You did not say it first and neither did I, yet when you say it and when I say it we speak like savages who have found three words and worship them. I did worship them but now I am alone on a rock hewn out of my own body.

You taught me language and my profit on't is I know
CALIBAN: how to curse. The red plague rid you for learning me
your language.

Love demands expression. It will not stay still, stay silent, be good, be modest, be seen and not heard, no. It will break out in tongues of praise, the high note that smashes the glass and spills the liquid. It is no conservationist love. It is a big game hunter and you are the game. A curse on this game. How can you stick at a game when the rules keep changing? I shall call myself Alice and play croquet with the flamingoes. In Wonderland everyone cheats and love is Wonderland isn't it? Love makes the world go round. Love is blind. All you need is love. Nobody ever died of a broken heart. You'll get over it. It'll be different when we're married. Think of the children. Time's a great healer. Still waiting for Mr Right? Miss Right? and maybe all the little

Rights?

It's the clichés that cause the trouble. A precise emotion seeks a precise expression. If what I feel is not precise then should I call it love? It is so terrifying, love, that all I can do is shove it under a dump bin of pink cuddly toys and send myself a greetings card saying 'Congratulations on your Engagement'. But I am not engaged I am deeply distracted. I am desperately looking the other way so that love won't see me. I want the diluted version, the sloppy language, the insignificant gestures. The saggy armchair of clichés. It's all right, millions of bottoms have sat here before me. The springs are well worn, the fabric smelly and familiar. I don't have to be frightened, look, my grandma and grandad did it, he in a stiff collar and club tie, she in white muslin straining a little at the life beneath. They did it, my parents did it, now I will do it won't I, arms outstretched, not to hold you, just to keep my balance, sleepwalking to that armchair. How happy we will be. How happy everyone will be. And they all lived happily ever after.

It was a hot August Sunday. I paddled through the shallows of the river where the little fishes dare their belly at the sun. On either side of the river the proper green of the grass had given way to a psychedelic splash-painting of virulent Lycra cycling shorts and Hawaiian shirts made in Taiwan. They were grouped the way families like to group; dad with the paper propped on his overhang, mum sagging over the thermos. Kids thin as seaside rock sticks and seaside rock pink. Mum saw you go in and heaved herself off the stripey fold-out camping stool. 'You should be ashamed of yourself. There's families out here.'

You laughed and waved, your body bright beneath the clear green water, its shape fitting your shape, holding you, faithful to you. You turned on your back and your nipples grazed the surface of the river and the river decorated your hair with beads. You are creamy but for your hair your red hair that flanks you on either side.

'I'll get my husband to see to you. George come here. George come here.'