

“The Lesbian Body” by Monique Wittig finally comes out in paperback, 50 years after its publication!

By [Marie Kirschen](#)

Published on January 17, 2023 at 12:04 pm

Updated on January 17, 2023 at 12:04 pm

Minuit publishes “The “Lesbian Body in paperback, just 50 years after its initial publication, while Monique Wittig's work is experiencing a strong revival of interest. A poetic and experimental text, where the author of “The Opoponax” continues to play with pronouns and syntax..

In 1973, when *The Lesbian Body* appeared for the very first time on the shelves of the bookshops, it aroused an upheaval for many readers. "It is difficult today to imagine the shock provoked by this adjective, lesbian, and by this superb black and purple cover taking back the title and the enumeration: 'THE LESBIAN THE CYPRINE THE SPITTLE THE SALIVA THE SNOT THE TEARS...'", remembers Suzette Robichon, great passer of the work of Wittig, in the book *Lire Monique Wittig aujourd'hui* (Presses universitaires de Lyon).

For the release - at last! - of this work in paperback, 50 years after its initial publication, Éditions de Minuit has chosen to use the graphic design of the original cover, crossed out with this inventory of the different secretions of a body, as if dissected. There is cyprine, but also saliva, snot, cerumen, urine... Raw, using an anatomical vocabulary, the text is far from any clean and polite sentimentality. Estimating that, until now, "the lesbian love in literature existed only under a watered-down form" (the name of Colette is in particular quoted), Monique Wittig, then 38 years old, launches out the "radical" challenge "to write a completely lesbian book in its thematic, its vocabulary and its texture, a lesbian book from the beginning to the end, from the first to the fourth cover", she details in the afterword of the work, previously unpublished in French.

An experimental book, difficult to access

The result is her most experimental book and probably the most difficult to access. Playing with syntax, the 1964 Prix Médicis laureate describes an I and a you that are deconstructed, but always in a form of equality, and that passion makes them swallow each other up: "I begin to eat you up as quickly as I can, I lick the last bits off your belly, I make the traces of blood disappear, I absorb you, I hold you inside me." The metaphor of love can sometimes be brutal, even violent. Isn't love regularly described as an "exquisite death"? But "the lovers of the *Lesbian Body* resurrect on the contrary when they kill", argues Wittig.

This text, her third, also allows the author of *The Straight Mind* to continue her work on pronouns, initiated in her first novel, *L'Opoponax* (1964), in which she used the indefinite pronoun "on" to remove all marks of gender. In *Les Guérillères* (1969), she universalized the "elles", as is usually done with the masculine pronoun "ils" when it is used as a neuter. In *The Lesbian Body*, Monique Wittig splits the j/e with a slash, to signify excess. "A sign that makes it possible to imagine an excess of I, an I exalted in its lesbian passion," describes the woman who disappeared 20 years ago, on 3 January 2003.

Le Corps lesbien (Editions de Minuit/“Minuit double”), 192 p., 9 €. En librairie.