



The Lesbian Body

Monique Wittig , David LeVay (Translator)

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On a fictional Sapphic island where women live exclusively among themselves, the narrator-protagonist, in a series of invocations to her lover and descriptions of the island's life, celebrates the contours, contents, and satisfactions of the lesbian body.

The Lesbian Body Details

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Author : Monique Wittig , David LeVay (Translator)

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From Reader Review The Lesbian Body for online ebook

Javier says

pronouns are currently a pretty heavily debated topic in the radical community, and so it felt appropriate when i found this book on the used/liquidation shelves of the old Elliot Bay Books location. a fascinating slog.

Scott Moore says

Visceral. Disgusting. Erotic. Violent.

Rachel says

I get the distinct feeling I would have loved this book if I read in the original but that it's a work that's a bit resistant to translation. I dug the basic ideas, and in the unlikely event that I ever learn French I'll come back to this one, but the English translation can't help but feel a bit less than (no pun intended) the sum of its parts.

Heidi says

So, you might be a little thrown off by this title from me...but it's really as subversive a book about language, it's structure and feminism as you can get. Much less "lesbian" when translated to English from the original French, it manages to be both beautiful and disgusting. God, it's so good.

Nathaniel says

Awesome. Wittig's exploration of the love-as-body eroticizes the visceral, while her exploration of desire splits the self in a way that's only truly enjoyable in the original French.

Raven Tiger {Paint me like one of your 19th century gothic heroines!} says

This book was gritty, graphic, dark, erotic, and very visceral. It also read more like prose poetry than actual fiction.

Not for the faint of heart.

Albert says

Monique Wittig undertakes to attack/fight against patriarchial writing, as hitherto always done by men. What you get in this book, is language full of play, flexibiilty, circular motions (not linear like men's thinking, supposedly). The book could have been much shorter and still got the point across, if it actually has a point. No plot, no characters, no dialogue: if you need these things in a book you may not like it. Very violent and bloody and full of body-talk/words; like you're reading a science journal about the body.

courtney says

i would be extremely interested to know what others think of this book. we read it for a class and discussed the aspects of violence inherent in desire and in language. and in departure from a particular norm. we talked about the purpose of fragmenting a subject so completely as to render it beyond human, beyond singular, beyond what can be understood. it is a 3 hour read if you just plow. but it is pretty intense. i wasn't sure if i like it or not, but it felt pretty powerful. and strange. so if you are a lesbian, let me know what you think about "the lesbian body."

Tamisha says

Part anatomy index, part Greek/Egyptian mythos fanfiction, all disgustingly good.

Allison says

I expected unusual, but after three chapters of the narrator eating her lover's eardrums, I just couldn't make myself keep trying.

Monica says

A remarkably way to turn the idea of "the gaze" on its head. Wittig is by far my favorite theorist. She deconstructs established norms and challenges the concepts of language and desire in such a creative way that she cannot be ignored and must be discussed.

Anthony says

a celebration of the body from the inside out-- bones, bile, blood & guts handled with erotic jubilation in a world without men... a unique reading experience

K. says

either two or five stars

"M/y ring and little fingers remaining outside you having grown together with the other fingers are engaged in caressing your loins your shoulders your nape while *I* pursue m/y slow inexorable invasion of you. M/y two fingers within you have come together, they attempt the passage from the duodenum from the stomach to your oesophagus, *I* try to reach your throat, then your mouth, from within, *I* seek to be absorbed by you during my writhings in your interior to be spat out rejected vomited entirely, *I* implore you in a very low voice, vomit m/e with all your might muzzled suckling-lamb queen cat spit m/e out, vomit m/e up."

Alexis Leon says

I did not know going in that this was a narrative told by a "Je" ("I") about the graphic death of their significant other, a "Tu" ("You"). It was simply, for me, a long epic poem about lesbian love. A beautiful, eloquent, jarring, and heart-brakingly honest account of the life and death of love and what it means for the speaker, but an epic poem nonetheless.

Liza says

You know how sometimes in a library when you've already gotten far too many books and your arms are full you reach a point of abandon and just throw anything on the pile? That's what was happening to me when I plucked *The Lesbian Body* down from the shelf because, I figured, I like lesbians and I like bodies. I thought it might come in handy at a certain time of night. From the cover and description ("a rhapsodic hymn to women's bodies and women's relationships") I guessed that it would probably be a little bit ridiculous and a little bit sentimental, which I have to say I think it was, but not in the way that I expected.

In the introduction, Wittig writes of "The desire to bring the real body violently to life in the words of the book (everything that is written exists), the desire to do violence by writing to the language which I (j/e) can enter only by force." The urgency with which she was writing and the impossible scale of what she considered her mission are affecting. In a certain mood, the excitement could be contagious. You could picture the author, flushed and frantically writing, trying to push language to its limits, as though if she could just be brave enough, bold enough, violent enough, the whole compromised world might come down and a new one come up in its place, the distance between the self and the desired finally transcended.

Unfortunately it seems that trying to amp up the language as much as possible ends up having the opposite effect and much of *The Lesbian Body* is repetitive and even boring. The language is so ceaselessly, insistently erotic that it becomes unerotic in its predictability. Here is a passage that I think is pretty representative: "Your hand followed by your arm have entered into m/y throat, you traverse m/y larynx, you arrive at m/y lungs, you itemize m/y organs, you make m/e die ten thousands deaths while I smile, you rip out m/y stomach, you tear m/y intestines, you project the uttermost fury into m/y body, I cry out but not from pain, I am overtaken seized hold of, I go over to you entirely, I explode the small units of my ego, I am threatened, I am desired by you. A tree shoots in m/y body, it moves its branches with extreme violence with

extreme gentleness, or else it is a bush of burning thorns it tears the other side of m/u exposed muscles m/y insides m/y interiors, I am inhabited, I am not dreaming, I am penetrated by you, now I must struggle against bursting to retain m/y overall perception, I reassemble you in all m/y organs, I burst." There is something frustratingly literal about all of this.

Still, I ended up reading the whole thing although I didn't expect to. There were moments when sudden unexpected images were really arresting, and then the rawness of it did, I think, add to the impact. But I would have to disagree with the jacket blurb "the art and the courage are of the highest level." I couldn't really speak to the courage without sounding, maybe, ungrateful and inconsiderate. Perhaps it's that *The Lesbian Body* did its work so well that the message seems a little tired to us today. I certainly imagine it was fresher in the climate in which it was originally published. As far as the level of the art, well, I think it's pretty clear that aesthetic considerations weren't the writer's primary concern. I have to say, a little bit apologetically yet, that, though I admire them in a way, strength of feeling and rawness aren't enough to trump aesthetic merit. All the same, I found myself reaching for this book at a time of night that I wasn't exactly reaching for the Henry James, so it did offer both pleasures and merits not always found in works that might be aesthetically better.
