

82. “I want to tell the story again:” The Palimpsests of Jeanette Winterson’s *Weight*¹

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Abstract

Weight is Jeanette Winterson’s retelling of the myth of Atlas. Winterson writes over the familiar story of Atlas in *Weight* and creates a unique narrative, still retaining the traces of the myth, which gives it a palimpsestuous structure. The novella links storytelling to a geological process through the image of the palimpsest. Winterson also brings together different genres, narrative worlds, and modes of discourse in the novella. The palimpsest is a term that explicates this pluralistic, multi-layered nature of the text, and it is also a device the author uses as a strategy to comment on the nature of storytelling; the palimpsest both shapes the structure of the text and functions as an element that informs the content. In other words, the author creates a palimpsestuous text which embodies distinct but connected palimpsests and invites the reader to read the text and its constituents as palimpsests that operate on several levels of signification. This study argues that the palimpsest, an oxymoronic structure of fragmentation and wholeness, constitutes the basis of Winterson’s *Weight*, a text which epitomises this concept. Drawing on various critics’ ideas on the concept, this paper aims to read *Weight* as a palimpsest and to explore the various palimpsests embedded in the text.

Keywords: Jeanette Winterson, *Weight*, intertextuality, myth, palimpsest

“Öyküyü yeniden anlatmak istiyorum:” Jeanette Winterson’ın *Atlas’ın Yüğü* adlı eserinin Palempsestleri

Öz

Atlas’ın Yüğü, Jeanette Winterson’ın Atlas mitinin yeniden anlatımı niteliği taşıyan eseridir. Winterson *Atlas’ın Yüğü*’nde, bilinen metnin üzerine yazar ve önceki anlatının da izlerini taşıyan özgün bir anlatı ortaya çıkarır; bu özelliği metni palempsest niteliği olan bir yapıya dönüştürür. Bu kısa roman, palempsest imgesi aracılığıyla öykülemeyi jeolojik bir süreçle bağdaştırır. Yazar metinde farklı türleri, söylemleri ve anlatı dünyalarını da bir araya getirir. Palempsest, metnin bu çoğulcu, çok katmanlı yapısını açıklayan bir kavramdır; aynı zamanda yazarın, öykülemenin doğasını irdelemek için kullandığı bir araçtır; palempsest hem metnin yapısını hem de içeriğini şekillendirir. Diğer bir deyişle, yazar birbirinden farklı ama bağlantılı palempsestler içeren, ayrıca kendisi de palempsest yapısı gösteren bir metin yaratıp okuyucuyu, metni ve unsurlarını çeşitli anlam düzeylerinde var olan palempsestler olarak okumaya davet eder. Bu çalışma, parçalanma ve bütünlük karşıtlıklarını içinde barındıran bir yapı olan palempsestin, Winterson’ın *Atlas’ın Yüğü* adlı eserinin temelini oluşturduğu ve bu eserin söz konusu kavramı örneklendirdiği savını tartışmaktadır. Çalışmada, çeşitli

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eleştirmenlerin görüşlerinden yararlanılarak metnin bir palempsest olarak okunması ve metinde var olan çeşitli palempsestlerin incelenmesi amaçlanmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Jeanette Winterson, *Atlas'ın Yüğü*, metinlerarasılık, palempsest, söylence

Introduction

Weight, published in 2005 as a part of the Canongate Myth Series, is Jeanette Winterson's retelling of the myth of Atlas. The novella begins with a description of the formation of sedimentary rock. Stating that "[s]edimentary rock is formed over vast expanses of time" (2018, p. xi), the author conceives of this process of stratification as identical to storytelling. As the author puts it, books, like sedimentary rock, embody "a record of contemporary life" (p. xi). However, both records are "far from complete." As stratum upon stratum is added, the process is "interrupted by new periods" (p. xii) and involves erosions as well as "twist[ings] or fold[ings]" of the strata (p. xii). The outcome of this process of building stratum upon stratum, record upon record is "sedimentary rock" (p. xii). Through these images of erasure and formation, the text suggests the main trope and motif of the text, the palimpsest, and the author describes the act of writing as the construction of parchments or palimpsests: "The strata of sedimentary rock are like the pages of a book" (xii). Through this implied image of the palimpsest, the novella links storytelling to a geological process. Pursuing the metaphor of sedimentation, the narrative suggests that individual narratives, or "layers," are fragmentary; yet the palimpsestuous³ structure constitutes a whole, albeit an incomplete one. This study argues that this oxymoronic structure of fragmentation and wholeness, the palimpsest, constitutes the basis of Winterson's *Weight*, a text which both anatomises and epitomises this concept. Drawing on various critics' ideas on the concept, this paper aims to read *Weight* as a palimpsest and to explore the various palimpsests embedded in the text.

In *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989, 2nd ed.), the word palimpsest is defined as "a parchment or other writing-material written upon twice, the original writing having been erased or rubbed out to make place for the second; a manuscript in which a later writing is written over an effaced earlier writing" (Oxford, Definition A. 2). Another definition of the word is related to geology: "Of a rock: partially preserving the texture it had prior to metamorphism. Also in *Geol.*, exhibiting features produced at two or more distinct periods" (Oxford, Definition B. 3). Both meanings are relevant to the discussion of *Weight* as a palimpsest. Winterson bases her narrative upon the various meanings of the concept, creating a plurality of references and contexts. Besides, by linking the image of sedimentary rock to storytelling, Winterson turns the palimpsest into a trope. The text is palimpsestuous by nature, and it embodies and implies different palimpsests. The literal and metaphorical contexts implied through the concept show in what ways this multi-layered and complex structure shapes the novella. The text retells the familiar story of Atlas and Heracles; besides, using the strategies of rewriting, it also modifies the earlier story and changes it in significant ways. In other words, Winterson writes over the myth and creates a unique narrative still retaining its traces, which turns the novella into a palimpsestuous structure. Thus, Winterson uses it as a structural element that shapes both the form and content of the text. Moreover, the main character of the story constitutes a palimpsestuous structure, too. Atlas rebels and loses the battle against the gods; his punishment is to hold up the universe. His punishment means a constant state of stasis; however, in Winterson's narrative, this state of inaction turns into a form of growth as he encounters Heracles and then Laika. Through narrative and structural strategies, Winterson turns the

³ Sarah Dillon defines "palimpsestuous" in her work titled *The palimpsest: Literature, criticism, theory* as "a near synonym of involuted" (p. 4), adding that "[w]here 'palimpsestic' refers to the process of layering that produces a palimpsest, 'palimpsestuous' describes the structure that one is presented with as a result of that process, and the subsequent reappearance of the underlying script" (p. 4).

protagonist, Atlas, into a multi-layered text. Therefore, the protagonist, the text’s structure, and the various constituents of the content may be read as instances of the palimpsest.

The Palimpsest and intertextuality

In *Weight*, Winterson uses the palimpsest image to write over the Atlas myth. Winterson’s use of the image of the palimpsest conveys some of the premises of postmodernism. As Kubilay Aktulum states, the palimpsest is among the images authors use as a means of intertextuality (2014, p. 171). He further states that postmodern theorists and critics define the text as a palimpsest (p. 172); in fact, the author creates texts that are inevitably bound to other texts, sets of discourse, and words (p. 175). By using the palimpsest as a structural element, Winterson creates a plurality of narratives, and she defines storytelling as a constant process of rewriting; a process of creation in which each narrative is connected to previous narratives or layers.

In a parallel vein, Winterson turns it into a metaphor for the connection between the past, present, and future. Her retelling of the myth of Atlas is also an act of uniting these distinct periods under the same structure. As Dillon puts it,

The ‘present’ of the palimpsest is only constituted in and by the ‘presence’ of texts from the ‘past’, as well as remaining open to further inscription by texts of the ‘future’. The presence of texts from the past, present (and possibly the future) in the palimpsest does not elide temporality but evidences the spectrality of any ‘present’ moment which always already contains within it ‘past’, ‘present’ and ‘future’ moments. (2007, p. 37)

Winterson uses the trope of the palimpsest to suggest that just like sedimentary rock, narratives are products of a process of culmination and erasure; they are instances of the persistence of previous and future existence into the present. As the authorial voice puts it, “‘Tell me the time’ you say. And what you really say is ‘Tell me a story’” (2018, p. 7). The text links narratives to existence since it is also implicitly defined as a construct created through narration. Janković notes that “Winterson in her narration/confession obliterates the boundaries between reality and fiction, past and present, myth and autobiography” (2008, p. 201). As a retelling of an ancient myth, *Weight* has multiple layers: The novella is an individual palimpsest that links the world of myth to “contemporary life” and brings together different story worlds and discourses; it is also a narrative “stratum” that constitutes one of the many layers of “sedimentary rock.” In other words, *Weight* is a structure that “partially preserv[es] the texture it had prior to metamorphism” (Oxford, Definition B. 3), and also “exhibit[s] features produced at two or more distinct periods” (Oxford, Definition A. 2).

As a retelling of the myth of Atlas, *Weight* illustrates how a dialogue between multiple narratives becomes a productive medium for the meaning-making process. Allen relates this productivity to its defining characteristics: “Intertextuality seems such a useful term because it foregrounds notions of relationality, interconnectedness and interdependence in modern cultural life” (2006, p. 5). A palimpsest is a structure whose integral element is intertextuality. *Weight* also benefits from intertextual relationships and highlights the ideas of “interconnectedness and interdependence.” Several critics point out that intertextuality denotes the pluralisation of texts and forms of discourse. As Julia Kristeva puts it, “[t]he text is therefore a *productivity*, and this means . . . that it is a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another” (1980, p. 36). In a similar vein, Dillon points out the dynamic and fertile nature of the palimpsest. She argues that “[a]lthough the process that creates palimpsests is one of layering, the result of that process is a surface structure which can be described by a term coined by Thomas De

Quincey – ‘involuted’” (2007, p. 3), which suggests the interplay between the various “layers” of meaning. As an instance of intertextuality, this “involuted” structure makes the interaction between distinct layers possible. *Weight* is such a palimpsestuous structure, and this element defines and shapes several aspects of the text.

Rewriting, a form of intertextuality, may be defined as the process of adding layers to the many previous versions of a narrative. In his discussion of hypertextuality, Gérard Genette states that “the art of ‘making new things out of old’ has the merit, at least, of generating more complex and more savory objects than those that are ‘made on purpose’, a new function is superimposed upon and interwoven with an older structure, and the dissonance between these two concurrent elements imparts its flavor to the resulting whole” (1997, p. 398). At the beginning of the novella, Winterson notes that her source for this book is Robert Graves’ *The Greek Myths*. Graves’ work itself is a retelling of ancient narratives that have many previous versions. Winterson thus adds another narrative layer to the already existing ones, “making new things out of old.” In other words, Winterson creates a structure that interacts with the previous versions of the myth; the novella is another layer added to the previous layers of narration, or of record. Each text may be read with reference to the metaphor Winterson uses at the beginning of the novella: that of sedimentary rock. As Winterson puts it, “[t]he strata of sedimentary rock are like the pages of a book... Each with a record of contemporary life written on it... Unfortunately the record is far from complete... The record is far from complete” (2018, p. xii). This early cadence brings the idea of incompleteness to the fore, and paradoxically, it is given at the beginning of the text, which implies that each narrative adds up to a whole that is made up of fragmentary layers, pages, or texts. Through such narrative strategies, Winterson creates an “involuted” text, the layers of which close upon, intrude, and shape each other.

Besides benefiting from the resources of rewriting, Winterson also undermines the non-pluralistic facets of myth in *Weight*. Although myths articulate the power structures embedded in them, they also epitomise the polyphonic and the palimpsestuous. Myths bring contesting modes of discourse and stances together. Aronofsky Weltman highlights the contradictory aspects of myth and observes that “[a]s a mode of discourse, classical mythology has been seized upon by feminist critics as both positive and negative. Some theorists derive from myth the principal imagery for a world of greater freedom for women, while others oppose what seems an essentializing stance” (1997, pp. 351-52). She also adds that “myth is genuinely powerful, providing the tools not only for reinterpreting women as politically significant but also for redefining gender itself in ways beyond traditional, empirical, rigidly bipolar logic” (p. 352). Although Winterson does not limit the text’s focus to the issue of gender, this statement describes what the text achieves; it invites the reader to redefine and reinterpret the ideas that are the products of a “rigidly bipolar logic.” In her retelling of the Atlas myth, Winterson undermines the implications of power structures intrinsic to myth and adopts a polyphonic, non-hierarchical narrative strategy in *Weight*. Thus, the novella does what Kostkowska suggests in her discussion of *The Powerbook*: “encourag[ing] relationships based on democracy rather than hierarchy” (2013, p. 71). Winterson replaces the dualistic logic by a pluralistic one, and her use of the motif of the palimpsest is one of her primary devices in achieving this pluralistic quality.

“Involuted” discursive contexts in *Weight*

The novella’s form as well as its content display the characteristics of the palimpsest. It is both a structural element integrated into the text and a metaphor that figuratively shapes it; in fact, it is not possible to separate the two functions of it. As already pointed out, the novella begins with a description

of the formation of sedimentary rock, which is followed by an introduction that explains why the author has chosen the story of Atlas. In the introduction, the author declares that “[t]he recurring language motif of *Weight* is ‘I want to tell the story again’” (2018, p. xvi), which is also the last statement of the introduction. This repetition is not limited to the introduction; “I want to tell the story again” is also the title of the first and the last chapters of the book. It is possible to read these repetitions as elements that highlight the “involved” nature of the palimpsest. In between, there are other chapters or “layers” that narrate the story of Atlas. Each chapter is linked to one another through such repetitions or common metaphors and motifs. Staels points out the interconnected narrative levels of the text in her discussion of the text:

The paratext preceding the introductory frame text self-reflexively comments on the novella’s plural narrative levels and lays bare the device of one narrative level and ontological border intruding into another. In doing so, it uses the language of geology. . . . This paratext self-consciously deals with Winterson’s creation of various story worlds, based on genre conventions, and metaphorically speaks about her violation of generic boundaries by means of transformative narrative techniques. (2009, p. 111)

As Staels argues, the novella consists of multiple narrative levels, and different narrative levels usually accommodate varying genre conventions. Similarly, Adıgüzel and Tekin claim that the text “establishes a combination of genre traditions of fantasy, epic tale, and autobiography through a revisionist perspective” (2021, p. 257). Different frames, genres, and modes of discourse are brought together to constitute the palimpsestuous structure of the text, and this structure enables Winterson to transgress various generic boundaries. Through the statement “I want to tell the story again,” the author implies that the story may be told limitless times using different genre conventions and forms of discourse. The fact that this statement is the title also of the last chapter invites further narratives to emerge. In other words, the narrative does not end here but will continue to be written over, adding up to the palimpsest, or, to refer once again to the image used at the beginning of the novella, adding up to the several layers of sedimentary rock. The act of retelling is thus integrated into the narrative structure of the text.

The first chapter, or the next “layer,” that follows the introduction begins with the statement, “The free man never thinks of escape” (2018, p. 3), which reminds the reader of existentialism’s major premises. Immediately after this statement, the narrator refers to nothingness: “In the beginning there was nothing” (p. 3). In the following sentences, the formation of the stars and Earth is described through scientific discourse. The allusive quality of the novella is thus developed through a description of the beginning of the universe using the discourse of philosophy and of science. Combining philosophical references with scientific discourse and elements of myth constitutes another dimension of the palimpsestuous nature of the novella.

Besides, she also connects Atlas’ story to her own. After alluding to her own life, she asks, “What was it that I carried?” (p. 99). Her answer comes a couple of paragraphs later, where she writes, “The more I did the more I carried. Books, houses, lovers, lives, all piled up on my back” (p. 99). Therefore, “weight” may be interpreted as a symbol that refers to the author as well as the protagonist. The parallels between Atlas and the author add an autobiographical aspect to the narrative. Seemingly irreconcilable narratives and modes of discourse are thus brought together and synthesised in the text. At the end of the novella, the authorial voice once again interferes and says that “[s]cience is a story. History is a story. These are the stories we tell ourselves to make ourselves come true” (p. 145), a statement which once again merges distinct spheres of discourse. All kinds of discourse are hence defined as elements of storytelling, and

storytelling is defined as an essential element of existence. Sellers comments on the function of storytelling and maintains that "[s]tory-telling shapes us as we use stories to shape the world" (2001, p. 31). Bringing together contesting forms of discourse to retell the story of Atlas is an instance of such a reciprocal process of interaction and of creation of worlds. As a palimpsestuous narrative that unites multiple ways of perception and various modes of discourse, *Weight* accommodates this formative aspect, too.

As *Weight* embodies various discursive contexts, it also brings together different voices. The novella unites different points of view, which reinforces the pluralistic nature of the narrative. When the story is narrated from first person point of view, the liminal subjectivity of Atlas becomes the focal point of the narrative. At some points in the narrative, he is the narrator of his own story; at others, the narrator tells it. As the narrative point of view shifts to third person omniscient, the narrative frame also changes. Heracles' voice is still another element that constitutes the palimpsest of voices in the text. As Staels notes, his "colloquial and vulgar speech contaminates the boundaries of the epic genre" (2009, p. 114). Each narrative level thus constitutes a layer that highlights the interdependence and interconnectedness of these distinct voices and points of view. Adgüzel and Tekin state that Winterson "pushes the boundaries of the myth's narrative and establishes stances open to new ideologies" (2021, p. 263). This plurality of narrative voices and points of view reaffirms "the multiplicity that she herself seeks to engender" (Middleton Meyer, 2003, p. 211). The palimpsestuous nature of the text invites the reader to adopt a pluralistic perspective and recognise the multiplicity of forms of discourse, stories, and hence, worlds.

The Palimpsest as metaphor

In "The palimpsest of the human brain," De Quincey describes the creation process of the palimpsest, stating that "the monkish chemists . . . expelled the writing sufficiently to leave a field for the new manuscript, and yet not sufficiently to make the traces of the elder manuscript irrecoverable for us" (De Quincey, 1845). De Quincey uses the concept as a metaphor for the human brain and employs it as an illustration of the functioning of memory:

What else than a natural and mighty palimpsest is the human brain? Such a palimpsest is my brain; such a palimpsest, oh reader! is yours. Everlasting layers of ideas, images, feelings, have fallen upon your brain softly as light. Each succession has seemed to bury all that went before. And yet, in reality, not one has been extinguished" (De Quincey, 1845).

Similarly, in *Weight*, Winterson invites the reader to see the text and its constituents as palimpsests that are all valid, operating on several levels of signification. From this perspective, the text may be read as a record of memory that embodies those "everlasting layers of ideas, images, feelings" within itself.

The structure of the palimpsest enables the cohabitation of those seemingly irrelevant, "everlasting layers." Dillon defines the palimpsest as a complex entity that consists of distinct elements which are in a dialogic relationship with each other: "The palimpsest is thus an involuted phenomenon where otherwise unrelated texts are involved and entangled, intricately interwoven, interrupting and inhabiting each other" (2007, p. 4). This description highlights the complex and multi-layered nature of the concept. It may be employed as a concept that refers to the different versions of a narrative or the several narrative layers that constitute a text. Also, it may be a metaphor used to describe the interaction between various layers of meaning embedded in the text. In her discussion of the palimpsest, Dillon highlights its "refiguration of concepts as diverse as history, subjectivity, temporality, metaphor and

sexuality” (2007, p. 3). In *Weight*, as in her several other works, Winterson invites the reader to reflect on these issues and suggests multi-layered alternatives of perception.

As a term, the palimpsest does not indicate mutual exclusivity between the surface and deeper levels of meaning. Rather, as the literal palimpsest suggests, it may be defined as the sum that the interplay of the various layers of narratives and voices brings about. Genette states that “on the same parchment, one text can become superimposed upon another, which it does not quite conceal but allows to show through” (1997, pp. 398-9). Distinct elements are thus brought together and constitute a unique and organic whole. It has the capacity both to preserve and transform its constituents. In the same vein, Dillon remarks that the palimpsest has a “continuing capacity to reinscribe otherwise traditional literary, critical and theoretical modes of thought” (2007, p. 126). She also adds that “[t]he concept of the palimpsest is not only determined by, but structurally *embodies*, this historicity of critical terms *and* their perpetual openness to critical and imaginative reinscription – an openness that is necessary for the exposure, affirmation and reworking of that historicity, as well as for their present and future effectivity” (p. 125). Therefore, the palimpsest is a structure that brings together and critically re-establishes and reforms various modes of discourse. It creates a space both for preservation and modification. The multi-dimensional aspect of the concept makes it a convenient structural element that embodies multiple layers of thought and discourse.

Atlas and the Palimpsest

Winterson states that, in the novella, she “wanted to explore loneliness, isolation, responsibility, burden, and freedom too” (2018, p. xvi). These existential themes are explored primarily through Atlas, “the long-suffering one” (p. 22). He is a figure of both strength and suffering; symbolically, Winterson uses Atlas as an element that materialises human existence. However, Winterson reinscribes this mythological figure to create a palimpsest which suggests that the complex nature of existence cannot be reduced to or read through binary logic and its structures. The narrative seems to suggest that just like sedimentary rock, Atlas, too, is built of layer upon layer. When he refers to his mother and father from first person narrative point of view, for instance, he constructs a self-image that unites contraries: “My father loved the strong outlines of my mother’s body. He loved her demarcations and her boundaries. [...] My mother loved my father because he recognised no boundaries” (p. 11). Atlas brings together those contrasting aspects in his being; they may be read as layers that constitute Atlas’ identity. “I am as turbulent as my father. I am as brooding as my mother” (p. 14), he says, adding that he “fought for freedom,” and was punished for it. He depicts the scale of his being in images that refer to a universal paradox: “I am the Kosmos – the all that there is, and at the same time I was never more outside, never more than nothing” (p. 15). The fact that he is all and nothing conveys once again the contrasts that Atlas combines in his being. Adigüzel and Tekin also touch upon the contesting aspects of Atlas’ identity as they write, “Atlas’s situation, caught between ‘desires and boundaries’ and ‘choice and fate’, completely overlaps man’s entity from Sartre’s existentialist vision” (2021, p. 257). These contrasting aspects accentuate the existentialist ideas explored in the text, and construct Atlas as a palimpsestuous element.

In his narrative, Atlas constantly refers to his burden and the associated boundaries imposed upon him as well as to his “*longing for infinite space*” (2018, p. 16). Adigüzel and Tekin highlight the symbolic potential of his burden: “what he carries is not the cosmos but, in reality, is himself moving between ‘boundaries and desire’” (2021, p. 258). He seems to be characterised by his ebbs and flows between his boundaries and his desire for freedom, or perhaps chaos. This is a state of in-betweenness, and it is the cause of his stasis. As Simon Goldhill remarks, “the book is as much about the ‘wait’ as ‘weight’” (2005,

p. 49). At some point, Heracles questions the purpose of being: "Why are we doing this," he asks Atlas (2018, p. 49). Atlas dismisses the question saying that "[t]here is no why" (p. 50). Yet, this is also the moment when he begins seeking an answer to the question.

His encounter with Laika, the dog that was sent to space in a sputnik in 1957, enables him to find an answer. His discovery of the sputnik, which "lay there like a lamed insect on his palm" (p. 126), is a critical moment for him. He opens the sputnik, finds the dog, and frees it. This encounter, which brings together Atlas and a "speck-sized dog in the star-stretched universe" (p. 126), is when Atlas notices that he does not feel the burden any longer: "Atlas had long ago ceased to feel the weight of the world he carried, but he felt the skin and bone of this little dog. Now he was carrying something he wanted to keep, and that changed everything" (p. 127). The friendship between Atlas and Laika symbolises any positive bond based on mutual recognition. The text hence brings together a Titan and a little dog, lifting off the "weight" that dominates the earlier part of the novella. The purposefully naïve emphasis on the companionship of the two symbolically suggests a possible way of experiencing existence. At the end of the narrative, the narrator remarks that "[a]ll that we can see is only a fraction of the universe" (p. 151), adding that what we see "could be Atlas holding up the universe. But I think it is Atlas and Laika walking away" (p. 151). The act of walking away is a moment of growth for Atlas. This is when he decides to act. This is also the point at which the narrative ends. Paradoxically, the title of the last chapter, too, is "I want to tell the story again." This ambiguous ending of the novella is in tune with Winterson's authorial stance, one which Middleton Meyer calls "a poetics of uncertainty" (2003, p. 212). By ending the narrative with this statement, she creates an open-ended structure that welcomes the future narrative layers of the palimpsest.

Conclusion

Although the defining aspect of Atlas' punishment is inaction or stasis, Atlas' effort to find an answer to Heracles' question marks the critical point in the palimpsestuous development of the character. At the end of this state of stasis, Atlas discovers that he can leave the burden aside, saying, the weight "doesn't need me any more. Strangely, I don't need it either" (2018, p. 146). Thus, stasis is replaced by change. Throughout the narrative, what the reader witnesses is an apparent state of inaction and liminality caused by Atlas' burden, which comes to an end with his eventual discovery. He decides to "put it down" (p. 149), which implies and entails agency. Therefore, although inaction imposed by "boundaries and desire" is the predominant aspect of the plot, the text gradually leads to Atlas' existential discovery. Staels points out that the text depicts the subject in the process of evolving from a hero confined by his burden to an individual: "In *Weight*, Atlas is shown to change from being an absolutely bounded and preformed epic hero, in a story world dominated by a single unifying perspective, to becoming a novelistic character who gains a new perspective on himself" (2009, p. 113). His rebellion and punishment as well as his encounter with Heracles and later with Laika may be read as the layers of experience that mark Atlas' palimpsestuous development. *Weight*, then, is a narrative that depicts an individual in the process of making, or, to refer once again to the opening metaphor of the text, a narrative that depicts the formation of sedimentary rock.

The novella illustrates some aspects and points of emphasis of postmodern literature. The text implicitly reminds the reader of Derrida's statement that "there is nothing outside the text" (1997, p. 163); however, it does not cancel meaning, either, as it follows certain patterns and frames of signification. In *Weight*, Winterson creates multiple narrative layers all of which interact with and complement one another; she thus destabilises dualistic notions and received assumptions about human nature, the self,

and the other. What she ultimately does is to undermine binaries, creating a space beyond the boundaries that she alludes to throughout the text. Therefore, the apparent self-reflexivity of the text achieved through its palimpsestuous structure is also used as a strategy to comment on the complex nature of existence.

By means of palimpsestuous structures, Winterson invites the reader to challenge their own received thoughts about such concepts as existence, freedom, and power. The boundaries that the text violates do not pertain only to genre conventions; they are also boundaries that constitute dominant modes of discourse and hierarchical oppositions. Winterson welcomes the pluralisation of voices to resist those limits. In *Weight*, Winterson creates palimpsestuous structures as a means of reinscribing, preserving and transforming contesting elements and democratising them. She uses the palimpsest to create a polyphonic structure in *Weight*, and the novella unifies contesting voices and forms of discourse through several palimpsests incorporated into its texture. She fuses form with content, the literal with the metaphorical. Rather than annulling the previous layers or constituents, this characteristic implies a standpoint that acknowledges the existence and validity of each layer, foregrounding the multiplicity achieved through the various palimpsestuous structures embedded in the text.

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