

**Readerly Dialogues:  
Reception, Intertextuality, and the Other in  
Contemporary French Women's Writing**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on the reading of fiction written by contemporary French women authors, namely Julia Kristeva, Marie Darrieussecq and Monique Wittig, establishing the reader as an active and engaged actor in meaning creation. The reader enters into dialogue with the text, the author, the narrator(s) and the characters, carving out an imaginative readerly space in fiction. The main aim of this thesis is to examine how this space comes into being, and what tools are needed for its exploration. Concepts from three main theoretical fields are used to set the parameters for this readerly space: reception studies, intertextuality, and theories of the other. As was observed by Elizabeth Fallaize, reception studies and women's writing have not been meaningfully combined. This thesis responds to this gap in research, simultaneously expanding our interpretations of the texts by looking at the multitude of intertextual links that can be established, and at the way reading influences our relations to the other. The Introduction examines the above-mentioned three theoretical areas, alongside elements such as the tasks of the reader, the materiality of the book, and the impact of reading groups. Chapter One examines two of Kristeva's most recent works of fiction — *Meurtre à Byzance* and *Thérèse mon amour* — studying the *mise en abyme* of reading and writing, the issues that can arise from extensive intertextual links and autobiographical projections, and introducing concepts such as the reading *Carmel* and the text as Trojan Horse. Chapter Two explores the Darrieussecq-ien aesthetic universe, starting with a consideration of the four different types of intertextuality identified in Darrieussecq's fiction. Darrieussecq's work with language is analysed, before introducing the concept of the fiction of honesty. The fiction of honesty allows us to explore the relationship of trust between the reader and the narrator, while an analysis of the inscriptions of time offers a better understanding of the chronologies of the reading process. Chapter Three investigates Wittig's works, focusing on her linguistic innovations, rewriting of myths and foundational stories, extensive use of sensorial writing, and links established between fiction and socio-political activism. Chapter Four considers the media reception of the three authors, introducing resources that are not easily accessible to Anglophone audiences. The Conclusion offers an overview of the findings of this thesis, before opening onto further avenues for research.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Meet me on the Page: Reading the Other, Undoing the Self

In their exploration of images of women reading in Western art, Laure Adler and Stefan Bollmann establish that ‘femmes, livres [et] hystérie’ represent a ‘trio infernal’.<sup>1</sup> The present thesis extracts two elements of this trio — *femmes* and *livres* — and reverses their order. Instead of looking at ‘women reading’,<sup>2</sup> the current study will delve into the process of ‘reading (the) women’, focusing on the dialogue and active exchange between reader and text. In order to analyse this dialogue, concepts such as intertextuality, the other, and elements belonging to reception theories will be re-actualised in relation to women’s writing, in particular to the fictional works of Julia Kristeva, Marie Darrieussecq, and Monique Wittig.<sup>3</sup> Intertextuality, reception theories, and women’s writing have been widely examined given the contemporary interdisciplinary turn of literary studies. However, they have not yet been meaningfully read alongside one another, in an attempt to offer new scenarios of reading that would recognise the reader as an active interpretive force in texts written by women, and would analyse the imaginative space cleared out for the reader in these works.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Laure Adler and Stefan Bollmann, *Les Femmes qui lisent sont dangereuses* (Paris: Flammarion, 2006), p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Images of ‘women reading’ is the main focus of Adler and Bollmann’s study.

<sup>3</sup> The following works will be analysed in-depth, in subsequent chapters: Julia Kristeva, *Thérèse mon amour. Récit. Sainte Thérèse d’Avila* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2008), hereafter referred to as *TMA*, and *Meurtre à Byzance* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2004), hereafter referred to as *MàB*; Marie Darrieussecq, *Truismes* (Paris: P.O.L., Collection Folio, 1996); *Le Bébé* (Paris: P.O.L., Collection #formatpoche, 2005 [2002]); *Tom est mort* (Paris: P.O.L., Collection Folio, 2007); *Rapport de police. Accusations de plagiat et autres modes de surveillance de la fiction*. (Paris: P.O.L., Collection Folio, 2010) hereafter referred to as *Rapport de police*; *Clèves* (Paris: P.O.L., Collection Folio, 2011); *Il faut beaucoup aimer les hommes* (Paris: P.O.L., 2013), hereafter referred to as *Il faut...*; Monique Wittig, *L’Opoanax* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1964), *Les Guérillères* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1969), *Le Corps lesbien* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1973) and *Virgile, Non* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1985).

<sup>4</sup> The idea of ‘clearing out an imaginative space’ is developed by Harold Bloom in *The Anxiety of Influence. A Theory of Poetry*, 2nd edn (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

Elizabeth Fallaize observed this gap in research when looking at the reception of Simone de Beauvoir,<sup>5</sup> concentrating on the impact of the first generation of readers, on the significant emphasis posed by critics and interpreters on Beauvoir's biography, and on her subsequent connection to feminism. Fallaize's study explores the reaction of various communities of 'real readers' to Beauvoir's work, applying the *topoi* of reception identified by both Toril Moi and Joanna Russ.<sup>6</sup> This type of exploration will represent one part of the approach taken by the following chapters.<sup>7</sup> Taking Fallaize's article as a springboard, this thesis situates itself in the gap between the reader as an abstract concept, and the actual reader. In order to explore the various readerly positions existent in this gap, another important element of our approach is the return to the text, but not in a formalist vein; the return to the text is carried out in order to establish the space carved out by the narrator (and/ or the author) for the reader, and the tools the reader needs in order to navigate this space effectively. This return to the text paradoxically engenders a move away from the text, as it encourages an exploration of multiple intertexts. A third and final starting point is Gill Rye's premise that 'reading can change one's life'.<sup>8</sup> It is this premise that opens up the analysis of our relation to the other, and of the manner in which reading can positively contribute to it. These three main starting points — Fallaize's study and the need to bring reception theories into dialogue with women's writing, the return to the text and the impact of intertexts, and reading as a catalyst for change — inform the three areas of exploration already highlighted in the title: reception, intertextuality, and the other. All three will be articulated in relation to the reader, and to the tensions (s)he needs to deal with (and/or overcome) during the reading process. As mentioned above, the reader is considered on a wide spectrum, from reader as an abstract concept implied and imagined by the narrator and author, to the actual readers who engage with the physical book. The following chapters will navigate this spectrum, investigating the politics of reading — the power play and tensions between reader, narrator, and author. These investigations will put forward new readings for the selected texts, considering the reader's pro-active contribution to the reader-text dialogue.

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<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Fallaize, 'Reception problems for women writers: the case of Simone de Beauvoir', in *Women and Representation* ed. by Judith Still and Diana Knight (WIF Publications, 1995), 43–56.

<sup>6</sup> Toril Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir. The Making of an Intellectual Woman* (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, USA: Blackwell Publishers, 1994) and Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (London: The Women's Press, 1984). Examples of such *topoi* of reception include the denial and pollution of agency, or the double standard of content, among others.

<sup>7</sup> Chapter Four, looking at the media reception of the three authors studied, resembles the type of analysis carried out by Fallaize in her study.

<sup>8</sup> Gill Rye, *Reading for Change. Interactions between Text and Identity in Contemporary French Women's Writing (Baroche, Cixous, Constant)* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2001), p. 13.

## Theoretical contexts and debates

### *Reception studies*

In order to carry out the analysis presented above, the theoretical articulations of the three main areas of exploration (reception, intertextuality, and the other) will be briefly looked at, before opening up the discussion to the ‘challenges’ faced by the reader — the multiple tasks the reader can carry out during the reading and interpretive processes. Reception studies entered the sphere of literary hermeneutics in the 1960s, quickly developing a series of variants: the German aesthetics of reception put forward by Jauss and Iser, Stanley Fish’s affective stylistics or Norman Holland’s psychoanalytic take on reception, among others. Machor and Goldstein offer a narrow definition of reception study as the field which ‘undertakes the historical analysis of the changing conditions and reading practices through which texts are constructed in the process of being received’,<sup>9</sup> whereas Suleiman’s definition of reception study as ‘shifting the focus of inquiry from the observed – be it defined as text, psyche, society or language – to the interaction between observed and observer’<sup>10</sup> allows for more analytical flexibility. Machor and Goldstein bring reception study closer to the study of various ‘horizons of expectations’,<sup>11</sup> focusing on the socio-historical conditions that determine textual interpretations, while Suleiman shifts attention to the process, the dialogue between text and reader. This dialogue can be broad enough to take into account the above-mentioned socio-historical conditions, but the reverse is not entirely possible (focusing solely on these conditions can ignore the dialogic nature of reading). Suleiman’s definition enlarges the very idea of reading as well, since the observed or the read can refer to ‘text, psyche, society or language’. Therefore, reception study becomes a methodological approach for looking at literature, psychoanalysis, history, and even semiotics. Widening the definition to such a variety of subjects can compromise the methodological reach of reception studies, but the focus on dialogue remains paramount to the argument of this thesis. Moreover, as will be shown

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<sup>9</sup> James L. Machor and Philip Goldstein, ‘Introduction’, in *Reception Study. From Literary Theory to Cultural Studies*, ed. by James L. Machor and Philip Goldstein (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), pp. ix–xvii (p. xiii).

<sup>10</sup> Susan R. Suleiman, ‘Introduction: Varieties of Audience-Oriented Criticism’, in *The Reader in the Text. Essays on Audience and Interpretation*, ed. by Susan R Suleiman and Inge Crosman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 3–45 (p. 4).

<sup>11</sup> Jauss develops the concept of the horizon of expectations as ‘the set of cultural, ethical and literary (generic, stylistic, thematic) expectations of a work’s readers in the historical moment of its appearance’ (Suleiman, ‘Introduction: Varieties of Audience-Oriented Criticism’, p. 35).



in subsequent chapters, reading fiction does involve an engagement with language, psychoanalysis, and socio-historical contexts.

Different strands of reception studies confer various degrees of independence to the reader. For example, for Iser, meaning ultimately resides in the text:

during the reading process there is an active interweaving of anticipation and retrospection, which on a second reading may turn into a kind of advance retrospection. The impressions that arise as a result of this process will vary from individual to individual, *but only within the limits imposed by the written as opposed to the unwritten text*.<sup>12</sup>

Iser only allows the reader to have associative powers, rather than creative ones, as the ‘stars in a literary text are fixed, the lines that join them are variable’.<sup>13</sup> In Iser’s view, the reader operates within the limits imposed by the text, without much consideration for the (inter)texts the readers themselves bring to each reading.

At the other end of the spectrum, Fish insists on individual readings, and on the socially constructed nature of interpretive communities:

my insistence that *everything counts* and that something (analysable and significant) is always happening, makes it impossible to distinguish, as Riffaterre does, between “linguistic facts” and “stylistic facts”. For me, a stylistic fact is a fact of response, and *since my category of response includes everything*, from the smallest and least spectacular to the largest and most disrupting of linguistic experiences, everything is a stylistic fact [...].<sup>14</sup>

While Fish offers the reader significant interpretive freedom, the idea that ‘everything counts’ diminishes our ability to use his theoretical approach as a stable model of reading. However, this interpretive freedom is not absolute, but rather constrained by the reader’s belonging to various interpretive communities. For Fish, these institutions or communities establish ‘a set of practices that are defining of an enterprise and fill the consciousness of the enterprise members’.<sup>15</sup> These practices will subsequently shape interpretations. The dynamism of the latter comes from the fact that readers belong to multiple communities. Each individual reader becomes a node, or a place of intersection between these various interpretive communities, therefore being able to produce unique interpretations.

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<sup>12</sup> Wolfgang Iser, ‘The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach’, in *Reader-Response Criticism. From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, ed. by Jane P. Tompkins (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1980), pp. 50–69 (p. 57), italics mine.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>14</sup> Stanley E. Fish, ‘Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics’, in *Reader-Response Criticism*, ed. by Jane P. Tompkins, pp. 70–100 (p. 97), italics mine.

<sup>15</sup> Stanley E. Fish, ‘Yet Once More’, in *Reception Study*, ed. by James L. Machor and Philip Goldstein, pp. 29–38 (p. 36).

Yet another approach is Jauss's view on the place of literary hermeneutics, a view which displays utilitarian undercurrents by considering the reading process to be a means of understanding past societies:

*[L]iterary hermeneutics is able to participate in historical understanding in its own way and to show, through the transformation of the horizon of aesthetic experience, what for the contemporaries of a past world was still a latent need, wish or presentiment of the future, and what may only be made conscious in its still-incalculable significance by the history of interpretation.<sup>16</sup>*

Reading becomes a method for enhancing our understanding of historical pasts and of societal evolution, rather than one for understanding the self and the other. Jauss's explanation focuses much more on the end result of reading, rather than on reading as a process.

Despite these various articulations of reception studies,<sup>17</sup> they all have the merit of democratising literary hermeneutics by bringing the reader back into the equation. Moreover, they also opened up the field of literary criticism to interdisciplinary studies as 'reader-centered critics appeared willing to share their critical authority with less tutored readers and at the same time go into partnership with psychologists, linguists, philosophers, and other students of mental functioning'.<sup>18</sup> It is in the spirit of this opening, and of this dialogue between 'observed and observer', as well as between various disciplines, that reception studies will inform some of the subsequent analyses of this thesis. Nonetheless, in this study, the reader is given more freedom than that assigned to him/her by Iser, since the interpretive contribution of intertexts is brought into play. The reader is someone who can join lines between texts, and not just within the confines of one literary text with 'fixed stars'<sup>19</sup>. By focusing on reading as dialogue, the thesis distances itself from Jauss's focus on 'historical understanding', moving towards an image of reading that enhances self-understanding, which could in turn lead to understanding of the other. Fish's interpretive communities will become a useful tool in

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<sup>16</sup> Hans Robert Jauss, 'The Identity of the Poetic Text in the Changing Horizon of Understanding', in *Reception Study*, ed. by James L. Machor and Philip Goldstein, pp. 7–28 (p. 21), italics mine.

<sup>17</sup> This introduction offers a very brief overview of some of the main figures of reception studies to highlight the shift towards an analysis of various readerly positions in literary studies. This overview is in no way exhaustive, leaving undiscussed figureheads such Umberto Eco, Michel Riffaterre or Jonathan Culler. Some of the concepts introduced by them will be used in subsequent chapters when examining the selected texts. For a more complete overview of the history of reception studies several works are available (alongside the edited collections cited above): Robert C. Holub, *Reception Theory. A Critical Introduction* (London and New York: Methuen, 1984); Elizabeth Freund, *The Return of the Reader. Reader-Response Criticism* (London and New York: Methuen, 1987).

<sup>18</sup> Jane P. Tompkins, 'The Reader in History: The Changing Shape of Literary Response', in *Reader-Response Criticism*, ed. by Jane P. Tompkins, pp. 201–232 (p. 223).

<sup>19</sup> See footnote 13 above.

Chapter Four, when analysing media reception, and the positions occupied by critics who are both reviewers and authors themselves. Their belonging to multiple interpretive communities shapes the way they present their opinions to the wider public.

### *Intertextuality*

By contrast with reception studies (which did not bring about the paradigm shift in literary studies predicted by Jauss),<sup>20</sup> intertextuality acquired and maintained a fame of its own, being ‘much used and abused on both sides of the Atlantic’.<sup>21</sup> In Kristeva’s initial articulation, it was defined as ‘the transposition of one or more systems of signs into another, accompanied by a new articulation of the enunciative and denotative position’.<sup>22</sup> According to this definition, intertextuality was a type of permutation of codes,<sup>23</sup> forcing the receiver of the message outside their comfort zone, having to search for the system of signification that would effectively decode the message received. The idea of permutation mirrors the mobility and dynamism of intertextuality (having to go outside a known system of meaning creation), but it does not fully take account of the back and forth movement suggested by the prefix *inter-*, as permutation stems from the Latin *permutare*, which implies a complete change, an exchange or a swap. Moreover, applying this definition to interpretive practices becomes difficult, as sign systems cannot be apprehended in their complete materiality (it is usage that offers them a physical existence, whereas individual texts can be tangibly pointed out even prior to reading).

A more easily applicable Kristevan definition is quoted by Elaine Martin, in her introduction to intertextuality, with the latter being the notion that each text is a ‘mosaic of quotations; [since] any text is the absorption and transformation of another’.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, intertextuality is brought into play at the textual level, rather than the systemic one. Judith Still and Michael Worton follow this textual level, when they define intertextuality as ‘everything, be it explicit or latent, that links one text to the other’.<sup>25</sup> They consider intertextuality to function both centrifugally and centripetally,<sup>26</sup> an idea

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<sup>20</sup> Jauss believed that with the advent of reception studies, literary interpretation would focus almost exclusively on the text’s relation to its socio-historical context, rather than on formal, textual elements.

<sup>21</sup> Leon S. Roudiez, ‘Introduction’, in *Desire in Language. A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* by Julia Kristeva (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), pp. 1–20 (p. 15).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>23</sup> Mary Orr, *Intertextuality. Debates and Contexts* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), p. 28.

<sup>24</sup> Elaine Martin, ‘Intertextuality. An Introduction’, *The Comparatist*, 35.1 (2011), 148–51 (p. 148).

<sup>25</sup> Judith Still and Michael Worton, ‘Introduction’, in *Intertextuality. Theories and Practice*, ed. by Michael Worton and Judith Still (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1990), pp. 1–44 (p. 22).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

which this thesis takes one step further, by considering intertextuality to be the point of intersection of these two movements — the centrifugal and the centripetal. Thus, intertextuality sends the reader outside the text being read, to new ones, but it then brings the reader back to the initial text. This return enhances textual interpretations (via the availability of new information, images, symbols, references etc.), but it also offers an increased understanding of the inner workings of the text (structure, plot etc.). Intertexts can show the reader how texts function, and they can help the reader develop his/her reading skills. It is this return that differentiates intertextuality from mere quotations, repetitions or references. This idea is exemplified in Kristeva's *Thérèse, mon amour*, when Bruno Zonabend offers Sylvia a whole list of reading recommendations relating to spirituality.<sup>27</sup> He undertakes the centrifugal movement (away from the text Sylvia plans to write), but not the centripetal one; he does not return to the initial text to show how his list could influence it, or enhance interpretation and understanding. The list does not actually enhance his own personal reading ability. As will be shown in Chapter One, he displays an ersatz intertextuality closer to pretence than to the intersection between the above-mentioned centrifugal and centripetal movements needed to deepen one's reading ability and understanding of a text.

Despite the fact that intertexts can be individually isolated, 'the identification of an intertext is an act of interpretation',<sup>28</sup> since choosing what counts as an intertext is a readerly decision. Moreover, deciding what a text actually is can vary from reader to reader (as will be shown in subsequent chapters, an intertext does not necessarily have to be a written text; it can be a painting, a sculpture, a song, a dictionary entry etc.). Even when two readers identify the same intertext (they follow a similar centrifugal movement), their return to the text (their centripetal movement) will be different, as it relies on their 'personal library of literary experience'.<sup>29</sup> For Riffaterre, the intertextual relation mirrors the interaction between the Sphinx and Oedipus, as he sees 'the text as Sphinx and the intertext as Oedipus'.<sup>30</sup> This implies that the intertext always illuminates or helps decipher the text. Nevertheless, the intertext is a text in itself, further perpetuating the hermeneutical drive (put simply, the intertext can generate another enigma, rather than help solve the first one). In other words, the Sphinx-Oedipus comparison implies a certain

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<sup>27</sup> *TMA*, p. 47; for a more in-depth analysis of this example see Chapter One, p. 51 below.

<sup>28</sup> John Frow, 'Intertextuality and ontology', in *Intertextuality*, ed. by Michael Worton and Judith Still, pp. 45–55 (p. 46).

<sup>29</sup> Ross Chambers, *Story and Situation. Narrative Seduction and the Power of Fiction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 31.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Riffaterre, 'Compulsory reader response: the intertextual drive', in *Intertextuality*, ed. by Michael Worton and Judith Still, pp. 56–78 (p. 77).

chronology: the reader is faced with a riddle posed by the text, which is subsequently elucidated by appealing to the intertext. However, the intertextual relation does not follow this chronological pattern, nor is it one-directional: texts become intertexts and vice-versa, and the process of elucidation can occur during or after (re)reading. This is partly due to the fact that the intertextual relation is a learning curve: it requires ‘sophisticated reading skills’<sup>31</sup> which are developed through reading. Certain groups of readers are known for having these particular reading skills (i.e. critics, researchers, other writers etc.), and can thus identify particular intertextual relations. Therefore, intertextuality involves power play, with certain links being highlighted and others stifled, further raising the question of who decides on the emergence of these links. This politics of intertextuality is further complicated by the assumption that a greater acquaintance with (particular) intertexts enhances the understanding of the text being read. This assumption can ‘induce anxiety [and] serve to exclude the reader’,<sup>32</sup> privileging certain reading experiences and personal libraries over others. By bringing the reader back into the interpretive matrix, this thesis sheds light on reading experiences that have not been fully explored or considered so far. Moreover, by paying attention to multiple intertexts, various personal libraries are valued, in an attempt to produce scenarios of reading that would diminish anxiety and exclusion.

Akin to readerly intertexts, authorial intertexts can be both revealing and anxiety-inducing. In his short story ‘Kafka and his precursors’, Borges argues that:

in the critics’ vocabulary, the word ‘precursor’ is indispensable, but it should be cleansed of all connotation of polemics and rivalry. The fact is that every writer *creates* his own precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future.<sup>33</sup>

The use of the modal ‘should’ is suggestive of the fact that ‘connotations of polemics and rivalry’ are still present when discussing authorial influences and intertexts. Taken to the extreme, these connotations can lend themselves to accusations of plagiarism, as shown in Darrieussecq’s *Rapport de police*.<sup>34</sup> Borges’s view is closer to Barthes’s observation that ‘l’écrivain ne peut qu’imiter un geste toujours antérieur, jamais originel; son seul pouvoir est de mêler les écritures, de les contrarier les unes par les autres, de façon à ne

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<sup>31</sup> Susan Bassnett, ‘Influence and Intertextuality: A Reappraisal’, *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 43.2 (2007), 134–46 (p. 135).

<sup>32</sup> Rye, *Reading for Change*, p. 117.

<sup>33</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, ‘Kafka and his Precursors’, *Labyrinths* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), pp. 234–36 (p. 236).

<sup>34</sup> Chapter Two will deal in more detail with Darrieussecq’s 2010 work, which offers a complex analysis of various accusations of plagiarism, and their impact on authors and readerly communities.

jamais prendre appui sur l'une d'elles'.<sup>35</sup> The act of 'ne jamais prendre appui' on any of the precursors' works marks the uniqueness, singularity or originality of the work; the author's contribution to the literary scene is reflected by his or her ability to weave various intertexts into a new text.<sup>36</sup> Authorial intertext can also be a manner of laying claim to a derived authority,<sup>37</sup> as the author is able to choose and carve out 'sa place au Panthéon'.<sup>38</sup> Using intertexts, the author can inscribe his/her voice into the polyphony of the literary scene. It is this polyphonic trait that gives both readerly and authorial intertexts their subversive power, as underlined by Graham Allen: 'intertextuality encompasses that aspect of literary and other kinds of texts which struggles against and subverts reason, the belief in unity of meaning or of the human subject, and which is therefore subversive to all ideas of the logical and the unquestionable'.<sup>39</sup> Intertextuality disturbs the unity myth, and the search for coherence; the text as a whole is not complete, and intertexts are never fully exhausted. Coming to terms with the otherness of the text, and with the inexhaustibility of intertexts is one of the gains of the reading process. However, in order to achieve this, the self needs to cultivate an openness towards the other, an issue which has extensively preoccupied philosophers, and cultural theorists alike.

### *Self and other*<sup>40</sup>

While reception studies and notions about intertextuality have both been prominent since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, theories of the other have existed prior to that. However, the global conflicts marking the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought the issue of the other to the fore, as writers strove to discern effective ways for articulating the self-other relation. What most theories emphasize is the idea that this relation is not a dichotomy, but rather a complementarity. Nonetheless, bridging the gap between theory and everyday practice is a complex process, to which reading can positively contribute. According to Kristeva, 'la culture implante en chacun la prise en compte d'une valeur et de son contraire, du

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<sup>35</sup> Roland Barthes, 'La Mort de l'auteur', *Essais critiques IV. Le Bruissement de la langue* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1984), p. 65.

<sup>36</sup> The word 'text' itself stems from the Latin *textum*, meaning that which is woven.

<sup>37</sup> Chambers, *Story and Situation*, p. 215. Authorial intertext refers to the intertextual links established by the authors themselves.

<sup>38</sup> Gérard Genette, *Seuils* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1987), p. 149.

<sup>39</sup> Graham Allen, *Intertextuality*. 2nd edn (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 45.

<sup>40</sup> Throughout the thesis, 'the other' is used to refer to another person or another consciousness. The same term will be used for people or consciousness in the real world or in fictional worlds. The Other will be used when referring to God or Jesus, especially in relation to Kristeva's *TMA*. Expressions such as 'the text as other' will be used when our encounter with the text resembles our encounter with the other. The 'other within' is used in relation to Kristeva's idea of 'l'étrange est en moi'.

même et de l'autre, de l'identique et de son étranger'.<sup>41</sup> In Kristeva's view, the other as a cultural product is a construction whose aim is to ease self-definition. Complicating this view of the other is the idea that 'l'étrange est en moi, donc nous sommes tous des étrangers. Si je suis étranger, il n'y a pas des étrangers'.<sup>42</sup> While the idea of 'the other within' can help avoid dichotomies, the conclusion 'donc nous sommes tous des étrangers' does not necessarily contribute to bridging the above mentioned gap. Instead of enhancing a reading of the other, the assumption that we are all others can discourage communication, and advocate a focus on individual particularities, rather than on collective endeavours. Moreover, this assumption glosses over the distinctiveness of different othering processes: for example, women's othering makes use of a separate set of tools than does the othering of ethnic communities, or of sexual minorities. The coming to terms with the other within is not sufficient; the process needs to be reflected at the communal or group level. This change in levels is not straightforward, and requires an understanding of how the other interacts with the self.

The other becomes essential for delimiting the self, and for constructing order and chronologies, as stressed by Vincent Descombes:

le premier n'est pas le premier, s'il n'y a pas, après lui, un second. Par conséquent, le second n'est pas ce qui vient seulement, tel un retardataire, après le premier, mais il est ce qui permet au premier d'être le premier. Ainsi, le premier ne parvient donc pas à être le premier par ses seules forces, pas ses propres moyens: il faut que le second l'aide de toute la puissance de son retard.<sup>43</sup>

The second as other is indispensable for defining the first (as self). Issues arise when definitions become cemented, thus precluding the possibility of dynamism and flexibility suggested by the verb 'venir'. The relation to the other is built in the space created by 'le retard', or in Levinas's words 'the other is the future. The very relationship to the other is the relationship with the future'.<sup>44</sup> Time acquires an interpersonal character, as it can only be experienced 'in the relation between humans'.<sup>45</sup> This delay is not just relevant to the self, but also to the other as 'only in relating to me is the other other, and its otherness is registered in the adjustments I have to make in order to acknowledge it – adjustments that may never become second nature to me'.<sup>46</sup> The self and other are mutually dependent,

<sup>41</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988, Collection Folio/ Essais), p. 219.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 284.

<sup>43</sup> Vincent Descombes, *Le même et l'autre. Quarante-cinq ans de philosophie française (1933–1978)* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1979), p. 170.

<sup>44</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, 'Time and Other (part 3)', in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. by Seán Hand (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1989), pp. 38–58 (p. 44); (at the moment of writing, a French edition of the work was not available).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>46</sup> Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 30.

rather than mutually exclusive. Moreover, they are not entirely different, since the complete other is not possible: ‘an unchanging, essential uniqueness would in fact be unreadable and imperceptible, since it would not be open to any of the codes and processes by which we read and perceive’.<sup>47</sup> If the other was completely different, it would not even enter our field of vision, we would not have any tools to acknowledge its presence, let alone adapt to it. There needs to be some common ground, some shared codes between the self and the other to allow for the reading process to begin.<sup>48</sup> Subsequent changes brought to these codes (during the reading process) account for the adjustments needed to acknowledge the other. If there were no change in codes after the encounter with the other, this would be indicative of an assimilation that negates the other’s otherness.

Reading can contribute to building a safe space for the encounter with the other, and implicitly for experimenting with the self. Thus, reading becomes a model of hospitality,<sup>49</sup> a welcoming of the other despite the potential dangers the other can engender. However, the contract of hospitality is initially opened by the text, rather than the reader. According to Robert Harvey, there is ‘no right to read others until one allows and enables others to read one’.<sup>50</sup> The other needs to give permission to be read, but at the textual level, the text, through its very existence, gives permission to be read. The text allows and invites the reader, therefore starting the relation of hospitality. It is then up to the reader to answer this initial hospitable gesture. This initial hospitality does not in any way guarantee hospitality throughout the entire reading process (as will be shown in Chapter One, the text can become inhospitable, stifling the reader’s opportunities for interpretation), but it does set up the reading relation as an encounter with the other: the text as other for the reader, and the reader as other for the text. Nonetheless, the text is

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>48</sup> In this context, reading is considered in its wider sense, of understanding (or trying to understand) the other, rather than the narrower sense of reading a text.

<sup>49</sup> As will become apparent throughout this Introduction, hospitality represents an important element of the readerly dialogues studied throughout this thesis. Hospitality allows us to articulate what is at stake when the reader meets the text (as other). However, there are several reasons why hospitality is not adopted as a more comprehensive model for reading: firstly, hospitality is a theoretically charged term (for example, carrying with it the Derridean distinction between conditional and unconditional hospitality) which would affect the ability of the current thesis to offer new reading scenarios. Secondly, the notion of dialogue can be more easily understood by a wider audience, an understanding which goes hand in hand with our desire to bridge the gap between academia and non-academic readerships. Thirdly, the notion of dialogue allows us to analyse the relations between readers and texts at different times (including after the reading process), not just when the initial (hospitable) encounter takes place. Fourthly, dialogue also allows us to account for intertextual links which push the reader outside textual confines (or outside the limits of the initial hospitable encounter).

<sup>50</sup> Robert Harvey, *Witnessness. Beckett, Dante, Levi and the Foundations of Responsibility* (New York: Continuum, 2010), p. 109.



not ‘an absolute, unknown, anonymous other’,<sup>51</sup> as certain elements of it are known before the start of the reading process: elements belonging to the book (covers, name of the author, publishing house etc.) offer information when the reader first comes into contact with the physical text; whereas other elements do not need this physical encounter (word-of-mouth, critical or media reception etc.). Most often, the initial hospitality of the text is complemented by these paratextual elements, which also have to be read and interpreted.<sup>52</sup>

For the reader to be able to engage with what Attridge identifies as the ‘singularity of literature’,<sup>53</sup> (s)he needs to be both hospitable and responsible. Readerly hospitality is manifested through ‘a readiness to have one’s purposes reshaped by the work to which one is responding’.<sup>54</sup> The initial textual hospitality needs to be matched by a readerly one, exhibited as a willingness to question and alter existent cultural codes in accordance with the otherness of the text. The reader does not need to fully integrate the text into the existing socio-cultural fabric, but rather to carve out a space where the otherness of the text can reveal itself as otherness. This is what Attridge considers to be a responsible readerly attitude, as ‘the other cannot come into existence unless it is affirmed, welcomed, nurtured, trusted’.<sup>55</sup> While this ‘responsibility for the other is a form of hospitality and generosity’,<sup>56</sup> it is also a form of irresponsibility,<sup>57</sup> as the consequences of the emergence of the other cannot be predicted. If one could predict the impact of otherness, it would not be otherness anymore. One enters the reading process with no guarantees of its outcome. Rye’s underlying premise that ‘reading can change one’s life’ does not ensure that the change will be positive. A responsible and responsive reading also needs to come to terms with the possibility of danger brought about by the other. The reader is faced with the tension of stepping outside their comfort zone, a tension between responsibility for the other (which implies irresponsibility for the self) and responsibility for the self (which might not allow the otherness of the other to fully emerge). This tension is an integral part of the reading scenarios put forward in subsequent chapters, as it ensures readerly alertness, diminishing the possibility of falling into complacency. An alert reader is open

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<sup>51</sup> Judith Still, ‘Language as Hospitality: Revisiting Intertextuality via Monolingualism of the Other’, *Paragraph*, 27.1 (2004), 113–27 (p. 117).

<sup>52</sup> These elements will be touched upon in the second half of the introduction, and subsequently in Chapter Four.

<sup>53</sup> ‘One way of thinking of singularity is as the *demand* that this specific collocation of words, allusions, and cultural references makes on me in the event of my reading, here and now, as a member of the culture to whom these codes are familiar’ (Attridge, *Singularity of Literature*, p. 67).

<sup>54</sup> Attridge, *Singularity of Literature*, p. 80.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

to textual changes and able to deal with the above-mentioned ‘singularity of literature’, creating a safe space for otherness to manifest and develop itself.

One manner of diminishing the possible negative effects of this tension involves focusing on the reading process itself, rather than on the final outcome. The reading process can equip the reader with deconstructive tools to be used in subsequent encounters with the other. The paradox of the reading process is that the world we read in the text is fictive, but the mental and imaginative processes that bring it into being are the same as those we use to make sense of the everyday world around us.<sup>58</sup> According to Todorov, the construction of fiction inevitably becomes a theme of the text, as the reader reads the manner in which the characters make sense of their own worlds:

based on the information he receives, every character must construct the facts and the characters around him; thus he parallels exactly the reader who is constructing the imaginary universe from his own information; thus reading becomes (inevitably) one of the themes of the book.<sup>59</sup>

The reader is constructing the fictive world, while simultaneously reading how the characters are constructing their own world within the confines of the diegesis. There is a double process of learning in reading: learning by following others (reading the way others approach the construction process), and learning by doing (through the construction process itself). This learning is malleable and transferable, as emphasised by both Culler and Iser:

it is clear that the study of one poem or novel facilitates the study of the next: one gains not only points of comparison but *a sense of how to read*.<sup>60</sup>

As the literary text involves the reader in the formation of illusion and the simultaneous formation of the means whereby the illusion is punctured, reading reflects the process by which we gain experience.<sup>61</sup>

Iser takes Culler’s point further, by highlighting the fact that learning about how fiction is constructed equips the reader with tools to undo it, or ‘to puncture the illusion’. Chambers deals extensively with this argument, when analysing the seductive power of fictional texts. These texts reach their full potential when combining their seductive power with ‘an analytic power that dismantles the elements of their “charms”, their “magic”’.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative. The Metafictional Paradox* (London and New York: Routledge, 1984), p. 30.

<sup>59</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, ‘Reading as Construction’, in *The Reader in the Text*, ed. by Susan Suleiman and Inge Crosman, pp. 67–82 (p. 78).

<sup>60</sup> Jonathan Culler, ‘Literary Competence’, in *Reader-Response Criticism*, ed. by Jane P. Tompkins, pp. 101–17 (p. 109), italics mine.

<sup>61</sup> Iser, ‘The Reading Process’, p. 64.

<sup>62</sup> Chambers, *Story and Situation*, p. 221.

The texts carry a certain honesty and self-awareness, as they present the reader with both the artifice, and the method to see through it. They expose themselves to the other (in this case, the reader), without any guarantees of the final outcome (this mirrors the (ir)responsibility of the reader mentioned above). According to Chambers, the more a text is self-reflexive, the more freedom it gives the reader. The text provides a model of the self's encounter with the other, as its narrative power 'is a power dependent for its force on the power to undo itself'.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, the self needs to undo its codes and cultural frameworks, to effectively allow for the emergence of the other. Regardless of the final outcomes of reading (be they positive or negative changes), it is the process that equips the reader with abilities to construct and de-construct worlds, both fictive and existent. In the process, the reader learns how to read, how to undo the text, and how to undo the self. While each encounter with the other is different, it is these (de)constructive skills that facilitate self-reflexivity and openness towards otherness. These skills also contribute to the reader becoming a co-creator of the text, the latter being one of the 'readerly challenges' analysed in the following sections. Kristeva's 'other within', alongside Attridge's responsible readerly attitude, and Chambers's textual self-reflexivity become essential for the readerly dialogues explored in this thesis. A responsible readerly attitude allows textual otherness to come to the fore. Reading this otherness can pave the way towards exploring the 'other within', while the tools for such exploration can be provided by self-reflexive texts themselves, since they carry within them the instruments for their own undoing.

### **Readerly challenges**

The three concepts outlined above — reception, intertextuality, and the other — intersect in the tasks or the 'challenges' of the reader. The reader and the text are the two main pivots around which these three concepts articulate, evoking the readerly positions of co-creator, translator, analysand and analyst, and even detective.

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 221.

### *The reader as co-creator*

When analysing comic books, Scott McCloud highlights the work the reader's imagination needs to do in the white space between the panels (i.e. the gutter);<sup>64</sup> it is in this empty space that all the narrative threads come together to create the story. Therefore, the 'creator and the reader are partners in the invisible'.<sup>65</sup> A similar dynamic exists when reading fiction, with the reader assuming a highly active role. As Levinas underlines, there is no such thing as an experience of passivity, since 'experience always already signifies knowledge, light, and initiative'.<sup>66</sup> This remains valid for the experience of reading, since the reader engages in processes of construction and deconstruction. It is the reader's initiative that will influence the outcome of reading. For Sartre, 'la lecture est création dirigée';<sup>67</sup> if we focus on the idea of 'dirigée' we are closer to Iser's view that the reader can fill in textual gaps, but only within the limits imposed by the text; however, emphasis on 'création' opens up the field to the reader's freedom and inventiveness. In Sharrock's analysis of elegy, Orpheus and Pygmalion stand in for the artist and for his creation: 'Orpheus makes his creation, Pygmalion, do that which he himself tries to do but fails: bring the beloved to life. Pygmalion is the perfect artist, the artist's artist.'<sup>68</sup> We can extrapolate this to the relation between writer and reader: Orpheus—the writer compels Pygmalion—the reader to become creator himself — the writer's writer. The writer puts a world into words, whereas the reader makes a world out of the same words.<sup>69</sup> While the words are the same, the worlds are different. In a similar way to Pygmalion, the reader breathes life into the creation, partly using intertextual connections. Susan Bassnett observes that 'the creative role of the reader in making connections takes us from influence studies in the old-fashioned sense to intertextuality, to the idea that texts exist in an endlessly interwoven relationship with one another'.<sup>70</sup> If the text is something woven, both the writer and the reader become weavers. This brings to mind another mythological figure, the weaver *par excellence*, Arachne. Her tapestry, with its threads running through several myths, becomes the embodiment of intertextuality. Moreover, as

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<sup>64</sup> Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics. The Invisible Art* (New York: William Morrow, Harper Collins, 1994), p. 68.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 205.

<sup>66</sup> Levinas, 'Time and Other (part 3)', p. 40.

<sup>67</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), p. 57.

<sup>68</sup> A.R. Sharrock, 'Womanaufacture', *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 81 (1991), 36–49 (p. 38).

<sup>69</sup> Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 27.

<sup>70</sup> Bassnett, 'Influence and Intertextuality', p. 138.

A. S. Byatt notes, ‘Arachne’s tapestry is Ovid’s poem’<sup>71</sup> itself, an endless story of doing, undoing, and transforming.

While this weaving process is unique for each text (or even for the same text at different times), it is not exclusive to reading fiction. Our being in the world involves us reading and being read. Harvey remarks that we are readable before we can talk,<sup>72</sup> emphasising the fact that reading is part of our lives before actual, physical encounters with texts. Hardy dwells even further on this omnipresence of narrative, noting that the stories we tell are already a mix of realism and fantasy,<sup>73</sup> despite the fact that they are meant to be grounded in everyday reality. Therefore, Attridge’s view that the reader is brought into being by the text<sup>74</sup> needs to be nuanced, as the reader is already acquainted with various reading processes before the encounter with the text. Nonetheless, it is the text that requires the reader to become a reader of literature or of fiction. His/her previous reading experiences become part of the intertextual web used for weaving the text into being. These previous experiences and intertexts fuel the responsibility the reader has towards the text, ‘the responsibility to free the text from its own limitations’.<sup>75</sup> Chambers believes that the reader is in a ‘position to perceive the ideological and cultural constraints that have limited the text’s self-conception’,<sup>76</sup> a position which subsequently allows the reader to undo these limitations, or at least to look at the text through a different lens than that which was used during its creation. Reading becomes an act of comprehension, both in the sense of understanding, and in the sense of bringing together (*com-prendre*), of inter-weaving texts and experiences. The reader can thus understand the frameworks that limit the reach of the text, and bring together other frames to enhance its interpretation. This readerly responsibility to ‘free the text’ is linked to ‘the creativity and the commitment of our own interpretations’;<sup>77</sup> for this freedom to be achieved, the reader needs to be engaged and active. The reader thus becomes a ‘sujet-en-procès’, joining the author in a process of continual production<sup>78</sup> — (s)he becomes a co-creator of the text, and a constant re-creator of the self.

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<sup>71</sup> A.S. Byatt, ‘Arachne’, in *Ovid Metamorphosed*, ed. by Philip Terry (London: Chatto and Windus, 2000), pp. 131–57 (p. 141).

<sup>72</sup> Harvey, *Witnessness*, p. 108.

<sup>73</sup> Barbara Hardy, ‘Towards a Poetics of Fiction: 3) An Approach through Narrative’, *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 2.1 (1968), 5–14 (pp. 5–6).

<sup>74</sup> Attridge, *Singularity of Literature*, p. 87.

<sup>75</sup> Chambers, *Story and Situation*, p. 27.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>77</sup> Rye, *Reading for Change*, p. 23.

<sup>78</sup> Allen, *Intertextuality*, p. 33.

### *The reader as translator*

One particular manifestation of the reader's function as co-creator is the reader's task as a translator, understood in its wider sense (not just as translation between two languages). If the concept of co-creation outlined above centred on the reader's reading experiences and intertexts, translation reverts back to the text, as the primary material that needs to be translated. Crossman dwells on this return to the text as it 'supplies me with words, ideas, images, sounds, rhythms, but I make the poem's meaning by a process of translation'.<sup>79</sup> Translation becomes a negentropic process,<sup>80</sup> ordering the textual elements into (readerly) meaning. However, this negentropic process involves significant decision-making on the part of the reader-translator: it is up to the latter to decide when sufficient material has been gathered, thus proceeding to the 'translation'. This reflects actual translation processes, as highlighted by Darrieussecq in the preface to her translation of Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*: 'c'est un choix que j'ai opéré: car traduire c'est aussi prendre des décisions'.<sup>81</sup> When faced with a new text, the reader-translator needs to decide when a satisfactory meaning has been reached. This decision involves the acknowledgement that absolute coherence or negentropy cannot be reached, and that certain textual elements will not be integrated into interpretations/ translations. Also according to Darrieussecq, 'traduire c'est la plus amoureuse des lectures',<sup>82</sup> as the translation process brings the reader closest to both the writer and the text. Translation compels the reader to be simultaneously a reader and a writer, both self and other. While Darrieussecq is referring to the actual translation process (i.e. the one she undertook with Woolf's text),<sup>83</sup> the reader can replicate a similar experience without necessarily having to produce a text in another language, since both translation and reading involve an undoing of the text to reveal the world put forward by the words. Translation is not a copy, but a 'revivification',<sup>84</sup> a bringing to life similar to the one exercised by reading. Because it involves a transposition from one language to the other, translation is directly related to the other:

To translate is, of course, to welcome the work as another into the same, to transform it from the foreign to the familiar; but in so doing, if its otherness and

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<sup>79</sup> Robert Crossman, 'Do Readers Make Meaning', in *The Reader in the Text*, ed. by Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman, pp. 149–64 (p. 152).

<sup>80</sup> Negentropic or ordering/ order-making process.

<sup>81</sup> Marie Darrieussecq, 'Prologue', in *Un lieu à soi*, Virginia Woolf, trans. by Marie Darrieussecq (Paris: Denoël, 2016), pp. 9–17 (p. 16).

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>83</sup> To date, Darrieussecq has translated Woolf's text, and Ovid's *Tristes Pontiques*.

<sup>84</sup> Orr, *Intertextuality*, p. 157.

singularity are respected – if, that is, the translation is inventive – the field into which it is welcomed is also transformed in the process.<sup>85</sup>

According to Attridge, a good translation does not gloss over the otherness of the text, in an attempt to constrain it to match the extant frameworks of the new language and culture. Translation as creative response allows this otherness to manifest itself, and challenges the codes of the target culture. Reading as a creative response, or rather as a ‘process of creative translation’,<sup>86</sup> aims for a similar process of questioning.

### *The reader as analysand and analyst*

If we move from the level of socio-cultural codes to the individual one, we observe that this type of questioning can also mirror the psychoanalytic encounter, positing the reader as an analysand. When explaining the Lacanian preference for the gerund-derived ‘analysand’ (rather than the past participle analysé(e)), Dylan Evans insists on the constant work-in-progress nature of psychoanalysis:

Lacan prefers this term because, being derived from the gerund, it indicates that the one who lies on the couch is the one who does most of the work [...]. In Lacan’s view, the analysand is not ‘analysed’ by the analyst; it is the analysand who analyses and the task of the analyst is to help him analyse well.<sup>87</sup>

This task of constant (self)analysis is comparable to the work carried out by the reader, as the text is not read, but rather being read; reading, like psychoanalysis, is a process, rather than a completed action. Moreover, the reader is ‘the one who does most of the work’, as (s)he is the one who breathes life into the text. Reading, like psychoanalysis, also involves processes of narcissistic identification and transference on the part of the reader, towards the characters and/ or the narrators. Via these processes, the reader is not just diving into the depths of the text, but also the depths of the self. It is no coincidence that both Freud and Lacan take literature as a starting point for developing their psychoanalytic concepts, as

what both ‘art’ and the transference have in common, in other words, is the fact that the production of meaning, via signs, is dependent upon a dialectic of a subject ‘supposed to know’ and a subject who presupposes this knowledge in the

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<sup>85</sup> Attridge, *Singularity of Literature*, p. 74.

<sup>86</sup> Adam Watt, *Reading in Proust’s A la recherche: le délire de la lecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 130. For a more in-depth analysis of domesticating and foreignising translations see Lawrence Venuti, *The Scandals of Translation. Towards an ethics of difference* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>87</sup> Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 9.

other. However much this knowledge may be an illusion, it is the basis of the continuity of the signifying chain, upon which desire is dependent.<sup>88</sup>

Both the psychoanalytic encounter and the reading process are faced with the same dilemma: by exercising his/her authority, 'the subject supposed to know' gives up this very authority,<sup>89</sup> breaking the 'illusion'. The 'subject supposed to know' is revealed to be the subject with a heightened 'listening attention',<sup>90</sup> rather than with a greater amount of information. This transfer of authority from analyst/narrator to analysand/ reader also involves a change of roles, when the analysand/reader approaches the end of the analysis, what Lacan names *la passe*,<sup>91</sup> the stage at which the analysand can become analyst.<sup>92</sup> *La passe* is not an end in itself, but rather a recognition of, and a reconciliation with the 'jouissance irréductible',<sup>93</sup> an ability to deal with the entropy of the self and of the unconscious. Reading requires a similar coming to terms with textual otherness.<sup>94</sup> In the context of reading, *la passe* mirrors the moment when the text becomes intertext, when it can effectively further the readings of other texts (including readings of the self as text), since 'il n'y a de lecture complète que celle qui transforme le livre en réseau simultané de relations réciproques'.<sup>95</sup> A 'lecture complète' integrates the text into our personal library, or reading autobiography, becoming part of the web we resort to when needing to weave other texts. This move from analysand to analyst is not entirely chronological in the case of reading. Evans remarks that during therapy 'the analyst must [...] treat the analysand's discourse as a text'.<sup>96</sup> However, during the reading process the reader-analysand is already faced with a text, and therefore (s)he needs to be simultaneously analysand (as shown above), and analyst, the site of both transference and counter-transference. The reader is both on the couch (*sur le divan*), and next to it. Effectively

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<sup>88</sup> Ruth Parkin-Gounelas, *Literature and Psychoanalysis. Intertextual Readings* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 150.

<sup>89</sup> When analysing the seductive power of fiction, Chambers observes: 'to the extent that the act of narration is a process of disclosure, in which the information that forms the source of the narrative authority is transmitted to the narratee, the narrator gives up the basis of his or her authority in the very act of exercising it.' (Chambers, *Story and Situation*, p. 51).

<sup>90</sup> Jane Gallop, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis. The Daughter's Seduction* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 49.

<sup>91</sup> Sonia Chiriaco, 'Qu'est-ce que la passe?', <<http://www.causefreudienne.net/quest-ce-que-la-passe-2/>> [accessed 29 March 2017].

<sup>92</sup> This move from analysand to analyst becomes significant when looking at Kristeva and Darrieussecq, both of whom had gone through an analysis, and then taken up psychoanalytic practice, which they both quoted as having informed their literary work.

<sup>93</sup> Chiriaco, 'Qu'est-ce que la passe?'.

<sup>94</sup> This tension between the reader and the otherness of the text can be linked to Barthes's *texte de jouissance*, as the latter also requires the reader to question his/her acquired codes.

<sup>95</sup> Jacques Derrida, *L'Écriture et la différence* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967), p. 23.

<sup>96</sup> Evans, *Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, p. 13.



managing this to-and-fro movement can ensure that reading accomplishes that positive change implied by Rye.

### *The reader as detective*

The psychoanalytic encounter has often been associated with a particular type of fiction, namely detective stories, as they both involve a search for and interpretation of present clues to explain past events.<sup>97</sup> This association sets up the reader as a detective, a readerly task that will be explored in more depth in Chapter One, when analysing the manner in which Kristeva applies and subverts detective frameworks in *Meurtre à Byzance*. According to Jefferson, the detective story is ‘the most teleological of narratives’,<sup>98</sup> responding to our need to order phenomena (the negentropic processes outlined above), and to create coherent stories. One of the main differences between psychoanalysis and detective fiction is the fact that the latter offers interpretive closure, whereas in the case of the former, the hermeneutic desire for an origin of all origins is never satisfied<sup>99</sup> (it is with this main difference that Kristeva plays in her redeployment of detective frameworks in *MàB*, precluding full closure, despite the apprehension of the murderer). We can consider the reader’s task as a detective to precede his/her task as a translator: the clues need to be identified before they can be translated into readerly meaning. However, the reader does not necessarily know what counts as a clue before (s)he has gone through the translation process, and even the co-creation one. Therefore, throughout the reading process the reader creates scenarios that might not fit subsequent textual clues. Nonetheless, as Fish observes, these unfulfilled scenarios are still part of the reading process: ‘all the “mistakes”, the positing, on the basis of incomplete evidence, of deep structures that failed to materialise, will not be cancelled out. They have been experienced: they have existed in the mental life of the reader: they mean’.<sup>100</sup> These ‘mistakes’ become part of reading, both as a process, and as a learning experience. They also highlight the temporality of reading: reading does not follow a linear chronology, but rather an amalgamation of retrospective and prospective moves. By means of these moves, the reader both wonders about and wanders through the text, predicting outcomes,

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<sup>97</sup> Charles J. Rzepka, *Detective Fiction* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), p. 43.

<sup>98</sup> Ann Jefferson, *The Nouveau Roman and the Poetics of Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 32.

<sup>99</sup> Simon Kemp, *French Fiction into the Twenty-First Century. The Return to the Story* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2010), pp. 82–83.

<sup>100</sup> Fish, ‘Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics’, p. 86.

and verifying these predictions.<sup>101</sup> This process of verification is central to detective stories, as it ensures the detective (and by extension the reader) correctly answers the whodunit question. However, the reader does not necessarily obtain pleasure from this final correct answer, but rather from the iterative schemes that precede it, as noted by Rzepka:

What the reader of detection desires at each step of the reading process is not its end, but its immediate continuation. He or she desires the next clue, and rarely more than the next, for each new clue brings closer the end of the narrative, which is the end of opportunities to invent imaginative, backward-looking arrays.<sup>102</sup>

### **Reading: from theory to practice**

#### *The pleasures of reading*

Rzepka's remark can be used to open up a brief discussion about the various pleasures of reading, before analysing some of the elements that affect the experiences of actual readers. Dwelling on the pleasures of reading and the involvement of the senses paves the way from the above theoretical discussions of reading to considerations of the process as it occurs in reality. Reading for pleasure is at times discounted as an easy way out, a comfortable endeavour that does not drive the reader to question existing structures: 'most poststructuralist writing assumes that it is important for the reader to struggle, to take time, to coproduce the text creatively – this reading process should be both pleasurable and painful'.<sup>103</sup> In this view, the pleasure of reading is obtained as a result of painful and challenging struggles and questioning. Attridge posits a similar view, but with an added emphasis on the otherness of the text: 'it is in this apprehension of otherness and in the demands it makes that the peculiar pleasure of the literary response (over and above the pleasure to be gained from new information, sensuous patterning, stirring of memory, moral exemplification, and so on) is to be experienced'.<sup>104</sup> Apprehending this otherness can be a painful struggle, as it involves leaving one's comfort zone. However, the

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<sup>101</sup> The idea of wandering through the text uses a similar image to Eco's inferential walks: 'at the level of narrative structures, the reader is supposed to make forecasts concerning the future course of the *fabula*. To do this the reader is supposed to resort to various intertextual frames among which to take his inferential walks' (Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader. Explorations in the semiotics of texts* (London: Hutchinson, 1981), p. 214).

<sup>102</sup> Rzepka, *Detective Fiction*, p. 27.

<sup>103</sup> Judith Still, 'Feminist Literary Theory', in *A History of Women's Writing in France*, ed. by Sonya Stephens (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 236–50 (p. 242).

<sup>104</sup> Attridge, *Singularity of Literature*, p. 131.

elements Attridge decides to mention only as parenthetical are still an integral part of the text. They ensure that reading is a complex, multisensorial process, with the mind acting both as the locus of rationality, and as the mediator of bodily sensations, since it is in the mind that bodily experiences are processed.<sup>105</sup> Moreover, the self-knowledge that emerges as a result of the apprehension of otherness can only be fully achieved as a product of both the intellect and the senses.<sup>106</sup> This epistemological complementarity is also highlighted by Sartre: ‘ainsi du langage: il est notre carapace et nos antennes, il nous protège contre les autres et nous renseigne sur eux, *c’est un prolongement de nos sens*’.<sup>107</sup> While Sartre’s focus is on language rather than the senses, the idea of *prolongement* is indicative of this complementarity. Sensorial pleasure does not just ensure a more complex self-understanding, but also an ability to relate better to the other.<sup>108</sup>

Multisensorial reading can be understood in at least three distinct ways: firstly, it can refer to the reader’s need to use his/her sensorial memory and experiences to better relate to the characters and/or the narrator. As certain experiences cannot fully be expressed in words, the senses are needed to complement understanding. Secondly, (as will be shown in the section on the materiality of the book), multisensorial reading can include the use of the senses when dealing with the physicality of the book (for example, the smell or the weight of the book and the subsequent associations they trigger). Thirdly, multisensorial reading can also include the reader’s visceral reactions and responses to the texts (for example, a reaction of abjection that is physically felt). The sheer diversity and idiosyncrasy of these reactions make them difficult to research. However, the first two understandings will be used throughout the thesis: the second particularly in the Introduction and the Conclusion, and the first throughout the first three chapters. An example of this first understanding of multisensorial reading and of its connection to the other is the reading of food, which will inform textual analyses of both Kristeva’s and Darrieussecq’s works (for example, Darrieussecq’s Solange is able to express her sexual desire by likening it to an appetite for food, while food and water allow Kristeva’s Thérèse to be in contact with the Other). Food is closely related to the other, as it represents both survival and danger (through the possibility of poisoning). It is also a notable community adhesive, as it brings the self and the other together under the auspices of the feast.

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<sup>105</sup> Watt, *Reading in Proust*, p. 133.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.

<sup>107</sup> Sartre, *Qu’est-ce que la littérature?*, p. 27, italics mine.

<sup>108</sup> Chambers highlights the double meaning of the verb to relate: both to tell stories, and to interact with others (Chambers, *Story and Situation*, p. 4). This double meaning becomes even more pertinent when we consider reading stories to be a manner of letting the other in.

Moreover, it incorporates both the senses and the *techne* (craftsmanship), since food marks the domination of nature by man, as the latter eats that which he has defeated.<sup>109</sup> The act of eating inherently involves the transgression of boundaries: ‘the body transgresses here [in the act of eating] its own limits: it swallows, devours, rends the world apart, is enriched and grows at the world’s expense’.<sup>110</sup> This mirrors the encounter with the other, as the enrichment of the self can only be achieved if limits and boundaries become fluid. Nonetheless, this encounter is by no means safe, and there are no guarantees as to its final outcome. Food allows the other in, effecting change on both the self and the other, as neither remain the same after the act of eating.

The feast and the rites of hospitality link food with story-telling. Hospitality towards the other is manifested in the sharing of food, with the expectation that the other will reveal parts of their story (thus decreasing their potential danger and otherness). Story-telling is also the manner in which the parasite (from the Greek *parasitos*, meaning a person who eats at another’s table) repays the food given by the host. Words become a manner of thanking and repaying the sharing of food, and perhaps not coincidentally both speech and ingestion are achieved via the mouth. Still takes this point even further when suggesting that words are not *propres* (clean), because they have been in the mouth of others.<sup>111</sup> Words, like food, carry that combination of enrichment and danger that allows the opening towards the other. Nonetheless, one should not eat only clean, safe, known food, as that will lead to ‘knowledge obesity and regurgitation’; [i]t is the combined pleasure and exercise of a mind fed on a very mixed diet of things, not least of familiar and unfamiliar “foods”<sup>112</sup> that allows for development, and for the furthering of thought. In these articulations, food becomes a useful image for understanding the manner in which the reader should approach the relation to the other. The food metaphor is not just evocative of a pleasurable, multisensorial text, but also offers a model for effectively interacting with the (text as) other, outside the confinement of borders. Reading about food becomes both a pleasure and a reflection of how one should read the other. Moreover, food and reading are linked by readers themselves, who ‘often describe their reading as if it were eating’.<sup>113</sup> The speed of eating and the attention given to ingestion

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<sup>109</sup> Patricia Yaeger, *Honey-Mad Women. Emancipatory Strategies in Women’s Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 4, and Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 301–302.

<sup>110</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*. Translated by Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 281.

<sup>111</sup> Still, ‘Language as Hospitality’, p. 115.

<sup>112</sup> Orr, *Intertextuality*, p. 57.

<sup>113</sup> Victor Nell, ‘The Psychology of Reading for Pleasure: Needs and Gratifications’, *Reading Research Quarterly*, 23.1 (1988), 6–50 (p. 16).

and digestion can be paralleled with the speed of reading, and the attention given to details and reflection.

### *Texts and paratexts*

Discussing food allows us to bridge the gap between theoretical and practical considerations of reading, moving into an analysis of the factors that can influence reception pre- and post- reading. Most of these factors will also be explored in more depth in Chapter Four. Catherine Pinet-Fernandes's study offers a good starting point, as she identifies three aspects that influence the reading process: the publishing house, the size of the volume, and the author's biography.<sup>114</sup> These become highly relevant for the works chosen in this study, if we take into account Darrieussecq's almost exclusive relation with P.O.L., and Wittig's association with and subsequent break from Jérôme Lindon and Éditions de Minuit. P.O.L. is a medium-sized French publishing house, known for publishing theatre and poetry, and for promoting what is widely known as 'haute littérature'. It aims for high standards of quality, while simultaneously distancing itself from an increased commercial outlook, associated with the larger *Galligrasseuil*<sup>115</sup> publishing houses. By working almost exclusively with P.O.L., Darrieussecq managed to inscribe her works in an esteemed literary tradition, and to cultivate a close relationship with her editor. P.O.L. helped Darrieussecq become an obligatory presence during the *rentrées littéraires*, regardless of her commercial success (her first novel *Truismes* was by far the most successful, with 400,000 copies sold in the first year after its publication, with sales of subsequent novels stabilising at a lower threshold). The distinctive P.O.L. white cover, with blue and grey writing, contributes to the image of 'haute littérature', and is reminiscent of similar strategies applied by other publishing houses, among which Éditions de Minuit. Éditions de Minuit and Jérôme Lindon are associated with the innovations of the *nouveau roman*, and Wittig's debut with the publishing house was seen to set her on a literary course following in the steps of Duras or Robbe-Grillet. However, after publishing her first four fictional works she ended her collaboration with Lindon, and struggled to find another permanent publishing house (*Paris-la-politique* was published by P.O.L., and *La Pensée Straight* by Balland; *Brouillon pour un dictionnaire des amantes* was published by Grasset, while Wittig was still working with Minuit,

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<sup>114</sup> Catherine Pinet-Fernandes, 'Les ressorts extra-textuels du jugement littéraire aujourd'hui', *Communication et langages*, 135 (2003), 87–103 (p. 88).

<sup>115</sup> *Galligrasseuil* referring to Gallimard, Grasset, and Éditions du Seuil.

hinting at divergences even before the final break). Due to Kristeva's wide portfolio of works (spanning fiction, philosophy, literary and psychoanalytic theory among others), she collaborates with several publishing houses, depending on their specialisms. Nevertheless, most of her fiction is published with Fayard, and the English translations of her works are published by Columbia University Press, adding an extra layer of prestige to her persona, and linking her writing with her teaching, as she is a visiting professor at Columbia University.

When we observe the size of the volumes analysed, Darrieussecq's and Wittig's works situate themselves at the more manageable end of the spectrum, not exceeding 300 pages in pocket edition. The availability of paperback and pocket editions can also increase readerly access to these works, as the former are associated with a democratisation of reading habits.<sup>116</sup> Kristeva's works complicate the picture, as *TMA* stands at more than 700 pages, making pocket editions difficult to produce. *MàB* is significantly shorter, but still surpasses the 300 pages threshold (it does, nonetheless, have a pocket edition). The size of the text can become an important decision-making factor, especially when considering the time spent reading, and the prospective and retrospective moves effected by the reader. These moves are bound to be more difficult to follow in a robust and eclectic work such as *TMA*.<sup>117</sup>

In his analysis of paratexts, Genette dwells on the author-editor relation, concluding that 'si l'auteur est le garant du texte (*auctor*), ce garant a lui-même un garant, l'éditeur, qui "l'introduit" et qui le nomme'.<sup>118</sup> The author and editor help each other build a web of authority and prestige, setting the works in particular literary traditions, and shaping readerly expectations even before the start of the reading process. This relation of mutually guaranteeing each other's status is reinforced by the list of 'works by the same author', or even 'works by the same author published with the same publishing house', often appearing on the back cover or on the front matter. Thus, the authority of the text being read is immediately linked to the author's and editor's previous work, starting the creation of an intertextual web even before any textual clues are received. It must nonetheless be mentioned that elements such as the author's name, the work's title, the name of the publishing house, and even the list of previous works are not aimed only

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<sup>116</sup> Resa L. Dudovitz, *The Myth of the Superwoman. Women's Bestsellers in France and the United States* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 59.

<sup>117</sup> The third factor identified by Pinet-Fernandes — the biography of the author — will be amply developed in Chapter Four, and therefore not analysed in this introduction.

<sup>118</sup> Genette, *Seuils*, p. 46.

at the readers, but rather at the public. Genette differentiates between these two entities, as

le public d'un livre, lui, est, me semble-t-il, une entité de droit plus vaste que la somme de ses lecteurs, parce qu'il englobe, à titre parfois très actif, des personnes qui ne le lisent pas nécessairement, ou pas entièrement, mais qui participent à sa diffusion, et donc à sa 'réception'.<sup>119</sup>

The readership and the public do not fully overlap. The public includes and exceeds the readership, having the ability to influence reception even without having read the text. The public is the one who can 'fai[re] du bruit'<sup>120</sup> and thus influence the reach and circulation of the works, and contribute to the shaping of trends and tastes. Certain paratextual elements are aimed at this public, inviting interpretation:

si le destinataire du texte est bien le lecteur, le destinataire du titre est le public [...]. Car, si le texte est un objet de lecture, le titre, comme d'ailleurs le nom d'auteur, est un objet de circulation ou, si l'on préfère, *un sujet de conversation*.<sup>121</sup>

The idea of the *sujet de conversation* links to the *bruit* mentioned above — the title, author, and editor are talked about, they contribute to the reception of a given work, and possibly determine an individual's move from member of the public to reader. For example, in the case of Darrieussecq's *Clèves*, links to Madame de Lafayette's *La Princesse de Clèves* and Nicolas Sarkozy's remarks about the contemporary relevance of this novel<sup>122</sup> are evident from the very title. *Clèves* can thus become *a sujet de conversation* before actually being read.

These paratextual elements achieve classificatory functions, as was highlighted by Foucault when discussing the author-function, which becomes 'le principe d'économie dans la prolifération du sens'.<sup>123</sup> The name of the author becomes a framework for discussing themes and styles. It can also become a system of constraint, as it narrows the possibilities of interpretation. The more acquainted a reader is with the author's work, the more the author-function can influence interpretations. For example, until the publication of *TMA*, Kristeva was not associated with the study of Catholic religious figures. Her trilogy of *le génie féminin* dealt with secular figures, while the religious themes in *MàB* (dealing with the Great Schism of 1054, and the subsequent crusades) were partly shaped

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>120</sup> Descombes, *Le même et l'autre*, p. 12.

<sup>121</sup> Genette, *Seuils*, p. 73, italics mine.

<sup>122</sup> Darrieussecq, *Rapport de police*, p. 417.

<sup>123</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?', *Dits et écrits. Tome I (1954–1969)* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1994), pp. 789–820 (p. 811). For the English translation ['the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning'] see Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?', in *Textual Strategies. Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, ed. by Josué Harari (London: Methuen & Co., 1980), pp. 141–60 (p. 159).

by Kristeva's Bulgarian origin, and differ significantly from the setting of *TMA* in sixteenth-century Spain. The spatio-temporal setting of *TMA* does not follow Kristeva's previous list of works, showing that the author-function can at times hinder the reading and interpretive processes.

A similar narrowing classificatory effect is enacted by socio-cultural codes, since 'texts are a system of forces institutionalised at some expense by the reigning culture, not an ideal cosmos of ideally equal poems'.<sup>124</sup> Texts are not allowed to operate independently in society, they are sanctioned by codes of acceptability. The extent of these codes can be observed when certain works are censored,<sup>125</sup> as censorship offers an indication of a society's (in)ability to deal with the other. While censorship represents an extreme example of the application of these codes, marginalisation or isolation can be seen as a more temperate form of restriction of certain texts. One such example is represented by Wittig's works: her first novel, *L'Opoponax*, was read through the codes of the *nouveau roman*, partly explaining the immense success of her debut novel; her subsequent works were read almost exclusively through a lesbian lens, which limited their reach and potential impact. Due to its association with the formal inventiveness of the *nouveau roman*, and to its winning the *Prix Médicis*,<sup>126</sup> *L'Opoponax* became a *sujet de conversation*. Because of the lesbian lens used to interpret Wittig's subsequent texts, they became *sujet de conversation* only among restricted, minority groups. If the *conversation* did reach the wider societal level, it often inhibited the move from member of the general public to reader of the texts. Stereotypes are part of cultural codes, acting as a shorthand in interpretation. Biscarrat observed this phenomenon in relation to the reception of televised series: 'ces structures stéréotypés garantissent l'intelligibilité du contenu'.<sup>127</sup> Stereotypes guarantee a certain stability and coherence of expectations, they ease the reading process by appealing to known frameworks. A similar phenomenon is observed by Eco during the reading process in which the reader 'picks up from the storage of his intertextual competence already reduced intertextual frames'.<sup>128</sup> The reader can resort to already used tropes, and simply apply them to facilitate the understanding of the text. Rather than enhancing the hermeneutic layers, intertextual frameworks derived from widely used cultural codes can impoverish textual interpretations. While they can ease

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<sup>124</sup> Edward W. Said, 'The Text, the World, the Critic', in *Textual Strategies*, ed. by Josué Harari, pp. 161-88 (p. 188).

<sup>125</sup> Yves Ansel, 'Pour une socio-politique de la réception', *Littérature*, 157 (2010), 93-105 (p. 98).

<sup>126</sup> Literary prize acting as an endorsement from the professionals of the literary community.

<sup>127</sup> Laetitia Biscarrat, 'Le genre de la réception', *Communication*, 33.2 (2005), 1-12 (p. 4).

<sup>128</sup> Eco, *The Role of the Reader*, p. 21.



and quicken the reading process, they do not push the reader outside of comfortable boundaries.

It is important to mention that these codes are not universal, varying across time and space. This becomes significant, especially as the studied authors' Francophone and Anglophone receptions differ (these differences will be explored in more detail in Chapter Four). It is not just the codes that are different between nations, but also the place allocated to reading. In her study of women's bestsellers in France and the United States, Dudovitz highlights the privileged place occupied by reading in French society, when compared to the US:

In France however, books and what people read is newsworthy information. Spates of articles on the bestseller appear in a wide variety of French publications and more surprisingly reports devoted to the summer literary offerings have been shown on the evening news.<sup>129</sup>

This privileged position has altered slightly since Dudovitz's study, published in 1990, as more current statistics show that 'a third of French people read less than one book per year, and in 2005, 82 per cent declared that la *rentrée littéraire* was of no interest to them'.<sup>130</sup> Nevertheless, the 2014 IPSOS survey revealed that '7 Français sur 10 déclarent avoir lu au moins un livre au cours des 12 derniers mois',<sup>131</sup> still allowing reading to occupy a high position in the classification of pastimes. This can be partly explained by the fact that the French education system is very text-oriented: 'to be sure, the sacred awe we feel in France toward the text – an awe cultivated by our educational system – creates an absolute respect for the text as such'.<sup>132</sup> This difference in educational systems is also emphasised in Hartley's study of reading groups: 'Britain's nearest neighbours, the French, do things differently; they learn philosophy at school and meet for discussions at the *cafés philosophiques* which have grown in popularity over the last decade'.<sup>133</sup> The focus on the text, and the availability of deconstructive and interpretive tools (provided by subjects such as philosophy) can contribute to the popularity of reading.

Despite this position, there are hierarchies within reading itself, with publishing houses often promoting a dichotomy between low and high literature, the former being

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<sup>129</sup> Dudovitz, *The Myth of the Superwoman*, p. 53.

<sup>130</sup> Kemp, *French Fiction into the Twenty-First Century*, p. 11.

<sup>131</sup> Ipsos MediaCT, *Les Français et la lecture*, March 2014, p. 7,

<[http://www.centrenationaldulivre.fr/fichier/p\\_ressource/12839/ressource\\_fichier\\_fr\\_les.francais.et.la.lecture\\_sne\\_cnl\\_2014.03.17.pdf](http://www.centrenationaldulivre.fr/fichier/p_ressource/12839/ressource_fichier_fr_les.francais.et.la.lecture_sne_cnl_2014.03.17.pdf)> [accessed 31 March 2017].

<sup>132</sup> Jacques Leenhardt, 'Toward a Sociology of Reading', in *The Reader in the Text*, ed. by Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman, pp. 205–24 (p. 210).

<sup>133</sup> Jenny Hartley, *Reading Groups* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 103.

used to fund the latter.<sup>134</sup> The situation is further complicated by the fact that French bestselling lists can be topped by foreign novels,<sup>135</sup> which can lead to ‘jugements esthétiques [qui] trahissent le racisme de classe, le “chauvinisme” et le “nationalisme littéraire”’.<sup>136</sup> The reception of foreign literatures (or even the lack thereof) gives a useful indication of the codes at work in French society, if we take into account the fact that ‘nulle part on n’est plus étranger qu’en France [...]. Et pourtant, nulle part on n’est mieux étranger qu’en France’.<sup>137</sup> This observation becomes pertinent for Kristeva, as she often contemplates her *étrangère* status, in both her fictional and theoretical works. Even the status of a French-born author such as Monique Wittig is blurred ‘to the point where some would consider her Anglo-American’,<sup>138</sup> partly due to her radical lesbian stance, and partly to her emigration to the United States. This *étrangeté* does not necessarily have to be linked to nationality, it can be obtained from particular philosophical affiliations or styles of writing: for example, authors such as Kristeva, Irigaray, and Cixous have been accused of ‘elitism and even deliberate mystification’.<sup>139</sup> Even Darrieussecq had to deal with various processes of othering, depending on the interpretive community that was receiving her works: her debut success often compelled literary professionals to disparage her works, while her background in academia sets her apart from other writers who do not occupy positions on both sides of the literary establishment (i.e. critics and writers).

### *Reading with others*

This brief examination of various interpretive communities (including their national differences) can be further developed into an examination of actual reading groups, as a locus of sharing and comparing interpretations. Reading groups also appear in the works studied: explicitly in Wittig’s *Les Guérillères*, as *elles* read *les féminaires* to examine the metaphors and euphemisms used to refer to women; and implicitly in Kristeva’s *TMA*, where the juxtaposition of intertexts calls for the formation of a reading *Carmel* (a group of readers with different skills, that would enhance the understanding of the text). According to Georges Mounin, reading as part of a group helps the reader ‘comparer ses réactions avec les effets du texte sur d’autres lecteurs, pour mieux savoir ce qui vient du

<sup>134</sup> Dudovitz, *The Myth of the Superwoman*, p. 55.

<sup>135</sup> For example, at the moment of writing the top bestselling paperback was Elena Ferrante’s *My Brilliant Friend*, <<http://www.edistat.com/palmares.php>> [accessed 31 March 2017].

<sup>136</sup> Ansel, *Socio-politique de la réception*, p. 97.

<sup>137</sup> Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, pp. 57–58.

<sup>138</sup> Still, ‘Feminist literary theory’, p. 238.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 242.

texte et ce qui vient de vous, de votre milieu, de votre histoire, de votre idéologie ou de votre psychologie'.<sup>140</sup> Reading as part of a group does not have to be a homogenising activity (with all the members agreeing on one interpretation, following the model of the lowest common denominator), but rather one that can highlight the otherness of the others, and the singularity of the self. This type of reading becomes both cumulative (by adding up the multiple personal interpretations), and subtracting (by recognising which interpretations belong to the others, the truly personal response can be identified). Even when part of a reading group, each reader is expected to engage independently with the text; the group exchange being only subsequent to the personal experience of reading.<sup>141</sup> Since the reading group acts as a micro-society, its interpretive activities can reveal the manner in which cultural codes affect hermeneutics. However, reading groups tend to form when their members have a set of characteristics in common, and as such they cannot act as a true reflection of society at large (they can nonetheless help us understand how interpretive communities operate). Mary Orr sees the reading group as a 'search engine',<sup>142</sup> a physical embodiment of intertextuality. This image helps us understand the need to form a reading *Carmel* in order to better interact with Kristeva's *TMA*. Due to a combination of literary, psychoanalytic, artistic, musical, and historical intertexts,<sup>143</sup> engaging with *TMA* requires the availability of such search engines. Thérèse's monastic founding work, bringing together nuns in the new order of the Discalced Carmelites, is reflected in the creation of this reading *Carmel*,<sup>144</sup> bringing together readers with various skills in the creation of new textual understandings. This reading *Carmel* also highlights 'la sociabilité du livre'<sup>145</sup> as a dynamic cultural artefact.

However, these search engines do not function just as repositories of information, they are also linked to oral traditions and memory. Oral traditions allow for a greater degree of fluidity and flexibility,<sup>146</sup> providing a less constraining space, than the written page, for otherness to emerge; they can thus be more hospitable than the written text. Reading groups, by combining both the oral and the written, can draw on this additional

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<sup>140</sup> Georges Mounin, 'Devant le texte', *Études littéraires*, 9.2 (1976), 287–93 (p. 292).

<sup>141</sup> There are of course exceptions to this rule, as certain groups actually read the texts together (often out loud). This still does not preclude a personal engagement with the text, either before or after the meeting of the reading group.

<sup>142</sup> Orr, *Intertextuality*, p. 56.

<sup>143</sup> This list is not exhaustive, and it will be explored in more depth in Chapter One.

<sup>144</sup> The word *Carmel* was chosen to reflect this mirroring effect between Thérèse's *Carmel déchaussé* and the group emerging as a result of reading about Thérèse.

<sup>145</sup> Viviane Albenga, 'Stabiliser ou subvertir le genre? Les effets performatifs de la lecture', *Sociologie de l'Art*, 2 (2011), 31–43 (p. 37).

<sup>146</sup> Susan Schibanoff, 'Taking the Gold out of Egypt', in *Gender and Reading. Essays on Readers, Texts and Contexts*, ed. by Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocínio P. Schweickart (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp. 83–106.

hospitality. Moreover, they also inscribe the text into the memory of the group, since ‘to remember we need others because memory is primarily a social phenomenon’.<sup>147</sup> As this memory is usually transmitted orally, the text receives an extra layer of creative flexibility, via the process of social remembering. The hospitality of this oral tradition (keeping nonetheless its roots in the written text being discussed by the group) is mirrored by the hospitality of the reading group itself. Hospitality characterises the functioning of the reading group, as its meetings take place in someone’s house, and usually involve food and drink.<sup>148</sup> Being part of a reading group entails a double engagement with otherness: the otherness of the text, and the otherness of the other members who cross the threshold of one’s house, and with whom food and drinks are shared. If reading was shown to render the boundaries of the self more porous, belonging to a reading group can further enhance this porosity, developing one’s empathy which is considered the ‘core reading-group value’.<sup>149</sup>

### *The materiality of the book*

Regardless of the type of reading one undertakes (individual or group, comfortable or questioning etc.), every reader needs to interact with the physicality or the materiality of the book.<sup>150</sup> It is not uncommon for readers to evoke the pleasures related to the handling of books, such as their smell or the ‘tactile pleasure in [their] weight and the texture of [their] pages’.<sup>151</sup> These observations add a new layer to the understanding of multisensorial reading, which is no longer just a reading of the characters’ various sensorial experiences that would trigger memories of similar events previously lived through by the reader, but it also becomes an active engagement of the senses, simultaneous with the act of reading, and determined by the physical characteristics of the book. Due to this link, books can maintain ‘intense powers of association’,<sup>152</sup> leading to the formation of sensorial intertexts understood as sensorial memories connected to

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<sup>147</sup> Ursulla Tidd, ‘Simone de Beauvoir and the Uses of Memory’, in *Women, Genre and Circumstance. Essays in Memory of Elizabeth Fallaize*, ed. by Margaret Atack, Diana Holmes, Diana Knight and Judith Still (London: Legenda, 2012), pp. 45–59 (p. 45).

<sup>148</sup> Hartley, *Reading Groups*, p. 15. Food appears to be related to reading yet again, adding to the previous analysis of a multisensorial reading.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>150</sup> Contemporary modes of reading have altered this relation to the materiality of the book, but an examination of such developments is beyond the scope of this study. For the purposes of this analysis, the book will refer exclusively to the codex format.

<sup>151</sup> James Conlon, ‘Men Reading Women Reading: Interpreting Images of Women Readers’, *Frontiers: A Journal of Women’s Studies*, 26.2 (2005), 37–58 (p. 39).

<sup>152</sup> Watt, *Reading in Proust*, p. 150.

particular characteristics of the codex (colour, weight, smell, page texture etc.) that can subsequently affect the manner in which we engage with other texts.

The materiality of the book also presents the reader with a heightened level of control, as (s)he can disturb the temporality and linearity of the book:

the book is a material object; it can be opened and closed at will. It can be read in bits, violating its temporality; it can be *reread* in part or in whole, violating its linearity. It moves with the reader, and it is still when he abandons it.<sup>153</sup>

The reader can exercise control over the book as an object, bringing it to life (through reading) only when (s)he decides to. This is best exemplified in Sylvia Leclercq's case, who relegates Thérèse's works to the top of her wardrobe, until insomnia keeps her awake one night and she decides to try reading the texts. From that moment onwards, she is inseparable from her portable Thérèse, but only because she decided to relinquish the control she initially had over the physical book. Maintaining the temporality of the book relates to the negentropic processes outlined in the first half of this introduction: there is an assumption that reading the text in the order it is presented in the book will help us make sense of it. However, there is nothing stopping us from disturbing this order, and adding to the chaos of the text. Such a disturbance would entail ignoring paratextual elements like the table of contents, the chapters (sections, parts, other textual divisions), and even the page numbers, as 'le paratexte est [...] ce par quoi un texte se fait livre'.<sup>154</sup> Consciously engaging with the physicality of the book can positively contribute to the reading process, by directly involving the senses, and encouraging a disturbance of the temporal order dictated by the paratext.

However, Fish considers that this physicality also prevents us from appreciating the kinetic aspect of literature, as 'somehow when we put a book down, we forget that while we were reading it was moving (pages turning, lines receding into the past) and forget that we were moving with it'.<sup>155</sup> Reading involves a double movement: the first one, exemplified by the turning of the pages and the receding of lines is closely related to the existence of the book in its codex form, while the second one, the to-and-fro movement between text and intertext, and between the depth and the surface of the text itself, is connected to the individual processes of reading, understanding, and interpreting. What Fish's observation ignores is the fact that when we talk about texts we often use spatial and temporal metaphors, referring to the moving of the text in particular directions

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<sup>153</sup> Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 152.

<sup>154</sup> Genette, *Seuils*, p. 7.

<sup>155</sup> Fish, 'Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics', p. 83.

or referring to the story as a journey.<sup>156</sup> While the physicality of the book might prevent us from initially discerning the movements of the book and of the text, the act of remembering and retelling the text uses movement through time and space as its central metaphor.

### *The 'average' reader, the critic, and the author*

Discussing the physicality of the book inevitably compels us to consider the 'physicality of the reader', triggering the subsequent analysis of three different types of 'real' readers: the average reader, the critic as reader, and the author as reader. One of the most frequent criticisms of Iser's theory of reading is his image of the reader, who 'in reality [...] approximates the ideal of an educated European',<sup>157</sup> being able to actualise a variety of intertexts to better make sense of the text being read. Arguably, Iser's reader would more often be the exception, rather than the rule, differing significantly from the average reader. Nonetheless, it is impossible to know what intertexts are available to each reader, and as such the connections they will make remain anchored within the personal, individual reading process, eluding possibilities for generalisation and theorisation.

The linguist and translator Georges Mounin takes a more practical approach to the reading process, offering advice that can be applied regardless of reader's literary know-how:

L'essentiel est de ne rien laisser passer, de ne rien laisser perdre, et pourtant de ne pas interrompre par une activité intellectuelle épisodique le moment de bien-être esthétique qu'est la lecture heureuse, la lecture consentante. [...] Peut-être noter, d'un coup de crayon, d'un soulignement, d'un mot, d'un signe en marge, télégraphiquement, n'importe comment, pour aider votre mémoire. Puis revenir, après, tout collecter [...]. Comme le psychanalysé: ne rien rejeter, ne rien censurer, ni l'inavouable, ni le strictement intime, ni ce qui a l'air sans rapport avec le texte, ni "ce qui a l'air idiot".<sup>158</sup>

Firstly, Mounin's reading advice follows a linear temporality, as he believes the reader should engage with the text without too many interruptions and distractions. He links this linear approach to aesthetic pleasure, a move which can in turn lead to an oversimplification of the factors that generate the 'bien-être esthétique'. If we take Kristeva's readers as an example (Sylvia, Stéphanie, and Sebastian), they actually relish

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<sup>156</sup> For a more complex analysis of this phenomenon, see Simon Kemp, 'The Inescapable Metaphor: How Time and Meaning Become Space When We Think about Narrative', *Philosophy and Literature*, 36.2 (2012), 391–403.

<sup>157</sup> Holub, *Reception Theory*, p. 97.

<sup>158</sup> Mounin, 'Devant le texte', p. 291.

the to and fro between texts, as this movement prolongs the reading process and therefore the aesthetic pleasure. Mounin's linear reading does not ignore the questions raised by the text, but rather marks them, and re-visits them after the reading of the full text. The reader is advised to make full use of the materiality of the book, by graphically changing the text ('noter, d'un coup de crayon'), adding a certain physicality to the reader's role as co-creator. These inscriptions form a new text (a type of readerly paratext), which will generate further reactions and pleasures. Mounin emphasises the need to take into consideration the immediate pleasures generated by the reading process: 'observer ce qui, de cette lecture, vous revient spontanément à l'esprit'.<sup>159</sup> The reader is encouraged to focus on his or her immediate reactions, as acknowledging these transforms the reading process into one of self-knowing. The text acts as a trigger for personal reactions that unveil the self to the self. Mounin's final link to psychotherapy ('comme le psychanalysé') becomes the next natural step, as he insists on personal intertexts rather than on literary ones. He does nonetheless encourage a double textual engagement — with the text, and with the reader's inscriptions as text — which can be a useful approach for the average reader, especially in the absence of extensive intertexts. Moreover, these inscriptions do not need to be exclusively personal reactions; they can act as springboards for the acquisition of intertexts. Mounin's advice takes away the pressure of not understanding; the reader is given several tools (e.g. inscriptions, focus on personal reactions) to counteract interpretive impasses. Furthermore, any reaction is considered to be a learning experience: 'même l'indifférence: chercher pourquoi un texte ne vous parle pas, franchement ne vous dit rien, ce peut être une aussi bonne clé qu'une autre pour ouvrir son esprit à ce qu'est l'émotion littéraire, ou même à sa propre émotion littéraire ou esthétique'.<sup>160</sup> Often, there can be social pressures to find a book compelling (e.g. literary prizes, or the author's status within the literary establishment); highlighting the fact that even indifference or dislike have their learning advantages can ease the reading process.

While Mounin frames the reading process in terms of personal reactions and aesthetic pleasures, for Jauss, the same process is placed within the dialectic of question and answer, since 'to understand something means to conceive it as an answer. Or more precisely, to test one's own opinion against the opinion of the other through question and answer'.<sup>161</sup> Jauss sets the reading process much more in the area of reason (where a

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., p. 291.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p. 293.

<sup>161</sup> Jauss, 'The Identity of the Poetic Text', p. 13.

question and answer exchange could occur), whereas for Mounin, the body and the psyche have a more substantial role to play. Jauss's method requires the reader to be simultaneously the source of the question and of the answer. The two approaches to reading do not exclude each other, but rather they are complementary; the better one understands the self (Mounin's approach), the more open one can be to a dialectic or dialogical approach (Jauss's demand). The average reader's experience usually involves both approaches, to different extents, depending on their familiarity with and openness to personal and literary intertexts. Moi separates this complementarity of approaches into four main readerly tasks: 'to be willing to have the experience (in the sense of paying attention to it), to judge it important enough to be expressed, to find words for it and to claim authority for it'.<sup>162</sup> Moi's tasks are set in chronological order, from engagement with the text, to response to it. The willingness to have the experience echoes Mounin's acknowledgement of the personal reactions stemming from reading — the reader needs to pay attention to the text and to the self. Moi requires the reader to take this acknowledgement one step further, and articulate it into words, taking responsibility for the latter. This articulation into words contributes to the question and answer process put forward by Jauss; the reader needs to convey his/her view before (s)he can be detached from it, and engage in questions and answers from the perspective of the other as well. These tasks and approaches complicate and lengthen the reading process, and can put a strain on the 'average reader', who nonetheless has the option to ignore or only partly engage with these approaches, and does not have to publicly account for them.

However, the critic as a reader does not have this option, as (s)he has to articulate a response, and assume responsibility for it in the public sphere. This public responsibility can often lead to a decrease in aesthetic pleasures,<sup>163</sup> since the critic is perceived as a figure of authority, with his or her literary expertise going beyond just a report of reading pleasures. It is no surprise that neither Sylvia in *TMA*, nor Sebastian in *MàB* share with the public the readings that have given them the most pleasure (Thérèse's texts, and Anne's *Alexiade*, respectively); their published works revolve around other topics. The critic is also under a certain time pressure, as (s)he needs to respond to the text in a timely fashion: 'criticism [...] is the present in the course of its articulation',<sup>164</sup> being 'as

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<sup>162</sup> Toril Moi, 'The Adventure of Reading: Literature and Philosophy, Cavell and Beauvoir', *Literature and Theology*, 25.2 (2011), 125–40 (p. 130).

<sup>163</sup> Patrocínio P. Schweickart and Elizabeth A. Flynn, 'Introduction', in *Gender and Reading*, ed. by Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocínio P. Schweickart, pp. ix–xxix (p. xi).

<sup>164</sup> Said, 'The Text, the World, the Critic', p. 185.



inevitable as breathing'.<sup>165</sup> There is a certain immediacy to criticism, due to the demands put on the critic to provide parameters for assessing the text. Despite becoming to a certain extent prescriptive (underlining what the reader *should* take away from the text),<sup>166</sup> criticism 'remains a function of literary life' with the critic being 'the one that still has something to say when everything has been said, that can say about the work something else than that work'.<sup>167</sup>

While criticism remains indispensable to the literary sphere, the critics themselves can approach their task in different ways. Stierle stresses the need for an enhanced reading competence, bestowing the ultimate interpretive authority on the critic as a reader: 'if the communicative function of literature is to be preserved a formal theory of reception and the proper reading competence are needed'.<sup>168</sup> Theoretical knowledge and competence are seen by Stierle to ensure 'the most sophisticated form of reading',<sup>169</sup> setting up a hierarchy of interpretations, with the learned critic at the top. The politics of reading becomes less democratic, in this model, and the identification of theoretical and literary intertexts acts as an exclusionary practice rather than a method of enhancing interpretations and the pleasures of reading. Such a view can sever the connection between text and reader, enhancing the social pressure of reading in the right or sophisticated way. Ignoring the pleasures of reading is symptomatic of 'the hermeneutics of suspicion [that] has made us believe that to read critically is necessarily to debunk, deconstruct, take apart, and tear down, not praise and admire'.<sup>170</sup> Such a view transforms the critic into an assessor or a judge, rather than a reader who then decides to share their understanding of the text with a wider audience. Moi dwells on the critic's position as reader, and on the fact that the 'critic needs to be capable of a certain degree of humility'.<sup>171</sup> As a writer, the critic invites the public to read his/her particular understanding, as 'the best criticism is at once an account of an adventure and an invitation to new adventures'.<sup>172</sup> Moi replaces the critic's authority with vulnerability, with an openness towards the other that is simultaneously welcoming and dangerous. This is closer to the reading process as envisaged by Attridge, a combination of responsibility

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<sup>165</sup> T.S.Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *Perspecta*, 19 (1982), 36–42 (p. 36).

<sup>166</sup> Mounin, 'Devant le texte', p. 290.

<sup>167</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, 'Reality and Its Shadow', in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. by Seán Hand, pp. 130–43 (p. 130), (at the moment of writing, a French edition of the work was not available).

<sup>168</sup> Karlheinz Stierle, 'The Reading of Fictional Texts', in *The Reader in the Text*, ed. by Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman, pp. 83–105 (p. 88).

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>170</sup> Moi, 'The Adventure of Reading', p. 127.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137.

and irresponsibility, with the critic using his/her skills to best present his/her reading, not to convince others of its exclusive validity.

While both the average reader and the critic are manifestly readers, the author is a type of reader whose reading process often remains unaccounted for. In Culler's view, 'writing can itself be viewed as an act of critical reading, in which an author takes up a literary past and directs it towards a future'.<sup>173</sup> While this covers a wider understanding of reading, reflecting the manner in which the author weaves various intertexts into his/her work, we must not forget that the author is 'a reader of his own action',<sup>174</sup> (s)he is a reader of his/her own text. Being both writer and reader increases the vulnerability entailed by the creative process. Despite the common assumption that the author holds control over the text, narrative seduction involves a loss of control, as was shown above, and as such 'to write is to risk rejection and misunderstanding. To create a work of art, Sartre writes, is to give the world a gift nobody has asked for'.<sup>175</sup> The author as reader goes through a double process of othering, first during the writing, and then during the reading of their own work. Contemporary publishing trends tend to complicate this process, as during the promotion of their works the authors are required to come back to them, even to engage in public readings of their texts. This reading aloud is already an interpretive act,<sup>176</sup> with the author being able to direct attention towards particular sections via voice modulations, stresses, intonation etc. The author can also intervene in the public's reading process, via various media appearances. These paratextual elements bestow on the writer parts of the authority (s)he has given up as a result of the preceding writing and reading processes. The extent and reach of this authority also depend on the author's (and editor's) willingness to get involved: as will be shown in Chapter Four, Kristeva was able to manage her media presence in a more effective way than Wittig, whereas Darrieussecq went through a process of trial and error, until she found the balance between visibility, involvement, and detachment. What all of these three writers have in common is the fact that they are all avid readers, and that at various points in their careers they have written about their reading processes: for example, Darrieussecq in *Rapport de police*, Wittig in some of the essays collected in *The Straight Mind*, and Kristeva in much of her theoretical and critical work. Of the three, Kristeva is the one

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<sup>173</sup> Jonathan Culler, 'Prolegomena to a Theory of Reading', in *The Reader in the Text*, ed. by Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman, pp. 46–66 (p. 50).

<sup>174</sup> Fish, 'Yet Once More', p. 36.

<sup>175</sup> Toril Moi, "'I am not a woman writer": About women, literature and feminist theory today', *Feminist Theory*, 9.3 (2008), 259–71 (p. 268); for Sartre's idea mentioned in the quotation see Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature*, Chapter II, 'Pourquoi Écrire', pp. 45–73.

<sup>176</sup> Stierle, 'The Reading of Fictional Texts', p. 99, footnote 17.

who regularly combines these three functions — writer, critic and reader — not just within her corpus, but within individual texts. Exploring the manner in which these three functions intersect, and affect the reading process will be the focus of the first chapter.

### *Approaches*

This thesis takes as its focus the idea of readerly dialogues, handing over agency to the reader. This reading agency is not arbitrary or completely idiosyncratic, as it partly takes its cues from the texts, paratexts, and socio-cultural frames surrounding them. The reader enters into dialogue with the text, the characters, the narrator(s), and even the author. A dialogue can also be set up with other readers, and even with the self, in a move that mirrors the psychoanalytic encounter. These dialogues help clear out an imaginative space for the reader. While this space will be different for different readers, certain elements will still be shared. The aim of the thesis is to examine how this space comes into being (what textual, paratextual, and extra-textual elements determine the emergence of such a space), and what readerly tools are needed to fully explore the imaginative potential of this space. There is no guarantee that all readerly dialogues will have a positive outcome, and therefore the thesis will also investigate the tensions and negative effects that appear when readers attempt to engage in dialogue, or when they try to create their own imaginative space within the text. Three different approaches will help in this exploration: the first one, following in the vein of reception theorists and of Fallaize's study of Beauvoir's reception will consider actual, embodied readers; the second will look at how the more abstract, implied reader is expected to work between texts; and the third takes as its starting point Rye's assertion that the encounter with the text can be transformative of the reader (transformation which can subsequently affect the reader's relation with the other).

Throughout the thesis I will activate the four readerly challenges outlined above. The reader's task of co-creation is essential to the existence of meaningful readerly dialogues, as I will show in the subsequent analyses. Depending on the genre of the text studied, certain readerly challenges will be further emphasised, for example the reader as detective in Kristeva's detective novel *MàB*, or the reader as analysand and analyst when looking at Darrieussecq's and Kristeva's works. As mentioned in the first introductory sections, I will distance myself from traditional reception theories, to allow for a greater interpretive contribution from the reader. This contribution is enhanced by considering

intertextuality to be the intersection of a centrifugal and a centripetal move (the idea of the intersection being an addition to Still and Worton's definition). These two moves allow the reader to both acquire new information and to enhance his/her understanding of the inner workings of a text. These inner workings are an integral part of Chambers's theory of self-reflexive texts of fiction. His theory will find echoes in my articulation of the hospitable text, of the text as Trojan Horse (both in Chapter One), and of the fiction of honesty (Chapter Two). Linking Kristeva's 'other within' with Attridge's 'singularity of literature' allows me to draw parallels between reading and the encounter with the other, reinforcing Rye's assumption that reading can change the self. Nonetheless, certain caveats need to be raised, when researching this particular field: there are difficulties in establishing with precision how reading changes us and our relationship with others, alongside the diversity (and even idiosyncrasy) of readers and reading situations.

The thesis does not claim to offer an exhaustive interpretation of the texts chosen. However, by situating itself at the intersection of women's writing with reception, intertextuality, and the other, it suggests new hermeneutical routes to be pursued, by keeping the active role of the reader at the forefront of our interpretive endeavours. This new interpretive lens (which takes into account the fact that the reader is an actual individual who inhabits the real world, and not just an abstract concept implied by the text, the author, or the critics) can be applied to other texts and authors, in order to enrich our existing critical corpus. Studying readerly dialogues in texts written by women becomes of particular relevance given the fact that women writers are often 'othered' or marginalised on the cultural scene. The reader therefore needs to deal with a double other — the text as other, and women as other (creators). A comparative study of Kristeva, Darrieussecq, and Wittig is distinctive in the field, offering a fruitful consideration of multiple parameters of the reading process (for example, the relation between reading and psychoanalysis, media success, or socio-political activism)

Judith Still notes that Kristeva's novels have not received 'much serious critical attention',<sup>177</sup> despite the fact that fiction offers a safe space for Kristeva to explore some of the theoretical concepts she introduced throughout her career. For example, *MàB* contributes to the discussion of motherhood and maternity, responding to Kristeva's 1977 call in *Stabat Mater* concerning the need to put forward constructive images of motherhood that go beyond the Virgin Mary or the abject mother. Similarly, *TMA* mirrors the conclusions of *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, while simultaneously offering practical

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<sup>177</sup> Still, 'Feminist literary theory', p. 241.

solutions to our interactions with the other. Both texts pose challenges for the reading process, destabilising the readerly spaces through the workings of intertextuality and the disturbance of generic frameworks (especially, when dealing with the readerly expectations raised by the detective novel, in the case of *MàB*). Kristeva's two fictional texts offer the opportunity to introduce, in Chapter One, the concepts of the reading *Carmel* and of the hospitable text — the first referring to a community of readers that contribute to enriching textual understandings by bringing their own knowledge and intertexts to the interpretive mix; and the second designating a text that welcomes the reader, without overpowering the latter with set interpretations. As mentioned above, when reading Kristevan fiction, the reader needs to navigate the text while bearing in mind Kristeva's triple function — author, reader, and critic/theorist —, thus further enhancing the readerly tensions.

Kristeva's hospitable text, psychoanalytic background, and focus on motherhood are linked to some of the themes approached by Darrieussecq, and analysed in Chapter Two. Darrieussecq's fiction of honesty<sup>178</sup> exemplifies the operation of the hospitable text, encouraging the reader to trust the narrator. Darrieussecq's texts set forth explorations of various 'others', challenging received codes about women (*Truismes*), teenage sexuality (*Clèves*), race (*Il faut...*), children (*Le Bébé* and *Tom est mort*), and artistic creation (*Rapport de police*, the only non-fictional text studied in the chapter). Darrieussecq's success and public persona make her a compelling case-study for reception, while certain recurring themes and images signal the emergence of a Darrieussecq-ien universe, establishing a new network of intertextual relations.

Wittig undertakes a similar challenging of codes, but focuses specifically on gender and lesbianism. This focus has often been detrimental to her reception, as it has slotted her works into the category of lesbian fiction, ignoring her formal and linguistic innovations. Chapter Three returns to Wittig's fictional texts in order to highlight the manner in which her original approach to literature, language, and politics can affect reading, and spur the reader into the process of questioning (societal norms), and possibly action. Multisensorial reading, and the re-writing of foundational stories (aiming to counteract the suppression of women's voices highlighted by Russ, by re-inscribing the women's perspective into history) will also inform the discussion in this chapter, as both these techniques demand an enlargement of readerly skills.

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<sup>178</sup> The fiction of honesty, concept introduced and developed in Chapter Two, comprises all the devices through which a relation of trust is established between the reader and the narrator.

Chapter Four looks at the three authors in conjunction, from the point of view of their media reception, underlining the manner in which this particular type of reception builds certain interpretations, shifting and diverting readerly attention. The media contribute to the narrowing of textual understanding, constructing thematic hierarchies (for example, by insisting on the importance of the authors' biographies in their works). This mix of textual analyses, focus on readerly processes, and study of the effect of 'real world' actors (i.e. the media, or the publishing houses) on reception allows the conclusion to assess the usefulness of this method of literary interpretation, and suggests ways in which it can be transferred to other authors. The Conclusion will also highlight paths for further inquiry (for example, the reception of translation), which were beyond the scope of the present study, before noting that subversion appears to have become an aesthetic value, raising questions about the implication this has for the reader, especially at the end of the reading process, when (s)he is required to step back into the 'real world'.

# CHAPTER ONE

## Kristeva's Fictions and Fictions of Kristeva

### Introduction

Julia Kristeva joined the sphere of fiction writing fairly late in her career, after having established herself as a literary theorist, philosopher, and psychoanalyst. Her previous theoretical work enters into dialogue with her fiction, as Kristeva assumes a triple function in her fictional texts: reader, writer, and critic (at least three different 'fictions of Kristeva', as suggested by the title of this chapter). The intersection of these three functions affects the reading process, simultaneously encouraging a development of readerly skills, and generating tensions between readers and the texts. Kristeva's works are a fertile ground for analysing the workings of intertextuality, a concept which she popularised in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, by developing Bakhtin's notion of dialogism. Nonetheless, her fiction has never received the warm critical reception that her theoretical work has enjoyed. Such discrepancies will be explored in this chapter, identifying the push and pull factors that affect our interactions with Kristeva's fictions, particularly *Thérèse mon amour* (2008) and *Meurtre à Byzance* (2004).

Kristeva's *TMA* was chosen as one of the two main case studies due to its complexity and rich intertextual references, and due to the fact that it remains largely unanalysed even in France<sup>1</sup> (the English translation was only made available in November 2014).<sup>2</sup> Published in 2008, it has the advantage of drawing on an incredibly fertile Kristevan *œuvre*, without restricting itself to it. While certain sections, especially those dealing with psychoanalytical interpretations, can be seen as a concretisation of concepts previously developed by Kristeva, the work represents much more than a mere extension of existing theory. A different type of *génie féminin*<sup>3</sup> is chosen, compelling

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<sup>1</sup> Carol Mastrangelo Bové, 'Kristeva's *Thérèse*. Mysticism and Modernism', *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy*, 21.1 (2013), 105-15 (p. 109).

<sup>2</sup> <<http://cup.columbia.edu/book/teresa-my-love/9780231149600>> [accessed 19 January 2015].

<sup>3</sup> Kristeva's *génie féminin* trilogy consists of volumes on Hannah Arendt, Melanie Klein, and Colette.

Kristeva to move beyond her focus on secular feminine figures — Melanie Klein, Colette, Hannah Arendt —, and to change the geographical setting of her fictional work, from Eastern Europe to sixteenth-century Spain. Moreover, the fact that the work combines different genres prompts an examination of the reading practices required for understanding. The choice of subtitle — *Récit* (rather than *roman*) — is suggestive of this fusion between novel, biography, commentary, theatre, poetry, and even music. According to Genette, ‘*roman* ne signifie pas “ce livre est un roman” [...] mais plutôt “Veuillez considérer ce livre comme un roman”’,<sup>4</sup> the author guiding the reader in the type of reading the latter should undertake. In the case of *TMA*, the author is encouraging a type of group reading: due to the fact that the text combines such diverse genres, references, and idiolects, the understanding of the text is enriched if the reading takes place within a group whose members share different reading skills (the reading of musical scores, the deciphering of psychoanalytic lexicon, knowledge of Castilian etc.). *TMA* can be studied in a type of modern literary salon or a reading *Carmel*.<sup>5</sup> Similar to Thérèse who set up the order of the Discalced Carmelites, Kristeva is creating a new reading order, a new group combining a variety of reading skills.

Despite their different geographical and historical backgrounds, there are significant similarities between Anne and Thérèse, positing them as two potential candidates for Kristeva’s *génie féminin* collection mentioned above. They both occupy a position at the intersection of religion and politics, which they manage to navigate partly through their writing. Religious turmoils (the First Crusade in Anne’s case, and the Reformation and Counter-Reformation for Thérèse) fuel their creative and political activities, allowing them to bring a feminine perspective into fields dominated by men: the royal and noble families yielding power in Byzantium, and the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. Nonetheless, this feminine perspective is mediated by the presence of the masculine: Thérèse’s works try to make sense of her relations with the Other (God as the Father and the Son), whereas Anne’s *Alexiade* ensures a place in posterity for Anne’s father, Alexios I Comnène. Moreover, their creative endeavours were censored by men’s interventions: Thérèse’s confessors tried to steer her silent prayers (which then led to her writing), while some of her collaborators wrote interpretations and links to Scriptures on the manuscripts themselves: ‘Louis de Léon et Jérôme Gratien publient et interprètent son œuvre après sa mort afin que Thérèse d’Avila devienne *la sainte de la*

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<sup>4</sup> Genette, *Seuils*, p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> See the section on ‘Intertextualities and the Reading *Carmel*’ below.



Contre-Réforme'.<sup>6</sup> Anne only started her writing project after her husband's death — 'Anne attendra ses cinquante-cinq ans et la mort de son mari [...] pour commencer à écrire'<sup>7</sup> — since being a woman made her vulnerable at court ('car la princesse n'est pas moins femme, détail à ne pas oublier'),<sup>8</sup> especially as her husband had already started to write a chronicle of Alexios's reign. Despite the fact that Thérèse was a nun in the Carmelite order, whereas Anne was married with children (although she wrote the *Alexiade* while in exile in a monastery), religion remains central to both their endeavours. The *Alexiade* deals with reactions to the Great Schism, and the First Crusade, which saw Roman Catholics and Byzantines fighting on the same side; nonetheless, this union did not deter Anne from considering the former to be barbarians. The choice of a religious background becomes even more pertinent if we take into account Kristeva's position as an atheist: working on important religious figures helps her bridge the gap between psychoanalysis and religion, by means of literature and story-telling. By means of this bridging, Kristeva contributes to the creation of the 'third space' or the 'espace tiers' Thérèse mentions in *TMA*.<sup>9</sup> This third space can become a useful tool when trying to overcome self-other dichotomies, a need highlighted in *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*; a space belonging neither to the self, nor to the other, but a space where difference can be recognised and used in acquiring further (self-)knowledge.

Both *TMA* and *MàB* help build this space that is open to change and alterity, by challenging the readers, and actively involving them in the interpretive process. The rich intertextual connections of *TMA* create a push-and-pull effect, by constantly sending the readers outside the diegesis in order to better understand the implications of Kristeva's text. In the case of *MàB*, the framework of the detective novel, as we shall see, ensures the reader is constantly on the search for clues, precluding easy acceptance and acquiescence. This chapter will explore and analyse the place carved out for the reader in these two Kristevan novels. Close textual analysis and comparative approaches will accompany the two main sections of the chapter, dedicated to *TMA* and *MàB*, respectively. The underlying premise of this analysis is that 'reading can change one's life',<sup>10</sup> especially by encouraging the questioning of existing frameworks, and by encouraging new ways of thinking; being faced with novel experiences, readers can

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<sup>6</sup> *TMA*, p. 33.

<sup>7</sup> *MàB*, p. 185.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184.

<sup>9</sup> *TMA*, p. 254.

<sup>10</sup> Rye, *Reading for Change*, p. 13.

achieve a new degree of self-awareness.<sup>11</sup> Taking Gill Rye's premise as a starting point, the first part of the chapter, dedicated to *TMA*, will also apply her methodology, by studying diegetic readers and writers, and the *mise-en-abyme* of the writing, reading, and publishing processes. Both Thérèse and Sylvia Leclercq are readers and writers, and the manner in which they interact with the texts they read and create can be revealing. The subsequent sections examine the tension arising in *TMA* between the alienation and the attraction of the reader back to the text. *TMA* often treads a fine line between pushing and pulling the reader, through elements such as: the blurring of boundaries between fiction and reality, the mix of genres, the choice of language and idiolects, the encyclopaedic character, the relations established between characters, narrator and reader, and the relevance of the text to contemporary times. Within these sections the concept of the reading *Carmel* is further explored, alongside references to food and the water metaphor, as both these elements allow for a meeting of the self with the other, via the body. In the case of Thérèse, the body is closely linked to writing, which raises questions about the manner in which the readers can relate to this writing of and from the body.

The second main part of the chapter is dedicated to *MàB*, continuing the exploration of the heightened demands put upon the reader by Kristevan texts. In this context, *MàB* embodies the tension between a hospitable text, and a text more akin to the image of the Trojan Horse. A hospitable text lets the reader in, giving them space, time, and relevant information to construct the fiction, simultaneously allowing him or her to use intertexts actively and creatively. Kristeva's texts analysed in this chapter can be seen to reverse the direction of and pervert this rite of hospitality, in a manner similar to the Trojan Horse. These texts disguise themselves as something they are not — detective fiction in the case of *MàB*, and hagiography in the case of *TMA* — subsequently to allow for an outpouring of themes and genres.<sup>12</sup> Trojan Horse texts enter the world of the reader in disguise, or under cover. Therefore, they can carry an element of threat, highlighting the fact that the encounter with the other can be dangerous, and that letting the other in can be perceived as an act of irresponsibility (as shown in the Introduction). The subversion or parodying of genre norms enacted by Trojan Horse texts can also have positive effects, as 'parodic art is both deviation from the norm and includes that norm within itself as background material. Forms and conventions become energizing and

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<sup>11</sup> Holub, *Reception Theory*, p. 91.

<sup>12</sup> This outpouring of genres is mostly visible in *TMA*.

freedom-inducing in the light of parody'.<sup>13</sup> The tension occurs when parody affects the hospitable character of the text, when subversion puts a constant strain on the place of the reader in the text. This section does not aim to decide whether Kristeva's text is either a hospitable one or a Trojan Horse, but rather to highlight and analyse the elements that enhance the tension between these two sides. Some of these elements relate to genres, and to readers' expectations in relation to them. *MàB* can become an anti-detective novel, or a metaphysical detective novel, with a frequent *mise-en-abyme* of the reading and writing processes, and an insistence on autobiographical projections. The narrative cues are equally complicated in both *MàB* and *TMA*, with time, space, names and multiple narrative voices, and predominant metaphors (of fire, water, and food), constantly enlarging and reducing the space the reader can occupy, creating tensions for the reading process. Following these two broad lines of inquiry (genre alongside *mise-en-abyme* and narrative cues) the analysis will highlight the instability of the Kristevan fictional universe, and the possible effects this can have on the reader.

## Readings of pleasure and the pleasures of reading in *TMA*

### *Readers and writers within and outside the diegesis*

In a 2009 interview, Kristeva offers details about the origins of *TMA*:

L'histoire de Thérèse est apparue dans ma vie par hasard, je connaissais très peu de choses d'elle [...] Frédéric Boyer un de mes anciens étudiants, qui est devenu depuis directeur de Bayard Presse, avait préparé sous ma direction une thèse sur l'expérience spirituelle chez Dostoïevski, Proust et Kafka. Il m'a proposé de faire un petit livre sur un grand guide spirituel de l'Occident, "avec une interprétation anthropologique psychanalytique." J'étais en train d'écrire *Meurtre à Byzance*, j'ai proposé Anne Comnène. Il a préféré Thérèse d'Avila, "plus connue, voire célèbre." Je ne la connaissais presque pas. "Lisez-la et vous me direz." Et j'ai lu pendant six ans. Je me suis plongée dans son œuvre, sa vie, j'ai vécu avec elle et les féministes qui avaient écrit sur elle, américaines, italiennes, etc.<sup>14</sup>

Although *TMA* was initially a commissioned work, the time the author spent researching ('j'ai lu pendant six ans') suggests a significant amount of freedom of creation. Similarly, the fact that 'un petit livre' became a 700 page *récit*, reflects the minimal nature of the constraints posed by the editors. According to Kristeva's answer, the geneses of *MàB* and *TMA* are linked, following the author's interest in European spiritual leaders. Anne and

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<sup>13</sup> Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 50.

<sup>14</sup> Irene Ivantcheva-Merjanska and Michèle Vialet, 'Entretien avec Julia Kristeva: Penser en nomade et dans l'autre langue le monde, la vie psychique et la littérature', *Berlin*, 31 (2009), 158–89 (p. 182).

Thérèse are connected by their Biblical hermeneutics, despite their different socio-historical backgrounds. However, in other interviews, the accounts about the origin of *TMA* differ, diminishing the implication of the editor and of the publishing house. The interview with Ivantcheva-Merjanska and Vialet (quoted above) does not mention her breaking the contract with the editors, whereas in other publications she explicitly insists on her freedom of creation:

*Thérèse mon amour* a commencé par une commande [...]. Puis j'ai rompu mon contrat pour pouvoir écrire librement, car j'ai découvert en Thérèse d'Avila une grande créatrice. Je voulais avoir toute la latitude et le temps de pouvoir écrire à ma guise.<sup>15</sup>

Voici six ans, on m'a proposé d'écrire un ouvrage au sein d'une collection sur les maîtres spirituels de l'Occident. J'ai refusé, mais j'ai découvert sainte Thérèse.<sup>16</sup>

Whilst the commission is present in all three accounts, the involvement and flexibility of the editors is implied in the first interview. The other two clearly mention the breaking away from contractual requirements, insisting on Kristeva's unmediated link to Thérèse. This relation is similar to Sylvia's (the narrator of *TMA* and Kristeva's alter-ego), as the latter notes early on that 'la sainte je ne la partagerai avec personne. Je me la garde. C'est la colocataire de mes nuits sousmarines, elle s'appelle Thérèse d'Avila'.<sup>17</sup>

Kristeva's engagement with Thérèse's texts is also visible before the publication of *TMA*, highlighting the prolonged research work she carried out. In *La Haine et le pardon* (published three years ahead of *TMA*), Thérèse's figure emerges several times in the second part of the volume, which deals specifically with various feminine typologies.<sup>18</sup> Mentioning Thérèse's works ahead of the publication of *TMA*, within a text dealing with contemporary issues, paves the way for a rediscovery of the saint (rediscovery mediated by Kristeva and Sylvia), whose texts are rendered visible and relevant. While Kristeva admits to being mostly unfamiliar with Thérèse's work before embarking on the project, other authors have previously established connections between Kristeva and Thérèse.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Pascale Navarro, 'Féminin Singulier', *Gazette des femmes*, November-December 2008, pp. 33–35 (p. 33) <<https://www.gazettedesfemmes.ca/2273/feminin-singulier/>> [accessed 24 April 2017].

<sup>16</sup> Jacques Nerson, 'Une somme de Julia Kristeva', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 22 May 2008, pp. 112–13 (p. 112).

<sup>17</sup> *TMA*, p. 19.

<sup>18</sup> Julia Kristeva, *La Haine et le pardon. Pouvoirs et limites de la psychanalyse III* (Paris: Fayard, 2005), see for example pp. 239, 240, 630, 631.

<sup>19</sup> For example, Paul Julian Smith explores the theme of the other in Thérèse's *Livre de la vie* [Vida de Santa Teresa de Jesús], via Kristeva's psychoanalytical work, concluding, sixteen years prior to the publication of *TMA*, that 'if women's identification with Western religion is as problematic as Kristeva suggests, then abjection (like hallucination) can be read not as a clinical symptom but as a necessary refusal to incorporate the paternal signifier' (Paul Julian Smith, *Representing the Other: 'Race', Text, and Gender*

The first interview quoted above indicates that *TMA* stemmed from an academic background, which might render it less accessible to the average reader. In a comparable manner, Sylvia's published work originated from an unfinished doctoral thesis, while her current profession is in the field of psychoanalysis. Generally, the writers' previous experience and work can pre-set the approach, and even pre-select the audience. However, the fact that Thérèse was 'plus connue, voire célèbre' can engage a wider audience which had previously acquired an *intertexte thérésien* via different means. Furthermore, the fact that Thérèse's life and work were new territory for Kristeva herself opens up a multitude of possibilities for creation, pushing Kristeva outside the study fields she is widely known for. A similar reflection on the publishing process appears in *TMA* through the interaction between Sylvia and Bruno Zonabend, her editor from *Éditions Zone*. The narrator's remark — 'Sylvia Leclercq, lire Thérèse d'Avila, quelle blague! Après son petit livre très clean sur la mère Duras, vous n'y pensez pas? La pauvre doit s'imaginer que les mystiques reviennent à la mode? Que ça lui fera un *money book*?'<sup>20</sup> — reflects the pre-conceived idea that the author's name has a 'classificatory function',<sup>21</sup> associating him/her with a particular style and set of themes. It also reveals the fact that many authors need to conform to strict editorial requirements, altering the creative process.

While Sylvia is not seen to be under such pressure from Bruno, the latter does try to influence her research by suggesting must-reads about mysticism:

*Les grands courants de la mystique juive: fon-da-men-tal...* Bien sûr, vous le connaissez, mais il faudra le relire, si vous permettez, on redécouvre ces choses-là à la relecture, à la énième relecture, si vous voulez que je vous dise mon expérience... Et le *Zohar*? Non? Mais c'est le sommet, la somme incontournable, je vous le recommande, tout y est.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the fact that he aims to create interpretive connections, his references are not truly intertextual, he does not place the texts in dialogue with each other, he just quotes them as currently *à la mode*. This is further highlighted by Sylvia's reaction to the conversation: 'À mon tour, j'avalai un nouveau verre de vin, Bruno n'amorçait pas que [sic] le

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*in Spanish and Spanish American Narrative* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 125). This observation highlights the narrow place women are allowed to occupy in occidental religious discourses. Thérèse's approach becomes even more commendable due to the fact that she challenges the 'paternal signifier' from within the religious sphere. She partly (and retrospectively) answers Kristeva's plea for new discourses on womanhood and maternity (Julia Kristeva, 'Stabat Mater', *Histoires d'amour* (Paris: Denoël, 1983), pp. 295–327 and 'Le Temps des femmes', *34/44: Cahiers de recherche de science des textes et documents*, 5 (1979), 5–19).

<sup>20</sup> *TMA*, p. 18.

<sup>21</sup> Foucault, 'Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?', p. 811.

<sup>22</sup> *TMA*, p. 47.

rapprochement des spiritualités’,<sup>23</sup> placing Bruno’s reading recommendations on the same level as a new glass of wine. Moreover, she considers his exposé to be ‘un flot plutôt décousu qu’érudit’.<sup>24</sup> His intervention presents an ersatz intertextuality, as his recommendations resemble a bibliographical list, with little or no contextualisation. The titles are almost interchangeable, rather than complementary. Truly intertextual references should enhance, change, develop or enlarge understanding and interpretations. Bruno’s intervention is more akin to pretence than to an intertextual re-reading of oriental religious texts.

The *mise-en-abyme* of the publishing process can shatter the intimacy established between the creator and the reader, as the latter becomes aware that the text (s)he is reading has gone through several processes of alteration. This mediation of reception is further emphasised by Sylvia’s own experience of coming into contact with Thérèse’s work:

à la Procure en face de Saint Sulpice [...] j’avais acheté les *Œuvres complètes*, deux volumes sur papier bible bourrés de textes, illisibles. Un de ces achats compulsifs de veille de week-end solitaire, aussitôt relégués tout en haut de la bibliothèque et oubliés à jamais.<sup>25</sup>

*La Procure* is a real spatial reference, pointing to a bookshop close to the Saint Sulpice church in Paris, specialising in religious texts. The narrator highlights the manner in which both location and appearance can influence the decision to read a particular work: *La Procure* is a specialist book provider, catering to particular audiences, and the ‘deux volumes sur papier bible bourrés de textes’ are not (initially) alluring. If we were to extrapolate these remarks to *TMA*, we could infer that Kristeva’s name already attracts a particular type of audience, with certain expectations about, and from the work. However, following the above-mentioned suggestion that Thérèse d’Avila is a well-known religious figure within the Catholic tradition, we observe that the preliminary pool of readers has the potential of expanding. By having both Kristeva’s name and that of Sainte Thérèse d’Avila on the cover, *TMA* can be seen to reach out to at least two groups of readers that might not always interact. Moreover, Fayard is a well-known publishing house, with a wide portfolio of writers and genres, unlike the publishing house mentioned in *TMA*: ‘Zonabend a réduit son secteur littéraire.’<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

While these are all factors that can influence reception even before the start of the reading process, other phenomena can have an impact post-reading. Thérèse's own work is an appropriate example: during her lifetime her writing was subject to control, censorship, and even banning by the Inquisition.<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless, her work was subsequently used by the same authorities to promote the Counter-Reformation, and the fight against Protestantism. Thérèse's search for the Other within was used for political purposes: 'le concile de Trente, qui ouvre une nouvelle ère pour la foi catholique, a besoin de Thérèse dont l'expérience s'adapte parfaitement à ce renouveau'.<sup>28</sup> While such a teleological use could be seen to significantly diminish the possibilities for interpretation, it also guarantees the preservation and circulation of the texts, especially during a time when the availability of copies was scarce. In order to fit the requirements of the Catholic Church, Thérèse's work was published and interpreted by her close friends Louis de Léon and Jérôme Gratien. While their interventions did lead to alterations of the *texte thérésien*, their close relation to Thérèse (mentioned in both biographical accounts, and in Kristeva's text) also meant that her writerly intentions were generally kept. Thérèse developed some of her ideas in dialogue with both of them, allowing them privileged access to her way of thinking. Nonetheless, with such a history of circulation, Thérèse's work needed to be rediscovered, centuries after its first publication, by other readers and writers such as Sylvia, or even Kristeva.

It is this work of rediscovery that facilitates the *mise-en-abyme* of the reading and writing processes, with the figures of Thérèse and Sylvia as representative of both. Early on in *TMA*, we find out that 'Thérèse aimait lire, on l'a fait écrire',<sup>29</sup> reading becoming the origin of subsequent writing. Her readings included:

des romans de chevalerie en castillan dont sa mère lui avait transmis le goût;<sup>30</sup>

car la discrète doña Beatriz [Thérèse's mother] avait su transmettre à sa fille aînée le goût d'un autre monde, sans le dire, bien sûr, rien qu'en lisant des romans, comme s'il n'y avait aucune différence entre ces histoires d'amour et les vies des saints que préférait papa.<sup>31</sup>

Thérèse is portrayed as a meeting place for different reading traditions, overcoming the opposition between chivalric romance and hagiographies. Moreover, she is also seen here to combine the feminine and the masculine, the maternal and the paternal, the former also

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

being closely associated with the transmission of the mother tongue. Sylvia considers Thérèse to be ‘une lectrice gourmande’,<sup>32</sup> the adjective ‘gourmande’ suggesting that reading is not only an intellectual process, but one which involves desire and the senses. For Thérèse, the journey from reading to writing is a complex one, being initially mediated by both verbalised and silent *oraison*: ‘dans l’acte de la verbalisation en confession, puis dans celui, plus intime encore, de l’écriture’.<sup>33</sup>

In order to write, Thérèse needs to move from reading (and possibly listening to her mother read, as was suggested above), to spoken prayer and confession, which is in turn transformed into silent prayer.<sup>34</sup> The move to *oraison silencieuse* is due to Thérèse’s reading of Francisco d’Osuna’s *Troisième Abécédaire*<sup>35</sup> at the recommendation of her uncle Pedro. Listening, verbalising, and reading are interwoven to facilitate future creation, both literary and monastic. This process takes Thérèse from the outside world towards her inner self, and then back again to the outside world via her texts and her monastic founding work: ‘oraison – écriture – politique sont vécues et restituées comme les trois volets indissociables d’une même épreuve de refondation incessante de soi-même, du sujet continûment ouvert à sa propre altérité par l’intermédiaire de l’appel de l’Être Autre’.<sup>36</sup> Sylvia’s remark is an echo of Kristeva’s idea that our inability to deal with the other, the outsider or the different stems from an inability to deal with our own inner alterity.<sup>37</sup> Thérèse’s constant search for the Other, and implicitly for the self, does not allow her to fall into acceptance. Her ‘trois facettes [...] l’orante, l’écrivain, la fondatrice’<sup>38</sup> make her a *sujet en procès* as ‘[elle] se fonde elle-même par écrit tout en fondant le Carmel déchaussé’.<sup>39</sup> Writing has a two-fold impact: in the outside world, Thérèse’s precepts represent the basis of her monastic founding work; whereas inwardly, her writing becomes ‘[une] thérapie scriptuaire’<sup>40</sup> — a development of the talking cure into a writing cure. This development has transformative powers, as ‘lorsqu’il est entré dans cette oraison [...], il se change en petit papillon blanc’.<sup>41</sup> ‘Il’ refers to ‘le ver’, an

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>34</sup> Silent prayer can be related to silent reading, which according to Adler and Bollmann, ‘établi[t] une relation intime et familière entre le livre et son lecteur’ (*Les Femmes qui lisent*, p. 26).

<sup>35</sup> *TMA*, p. 183.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>37</sup> Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, p. 282.

<sup>38</sup> *TMA*, p. 110.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>41</sup> This is a quotation taken by the narrator from Thérèse’s own work (*TMA*, p. 99).



image used by Thérèse to refer to herself. The ‘oraison’ therefore, by implication, ensures Thérèse’s evolution, her physical change and development.

Sylvia engages on this multi-layered journey as she reads the saint’s work, a process which in turn affects her, “‘Sylvia Leclecrq a du tonus.’” On le dit, une sorte d’optimisme – c’est clair. Ça vous gêne?’<sup>42</sup> The transformative power of reading is directly reflected on the body as ‘du tonus’, which could be a mirroring of the inner ‘optimisme’. This positive consequence of reading is not obtained without difficulty, as the narrator herself admits: ‘votre culture catholique m’est étrangère et je lis difficilement votre langue le castellan’.<sup>43</sup> However, as noted by Todorov: ‘[W]e don’t stop constructing because of insufficient or erroneous information. On the contrary, defects such as these only intensify the construction process.’<sup>44</sup> If the reader seeks out methods for overcoming these difficulties, then (s)he engages in an active and creative process which, according to Iser, stands at the origin of the pleasure of reading.<sup>45</sup> Sylvia herself finds such methods in order to enhance her understanding of Thérèse’s texts (‘les deux éditions françaises [...] auxquelles s’ajoute une riche bibliographie d’études’),<sup>46</sup> to which she adds her own interpretation, ‘je vous traduis à ma façon’.<sup>47</sup> This process of combining intertextuality (in the form of published translations and commentaries) and personal mediation is also reflected earlier in the text, when the description of her walk through Paris becomes a metaphor for her manner of interpreting Thérèse’s work: ‘Paris est un voyage toujours possible. Non, je ne suivrai pas vraiment la piste de mon collègue, je continuerai à voyager à ma façon. Plus personnelle? On verra, pas seulement.’<sup>48</sup> Just as Paris allows for a myriad of itineraries, Thérèse’s work allows for multiple interpretations that do not have to be restricted to Sylvia’s background in psychoanalysis, or by her colleagues’ approval (in various episodes throughout the narrative Sylvia enters discussions and debates with her colleague Jérôme Tristan, whom she thinks of as adhering to general views about ‘le continent mystique’).<sup>49</sup> The Parisian walk is internalised and used to represent a journey of discovery and self-discovery, during which the subject travels without a map, charting new territory or rather re-charting spaces that were previously (too) easily dismissed and labelled. This metaphor could be extrapolated to convey a message to the non-diegetic

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<sup>42</sup> *TMA*, p. 78.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>44</sup> Todorov, ‘Reading as Construction’, p. 80.

<sup>45</sup> Iser, ‘The Reading Process’, p. 51.

<sup>46</sup> *TMA*, p. 79.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

readers about a more personal practice of reading that penetrates both the depths of the text and the depths of the self. While such a practice would enhance the pleasures of reading, in a text like *TMA*, where the reader needs to decipher Thérèse's work (without having direct access to it in its entirety and original form), alongside Sylvia's narrative and Kristeva's complex intertextualities, the journey might be very difficult (if not impossible) to accomplish during the first reading.

The intersection between the outside and the inside worlds is mediated by the body, which for Thérèse becomes a medium for knowing the Other, and for creating. The issue of writing the (feminine) body and its pleasures is widely explored by both Sylvia and Thérèse. The manner in which Thérèse transposes her desire and love for the Other, and the pleasures arising from their encounter could be associated with Cixous's *écriture féminine*, and Kristeva's idea of writing at the margins, allowing the semiotic to make itself present in the symbolic. By positing the image of Bernini's sculpture<sup>50</sup> at the opening of *TMA*, the theme of pleasure (and even ecstasy) is signalled early on, emphasised by the focus on Thérèse's facial expression in the second image used. The image of the sculpture is complemented by a quotation from Thérèse's work that seems to represent Bernini's inspiration:

Parfois, il me semblait qu'il [l'ange] me passait ce dard au travers du cœur et l'enfonçait jusqu'aux entrailles. Quand il le retirait, on aurait dit que le fer les emportait avec lui, et je restais toute embrasée du plus grand amour de Dieu. *La douleur était si intense qu'elle me faisait pousser ces faibles plaintes dont j'ai parlé.*<sup>51</sup>

The visceral reaction described is reminiscent of elements of the Kristevan semiotic ('faibles plaintes'), and it blurs the boundary between orgasmic and mystic ecstasy. The intersection of 'cœur,' 'entrailles' and 'parlé' (this can also refer to the act of writing, as the quotation is taken from one of Thérèse's books, *Livre de la Vie*) suggests that Thérèse moves beyond the Cartesian mind-body duality, allowing the latter to penetrate the former. Sylvia considers this to be Thérèse's manner of thinking desire: 'vous désirez en pensant, Thérèse, vous êtes une penseuse du désir'.<sup>52</sup> Desire is no longer the exclusive remit of the body; it becomes a companion of thought — Thérèse is transformed into the meeting place between the intellectual and the visceral, surpassing the mind-body

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<sup>50</sup> The same image appears on the cover of Lacan's Seminar XX — *Encore* — on female sexuality. In Gallop's reading of this cover 'St Teresa's ecstasy responds to the phallic'. Feminine pleasure (which is looked at rather than engaged with) is neither completely satisfied (demanding more — *encore*), nor completely elucidated (*encore à voir*) (Gallop, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, p. 35).

<sup>51</sup> *TMA*, p. 14.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 305.

dichotomy. Thérèse is able to enter a sensual and intellectual communion with the Other (God or Jesus), without erasing her female subjectivity. This communion is possible because she develops a novel manner of thinking her desires and pleasures: her ecstasies are not just visions, but rather intellectual visions, as she consciously thinks and writes them. These intellectual visions help her (and by extrapolation her attentive readers) create a third space, where the self and other can cohabit without erasing their individuality.<sup>53</sup> This thinking of desire is materialised through writing, as ‘la chair [est] devenue Verbe’.<sup>54</sup>

Furthermore, Sylvia re-interprets the well-known story of Thérèse’s incorruptible body as proof of her embodied writing. Four years after her death, Thérèse’s body was found intact, a phenomenon which contributed to her canonisation. Sylvia refuses to see this as a divine miracle, linking the survival of the body to the survival of the texts. Since Thérèse wrote her body into her work, the enduring nature of the latter becomes the explanation for the incorruptible body:

Cependant, puisque votre corps était déjà tout entier transvasé dans vos écritures et fondations [...] et que cet apparent dehors, ces objets externes, ces outils de combat sont le seul et unique témoignage de votre dedans le plus intime [...] – eh bien, tout compte fait, je ne suis pas en désaccord avec ceux qui croient en votre immortalité.<sup>55</sup>

This remark suggests that Thérèse’s work, both literary and within the monastic order, is a direct reflection and extension of her body. Her body is not only the locus of desire, but also that of ‘le dedans le plus intime’, bringing together passion and intellectual endeavour. As both her writing and the monasteries she founded are ‘objets externes’, available for public consumption, embodied writing raises the question of how we interact with this unknown, foreign body during reading, and what pleasures and risks this interaction might engender. Echoing Kristeva’s critique of the *société du spectacle*,<sup>56</sup> Sylvia fears Thérèse’s reception, as she believes that contemporary audiences do not have the adequate tools to fully go beyond fetishist curiosity:

Vos saisons, vos châteaux<sup>57</sup> seraient-ils aujourd’hui engloutis? Je le crains, car le Spectacle a tué l’imaginaire: il n’y a plus d’impossible, donc plus de désirs, dans

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<sup>53</sup> For a more developed analysis of this line of argument see Sandra Daroczi, “Thérèse, mon amour”, *The Literary Encyclopedia*, first published 13 September 2016 <<http://www.litencyc.com/php/sworks.php?rec=true&UID=35731>> [accessed 19 May 2017].

<sup>54</sup> *TMA*, p. 254.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>56</sup> Kelly Oliver, ‘Kristeva’s Imaginary Father and the Crisis in the Paternal Function’, *Diacritics*, 21.2/3, *A Feminist Miscellany* (1991), 43–63, and Guy Debord, *La Société du Spectacle* (Paris: Éditions Champ Libre, 1971).

<sup>57</sup> Reference to the title of one of Thérèse’s works, *Le Château intérieur*.

notre monde où tout devient virtuel. Et, cependant, je fais le pari qu'en soulevant votre bure, ce n'est pas seulement à la curiosité fétichiste de spectateurs blasés que j'exhibe votre corps et votre écriture. C'est à une noce avec vos intensités métamorphiques que je les convie: elle nous manque, acceptons-en le risque.<sup>58</sup>

Sylvia takes it upon herself to 'soulev[er] votre bure', in order to avoid a simplistic reception of Thérèse's work. On the surface, this can appear as a manner for Sylvia to impose her own interpretations upon the readers. However, her task is only to lift the veil, allowing the readers to interpret Thérèse's work and body. This interpretive work is still seen as a 'risque', maintaining ever-present the tension of reading. For Sylvia, Thérèse's work is an example of what Barthes defined as the *texte de jouissance* — '[texte] qui met en état de perte, celui qui déconforte (peut-être jusqu'à un certain ennui), fait vaciller les assises historiques, culturelles, psychologiques, du lecteur, la consistance de ses goûts, de ses valeurs et de ses souvenirs'.<sup>59</sup> This type of text does generate *jouissance*, however, its destabilising effect poses a risk to the reader. Sylvia sees herself as a mediator between Thérèse and contemporary audiences ('j'exhibe votre corps et votre écriture'); however, the question arises as to whether this mediation dilutes the effect of the text of bliss. If Sylvia acts as a buffer zone between us and Thérèse, then the risks we are undertaking are diminished, and the destabilising effect (and even the *jouissance*) can be tempered. Nonetheless, the possibility that the readers will find *jouissance* in Sylvia's text, rather than in Thérèse's, still remains available.

Despite the pleasures or even the *jouissance* provoked by the text, a work as complex as *TMA* can hinder understanding, complicating the reading process, and ultimately alienating the reader. For example, the (physical) boundaries of the book seem to be played with, especially when we retrospectively analyse the *dédicace* and the list of abbreviations for the works cited. As Sylvia is reading Thérèse's work, she uses quotations from both the French translations and the Castilian texts in supporting her argument. Some of these quotations are followed by an abbreviated indication of the sources, while others (both from Thérèse's work and from texts written by other authors) are acknowledged in the *Notes* section at the end. This inconsistent methodology could suggest that some of the sources are cited by Sylvia, while others are cited by Kristeva herself. If we were to admit such an explanation, then Sylvia's intervention as the narrator starts earlier than page 13 (the beginning of the narrative). This also casts a shadow of doubt upon the dedication: *Pour mon père*. While traditionally this inscription would belong to the author, if Sylvia's presence is felt earlier than the start of the first chapter,

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<sup>58</sup> *TMA*, p. 94.

<sup>59</sup> Roland Barthes, *Le Plaisir du texte* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973), p. 25.

this could suggest that the narrator herself is dedicating the work to her own father. This assumption is supported by the fact that Sylvia does not seem to have been able to reconcile herself to the loss of her father: ‘je ne suis pas insomniaque, mais je me réveille toujours vers deux heures du matin depuis que papa n’est plus, cela fera dix ans en septembre’.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, the father figure becomes a source of anxieties for both Thérèse and for Marianne Baruch, Sylvia’s friend.<sup>61</sup>

While these uncertainties can create a distance between the author and her work, at other times, the fiction is broken by devices that actively attest to Kristeva’s presence. The reader is suddenly made aware of the author’s presence, when Sylvia recounts that she met her friend Andrew ‘aux cours de Kristeva à la Columbia University’.<sup>62</sup> This intrusion could create a sense of frustration, especially as the chapter starts more dynamically than others, involving more characters than usual, and thus such a break could be seen to disturb the narrative flow. This phenomenon consistently re-appears as the narrator cites both Kristeva’s name<sup>63</sup> and that of her husband, Philippe Sollers,<sup>64</sup> alongside references such as: ‘les bancs de Jussieu ou de Columbia’<sup>65</sup> (referring to universities where Kristeva taught); ‘comme Julia Kristeva à ses débuts dans son polar métaphysique *Meurtre à Byzance*’;<sup>66</sup> ‘Julia Kristeva me l’a fait comprendre’.<sup>67</sup> From the first few chapters of the text ‘[t]he narrator’s psychoanalytic practice and writing make clear that Kristeva projects herself onto Sylvia’,<sup>68</sup> and as such these references do not necessarily add any textual depth. However, they do ensure that the reader does not lose sight of the author during the reading process (which for a text like *TMA* could be lengthy). While these autobiographical appearances do not significantly influence the narrative flow (or the manner in which the characters make sense of their world), they do blur the boundary between the diegesis and the reader’s reality. They influence the manner in which the readers construct the fiction, having to superimpose the world of the book onto the world outside the book. Rather than being textual tools, contributing to the plot, these appearances have an extra-textual function, sending the reader towards other works or resources. They are vectors allowing multiple exits from, and entries into the text. Thus, the readers need to navigate between two audience levels: the narrative and

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<sup>60</sup> *TMA*, p. 17.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 140–141.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 228.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 320.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 482.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 690.

<sup>68</sup> Mastrangelo Bové, ‘Kristeva’s *Thérèse*’, p. 106.

authorial level.<sup>69</sup> The autobiographical elements intrude into the fictional world created for and by the narrative audience, causing the latter to become an authorial audience.

The use of deictics and the variation of personal pronouns have a similar blurring effect, disturbing the chronological flow or concealing the narrator's intended audience. Suleiman sees deictics in general as 'indexes of readability',<sup>70</sup> however, in the case of *TMA*, deictics distort the temporal boundaries between Thérèse's present and that of the narrator (which is much closer to contemporary times). For example, the use of 'aujourd'hui' is misleading, since it transports the reader back to Thérèse's time, as opposed to keeping him/her in the narrator's temporality:

*Aujourd'hui*, avec Pedro de Cepeda à Hortigosa, Thérèse ne connaît encore son destin.<sup>71</sup>

*Aujourd'hui*, en écoutant vos histoires de nonne, Borgia se tait.<sup>72</sup>

*Aujourd'hui*, elle ne plaisante pas avec son cercle d'intimes.<sup>73</sup>

In addition to navigating two different periods of narrated time, the reader needs to concentrate on the narrative time as well,<sup>74</sup> which follows a non-linear pattern, with multiple returns and proleptic references. The use of personal pronouns is also ambiguous, especially when the plural 'nous' and 'vous' forms are used. Sylvia always addresses Thérèse using 'vous'; however, certain uses point either to the readers or rhetorically to other characters. In a similar manner, 'nous' can either establish a complicity between Sylvia and Thérèse, or between Sylvia and the reader.

This possible exclusion of the reader via the use of pronouns can have a significant impact on reception. For example, when Sylvia continues a sentence from Thérèse's work it is unclear whether she addresses the nuns around Thérèse or contemporary women:

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<sup>69</sup> Peter J. Rabinowitz, "What's Hecuba to Us?" The Audience's Experience of Literary Borrowing', in *The Reader in the Text*, ed. by Susan Suleiman and Inge Crosman, pp. 241–63 (p. 245). According to Rabinowitz, the narrator writes (or tells a story) for the narrative audience, and the author for the authorial one. The authorial audience can break the illusion of the narrative, and navigate between the world of the book and the real world.

<sup>70</sup> Suleiman, 'Introduction: Varieties of Audience-Oriented Criticism', p. 15.

<sup>71</sup> *TMA*, p. 173, italics mine.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 306, italics mine.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 311, italics mine.

<sup>74</sup> Narrated time refers to the events the narrator writes about: in the case of *TMA*, events from the lives of both Sylvia and Thérèse. Narrative time refers to the present of the narrator, the time during which she writes. While some moments of narrative time might overlap with narrated events from Sylvia's life, the temporal boundaries are difficult to establish.

*'Soyez des hommes forts, mes filles' (Ch., 7); ou encore: 'Faites ce qui est en vous' (Ch., 7:8), car, par la grâce de la communion ce qui est en vous, en nous, n'est que la présence du Seigneur qui épouse nos entrailles.*<sup>75</sup>

While the 'vous' refers to the nuns, the community contained by the 'nous' is more ambiguous. The italicised sentences are quoted from Thérèse's work, but the rest are Sylvia's continuation. By using the 'nous' Sylvia could be trying to integrate the nuns' group, or to extend their group to include contemporary women, or even to step into Thérèse's speaking position. In the latter case, the group referred to by the 'vous' is the same as the one included in the 'nous', but Sylvia looks at it first from the outside, and then the inside (as Thérèse's double or *porte-parole*). Similarly, with turns of phrase such as 'nous avons déjà parlé'<sup>76</sup> or 'suivons-en les aventures métamorphiques',<sup>77</sup> the community included in the 'nous' or the verbal form 'suivons' is ambiguous, as it can either refer to Sylvia and the readers, or Sylvia and Thérèse. Moreover, the closeness between Sylvia and Thérèse is deepened by the use of the first name, which is 'usually a mark of a particular and intimate relationship with "readers"'.<sup>78</sup> This is further enhanced by the fact that, when addressing Thérèse directly, Sylvia usually uses the possessive adjective 'ma/mon' followed by a variety of epithets: 'ma suppliante, ma philosophe, ma secrète, mon implacable, ma romancière'.<sup>79</sup> These epithets find their full power in the title of the text, as 'mon amour' refers to one of the most intimate relationships possible, encompassing all the other appellations.

This complicity between Thérèse and Sylvia is further emphasised by the manner in which the latter appropriates, interprets, and re-writes the former's work, at times obscuring the possibility for those outside the pair to make sense and construct meaning. Sylvia sees herself as creating 'mon roman à moi',<sup>80</sup> 'je continue mon roman dans ma tête – avec ma colocataire, bien entendu'.<sup>81</sup> While it is unclear if this 'roman' is the actual book she has been commissioned to write, or just a manner of analysing her life (in an attempt to replicate Thérèse's writing cure mentioned above), the fact that it is 'à moi', 'dans ma tête' limits the participation of the readers. This is one link that will always be out of the reach of the readers. Another such unavailable link is represented by Sylvia's musings and dreams: 'ce voyage en Espagne [...] me fait reprendre le fil de l'histoire de

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<sup>75</sup> *TMA*, p. 221, italics and parenthetical references present in the original text.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 307.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>78</sup> Still, 'Language as Hospitality', p. 118.

<sup>79</sup> The epithets, in the order quoted, appear on the following pages in *TMA*: 241, 256, 260, 282, and 304. These examples represent just a selection of the multitude of epithets used by Sylvia to address Thérèse.

<sup>80</sup> *TMA*, p. 209.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210.

Thérèse, que je mélange à mes lectures, à mes rêveries'.<sup>82</sup> While certain clues in her thoughts and writing might reveal links to 'mes lectures', her 'rêveries' remain inaccessible. Sylvia's relation to Thérèse casts the reading process in a new light, as the phrase 'depuis que je fréquente Thérèse'<sup>83</sup> suggests. The idea of 'fréquenter' brings Thérèse to life and makes her present.

For a reader who is unfamiliar with Thérèse's work, this 'fréquentation' can be difficult to recreate. Moreover, if the reader were to decide to 'fréquent[er]' Sylvia, they would also need to engage closely with Thérèse, as Sylvia is 'en train de refaire [la biographie multicolore de ma colocataire] à ma façon'.<sup>84</sup> This statement has oxymoronic qualities, as biographies are seen to move towards objectivity, rather than be written 'à ma façon'. Therefore, the issue of trust between the narrator and the reader is brought forward. If the reader is unaware of Thérèse's life and work, how much can (s)he trust Sylvia to offer an accurate account? According to Backscheider,

the most invisible person in a biography is the most powerful – the author. At every moment his or her voice can be heard – but isn't. Indeed it has been said that when we notice the biographer we have found an artistic and technical flaw. When we don't notice, however, we risk forgetting how much of biography is interpretation rather than 'fact' and why that matters so much.<sup>85</sup>

If we consider Sylvia as the author of Thérèse's biography, she is highly visible, more akin to a participant than an observer. It can be argued that Sylvia writes an autobiographical account of her encounter with Thérèse, rather than a biography of the latter. Another layer is added when we consider Kristeva's position as the author of the biography. As was shown above, she is also highly visible in the account. Following Backscheider's logic, if invisibility equals power in the context of the biography, then Kristeva's high visibility is equated to a loss of power. However, as was previously mentioned, her autobiographical appearances can intensify her hold on the text, rather than diminish it.

The trust between the narrator and the reader can be reinforced by the wide use of quotations from Thérèse's work, in both French and Castilian. Even if the reader cannot engage with the Castilian text, the latter supports the French version, possibly validating Sylvia's interpretations. However, the quotations also reflect a process of selection, and by extrapolation the narrator's (and the author's) bias. Thérèse's texts went through

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 279.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 274.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 300.

<sup>85</sup> Paula R. Backscheider, *Reflections on Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 3.



several changes and mediations that rendered them different from the original: first of all, the texts were subject to censorship by the Catholic Church and by the nun's confessors; secondly, her initial publishers effected changes upon the originals, while for one of her books the original version was lost; and thirdly, the selection effected by Sylvia (/Kristeva) is marked by her own subjectivity. Moreover, Sylvia's own relationship to the original text is mostly mediated by translations.<sup>86</sup> This raises the question of the purpose of the Castilian text within the body of the narration, especially as it can be seen to disturb graphically the flow of the text. Is the Castilian version supposed to increase the reader's trust in the narrator (and implicitly in the author), or can it run the risk of alienating the readership (especially those who do not speak Castilian, like Sylvia herself), by overloading the narrative flow? This issue becomes even more pertinent, given that Sylvia very rarely dwells on inconsistencies or difficulties in translation.

At the level of the language used throughout the text, the question of subject-specific idiolects also needs to be considered. The first half of the text focuses extensively on Sylvia's psychoanalytical interpretations, which require the use of a particular lexicon drawing on Freudian concepts. Her debates with Jérôme Tristan represent a highly specialised exchange, possibly restricting the access of the non-versed to the meaning intended by both parties. According to Rye, 'Kristeva does not underestimate the difficulties of the negotiation which must take place between accessibility and artistic creation, but argues that "la lisibilité, la clarté, la simplicité" are keys to communicability'.<sup>87</sup> The use of psychoanalytic interpretations could be an example of this challenging negotiation: Sylvia's attempt to go beyond 'cet évitement freudien'<sup>88</sup> and to move her field forward, might only be possible via the use of such specialised vocabulary. A less rigorous approach might not allow for a full analysis. However, this rigour does imply that 'la lisibilité, la clarté, la simplicité' are at times diminished. This becomes significant when taking into account Sylvia's attempts to make Thérèse our contemporary: 'pour vous faire rencontrer une Thérèse vivante en nous, à faire revivre en vous'.<sup>89</sup> *Lisibilité*, *clarté*, and *simplicité* are central in highlighting Thérèse's contemporaneity, given that most readers would not have the necessary background to engage with the saint's texts without mediation. However, Sylvia's psychoanalytical interpretations can sacrifice the *lisibilité*, *clarté*, and *simplicité* creating yet another layer that needs to be deciphered, and possibly alienating the readership. Nonetheless, this

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<sup>86</sup> *TMA*, p. 79.

<sup>87</sup> Rye, *Reading for Change*, p. 37.

<sup>88</sup> *TMA*, p. 75; Freud's work only contains '[des] rares allusions à la mystique en général (Ibid., p. 75).

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

alienation can prove to be productive, as ‘the instances when the reader resists or takes control may well be those which produce new and interesting readings of the text’.<sup>90</sup> As long as the reader’s resistance is not transformed into an abandonment of the text, it can lead to a new, creative and original understanding of the self, and of the piece being read.

### *Intertextualities and the reading Carmel*

In a similar manner, *TMA*’s mix of genres can have a double-effect. Kristeva’s text seems to dismantle the unity myth,<sup>91</sup> by bringing together elements as varied as musical scores, literary commentary, narration, poems, drama (in the form of the play in four acts that constitutes the penultimate chapter), epistolary fragments, mathematical formulae,<sup>92</sup> maps, and photographs of paintings and sculptures. Deciphering all these components can be highly rewarding for the readers, paving the way to a journey that might take them outside the literary realm. Simultaneously, it can generate frustration, if the reader cannot obtain access to these intertexts. However, as it was suggested in the introduction, *TMA* might also be proposing a new type of reading practice and reading community. As knowledge of such a variety of intertexts might only be available to a diverse group of readers (rather than one single individual), reading with others could answer some of the questions raised by the text. While Thérèse’s founding work created the *Carmel Déchaussé*, Kristeva’s creative endeavour creates a ‘reading *Carmel*’ — a community of readers who, via Sylvia’s mediation, can render Thérèse contemporary. This reading community<sup>93</sup> could contribute to the creation of the *espace tiers* that would facilitate the interaction with the other, overcoming the self-other dichotomy. Because the other is needed to complete the understanding of *TMA*, the boundaries of the self become porous and open to alterity. To borrow Fish’s term, this reading community would represent an intersection of different interpretive communities, enlarging the possibilities for meaning creation. Nonetheless, such intersections might be easier to establish by readers like Sylvia (or Kristeva), who have access to a wide network of experts, with diverse backgrounds that facilitate the unravelling of intertextualities. The average reader might

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<sup>90</sup> Rye, *Reading for Change*, p. 72.

<sup>91</sup> Sartre, *Qu’est-ce que la littérature*, p. 68, and Culler, ‘Prolegomena to a Theory of Reading’, p. 61.

<sup>92</sup> *TMA*, pp. 636, 639.

<sup>93</sup> This community can find echoes with the Beguines mentioned in the text (Bruno sent Sylvia ‘cet ancien catalogue d’une exposition des œuvres des *Béguines*’, *TMA*, p. 44). The Beguines were a self-sufficient group of women, helping each other and practicing ‘Christian virtue on their own’ (Adrienne Rich, ‘Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence’, *Signs*, 5.4 (1980), 631–60 (p. 651)).

find it difficult to establish such a reading community which would cover most cultural areas explored in *TMA*.

*TMA* sets forth a particular kind of dynamism, sending the reader away from the text and then drawing him/her back in, occupying a space at the boundary of active reading and overstrain. According to Iser:

a literary text must [...] be conceived in such a way that it will engage the reader's imagination in the task of working things out for himself, for reading is only a pleasure when it is active and creative. In this process of creativity, the text may either not go far enough, or may go too far, so we may say that boredom and overstrain form the boundaries beyond which the reader will leave the field of play.<sup>94</sup>

It would be extremely hard to argue that *TMA* pushes the reader close to the boredom stage by not going 'far enough', but most of the elements analysed in this section suggest that the overstrain point is easier to reach. While readers experience boredom and overstrain in different ways, the constant demands of *TMA* on the reader can determine the latter to leave the field of play. In a similar manner to Sylvia's first encounter with Thérèse's œuvre ('deux volumes sur papier bible bourrés de textes'), the reader's encounter with *TMA* can be influenced by the sheer volume of the text. Moreover, Sylvia is a demanding narrator (or guide), the need for an active reader being almost constant. For example, she prompts the reader to follow her, while simultaneously maintaining a retrospective look: 'le lecteur s'en souvient',<sup>95</sup> 'nous l'avons vu',<sup>96</sup> 'on l'a vu'.<sup>97</sup> Her text needs 'un lecteur attentif',<sup>98</sup> especially as she does not maintain a linear chronology. For example, when addressing Thérèse, she refers back to an episode from the opening pages: 'vous vous souvenez de la menace de la jeune ingénieure'.<sup>99</sup> However, the first time the story of the 'jeune ingénieure' is introduced, Sylvia is relating the events in the third person, being only at the beginning of her discovery of Thérèse: 'Dans le brouhaha, une jeune femme voilée a soudain pris la parole. Ingénieur en informatique'.<sup>100</sup> In order to establish the correct intra-textual connections, the reader needs to be attentive to all the details. Similarly, the reader has to find (and remember) Sylvia's biographical details

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<sup>94</sup> Iser, 'The Reading Process', p. 51.

<sup>95</sup> *TMA*, p. 45.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 292.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85; it can be argued that at this early stage, the relationship between Sylvia and Thérèse was not yet as intimate as later in the text. If Thérèse is meant to remember the episode of the young engineer, then she needs to have been omnipresent in Sylvia's life from the very early stages of their encounter. The 'vous vous souvenez' could be an address to Sylvia's readers; however, the rest of the paragraph suggests that Sylvia is addressing Thérèse.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

among her commentary, and the biography she constructs for Thérèse: for example, the reference to the La Rochelle port on page 45 is linked to an earlier reference to the Île de Ré on page 26, the reader needing to connect both of them to realise that Sylvia has a holiday home on the island, information which is confirmed only in the second half of the book.<sup>101</sup> Other details are so specific that they can only be deciphered by a particular audience: ‘La déprime. Un séjour à Sainte-Anne, une longue psychanalyse [...]’.<sup>102</sup> The ‘séjour à Sainte Anne’ refers to the Sainte-Anne psychiatric hospital in Paris, but this type of intertext would only be available to those familiar with the French capital.

The text abounds with complex intertextualities, which confer on the work an encyclopaedic character. As such, the final chapter, in the form of a letter addressed to Denis Diderot, can become more than a reference to his novel *La Religieuse*, possibly including allusions to his work on the *Encyclopédie*. Covering a period from the 16<sup>th</sup> century to contemporary times, *TMA* facilitates a considerable acquisition of knowledge, combining elements from different fields of study. This acquisition is part of the active process of reading, and thus, it contributes to its pleasures. Being given certain clues for research — names (e.g. Madame Guyon, Fénelon, le président Schreber, Maître Eckhart, Edith and Rosa Stein, Georges Bernanos, Michel de Certeau, Bossuet, François de Sale, Pierre de Poitiers, Sophie Volland etc.), references to fictional works and characters (Don Quixote, Molly Bloom, Albertine, Anne-Marie Stretter, Lol V. Stein etc.), places (Spanish towns, Mount Tabor etc.), events (the Dreyfus affair, etc.), and concepts (e.g. ‘lexithymie’) — the reader is encouraged to use other works and sources, and to relate them subsequently to Thérèse and to *TMA*. Sylvia herself encourages the reader to undertake such research work: ‘Qu’est-ce encore? Allons donc, ne faites pas les étonnés, tout se sait maintenant sur Internet’.<sup>103</sup> At times, this type of research can resemble detective work, however, without always yielding definite end results. For example, Sylvia uses the figures of the ‘nihiliste rigolard et la séductrice incestuée de la rentrée littéraire’<sup>104</sup> without directly naming them. If earlier temporal indicators were to be followed (the terrorist attacks in London and the death of Pope John Paul II), they would point to the 2005 rentrée. Thus, ‘le nihiliste rigolard’ could be Michel Houellebecq, while

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., pp. 319, 439; the references to Île de Ré are further complicated by the fact that Kristeva herself has a house on the island, which she frequently mentions in interviews (see for example, Florence Batisse-Pichet, ‘Où vit la psychanalyste et romancière Julia Kristeva’, *Côté maison*, 21 July 2015; <[http://www.cotemaison.fr/chaine-d/deco-design/ou-vit-la-psychanalyste-et-romanciere-julia-kristeva\\_25248.html](http://www.cotemaison.fr/chaine-d/deco-design/ou-vit-la-psychanalyste-et-romanciere-julia-kristeva_25248.html)> [accessed 22 May 2017]).

<sup>102</sup> *TMA*, p. 38.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 187.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 323.

la ‘séductrice incestuée’ could refer to Amélie Nothomb. However, each *rentrée littéraire* sees the publication of hundreds of new works, and as such a definite clarification cannot be obtained.

In other situations, the reader needs to be familiar with the intertext prior to reading *TMA*, as the latter follows a pattern set by the former. For instance, in the closing section of the first chapter, Sylvia echoes Molly Bloom’s soliloquy, allowing her monologue to reflect her flow of thought, having a semiotic and oral character, punctuated by ten repetitions of ‘oui:’

... *oui*, échec et mat à Dieu aussi, *oui, oui*, Thérèse ou *Molly Bloom* [...] mais *oui*, pour une âme comme la mienne tout est *oui* [...] mais *oui*, métaphores transmuées en métamorphoses, à moins que ce ne soit le contraire, mais *oui*, Thérèse, *oui* ma sœur, invisible, extatique, excentrique, hors de vous en vous, hors de moi en moi, *oui* Thérèse, mon amour, *oui*.<sup>105</sup>

This constant work of research ensures that the reader spends a considerable time studying *TMA*, regularly returning to the work and bringing forth new intertexts revealed by his/her individual investigations. Due to the richness of the intertexts, subsequent readings of *TMA* can also be encouraged. Moreover, because of the numerous cultural elements covered by the narrative, *TMA* can become a *texte de référence* for the readers’ previous, and future *lectures*. However, this constant move between text and intertexts can lead to the above-mentioned overstrain, and determine the reader to abandon the text, rather than return to it several times.

A specific type of intertextuality takes the form of references to Kristeva’s other works (intra-*œuvre* links), especially those of a theoretical nature. While Kristeva has stated that ‘[j]e ne compare pas mon travail théorique à mes romans, et je ne vise aucunement à traduire l’un dans l’autre’,<sup>106</sup> *TMA* does reveal moments of intersection between her fiction and her theoretical concepts. Besides numerous connections to *Étrangers à nous-mêmes* (via the interpretation of Thérèse’s Other), references to some of her most well-known titles find their way into the text itself: ‘soleil noir de la mélancolie’,<sup>107</sup> ‘les nouvelles maladies de l’âme’,<sup>108</sup> ‘l’abjection’,<sup>109</sup> while the references to Proust, Colette and Hannah Arendt<sup>110</sup> link *TMA* to Kristeva’s literary criticism. Although a mere citing of the titles does not entail intertextual links (as was shown when

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 41; italics mine.

<sup>106</sup> Ivantcheva-Merjanska and Vialet, ‘Entretien avec Julia Kristeva’, p. 172.

<sup>107</sup> *TMA*, p. 102.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>110</sup> Proust is mentioned on p. 272, and Colette and Hannah Arendt on p. 482 of *TMA*.

discussing Bruno's list of recommendations), for readers familiar with Kristeva's work, these occurrences could prompt a deeper exploration of the Kristevan universe. Moreover, the titles and references are integrated into the text, rather than being a simple enumeration or list. If they were to be removed, the discourses around them would no longer make sense. When analysing Cixous's fictional work, Rye noted that 'the multi-layering and interweaving of Cixous's narratives liberate her readers from the single text, yet hold them within her work, sending them out to other Cixous texts'.<sup>111</sup> This observation is true for *TMA*, and Kristeva as well: while the intertextual links are multiple (spanning vast periods of time and bringing together religious and secular traditions), a sizeable number of them send the reader to other Kristevan works. Moreover, Sylvia herself seems to find support for her interpretations in the author's previous texts:

Vos visions, Thérèse, ne sont pas perçues des yeux du corps, vous y insistez souvent, mais bâties par une écoute qui touche: infrastructure du langage, sensation devenant intelligible, sculpture première du sens que Julia Kristeva appelle le 'sémiotique'?<sup>112</sup>

Julia Kristeva me l'a fait comprendre dans ses *Histoires d'amour*.<sup>113</sup>

These multiple intertexts can capture the reader because they represent a variation of what Barthes identified as the 'staging of appearance as disappearance'.<sup>114</sup> The intertexts are not fully present in the body of the main work; hints of their existence are given, but it is up to the reader to uncover them further, and to decide the extent to which they offer clarification. As was mentioned in the Introduction, intertexts are not necessarily elucidating (to use Riffaterre's analogy, they do not always act as Oedipus deciphering the Sphinx's riddle, they can themselves become a new riddle), thus their relation to the text is not always one of clarification.

As was pointed out at the start of this chapter, it is not just other works that can become intertexts, but a variety of cultural productions and news items. The latter help the reader render *TMA* contemporary, especially as Sylvia considers Thérèse's work to provide answers to present-day issues. For the narrator, '[d]epuis le 11 Septembre, la montée du terrorisme islamiste m'a fait découvrir que la religion est le seul monde, avec celui de Paul et d'Élise [Sylvia's patients], capable encore de me passionner'.<sup>115</sup> References to this 'montée' are further emphasised by the episode of the 'jeune

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<sup>111</sup> Rye, *Reading for Change*, p. 101.

<sup>112</sup> *TMA*, p. 511.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 690.

<sup>114</sup> Barthes, *Le Plaisir du texte*, p. 10.

<sup>115</sup> *TMA*, p. 38.

ingénieure’,<sup>116</sup> and by the fact that the fourth part of *TMA* opens with an account of the 2005 London attacks: ‘Le 7 juillet 2005, la Castille crève de chaleur [...] je tourne au hasard le bouton de la radio, on annonce les attentats à Londres’.<sup>117</sup> Nonetheless, at no point in the narrative does Sylvia create an opposition between different religious values. On the contrary, she returns to religious discourses to find an articulation for a possible third way.

The narrator uses ‘cette fournaise glaciale qu’est la vie psychique de Thérèse’,<sup>118</sup> to formulate a new way of dealing with alterity and dissonance (or put simply, with the other). The oxymoron ‘fornaise glaciale’ is suggestive of oppositions. However, the fact that Thérèse, as an individual, is seen to embody both coldness and heat, points towards the possibility and desirability of this third way. Maria Margaroni considers this to be one of Kristeva’s intentions in writing *TMA* as

Thérèse’s mysticism is the index of a third pathway leading beyond our contemporary identitarian dead ends; more specifically, beyond both the polyphonic emptiness of a cosmopolitanism that has so far served imperial and market interests as much as beyond the adolescent attachment to rigidified forms of identity.<sup>119</sup>

Thérèse’s body and person become a space for the co-habitation of opposites, as she allows God (/the Other), to fill her with his presence, without fear of what such alterity might reveal about the self. Therefore, ‘contre la dépression Thérèse n’invente pas un antidépresseur, mais une sur-pression qui vous annule [...]; l’objet d’amour [...] vous comble de sa surabondante présence’.<sup>120</sup> The nun transforms absence into overwhelming presence; while the ‘antidépresseur’ already suggests a possible opposition (through the use of the prefix anti-), the ‘sur-pression’ is indicative of a movement beyond antagonisms. Moreover, the fact that this experience does not remain solely at the personal level, but is transposed into historical and literary action (via her monastic founding work, and her writing), puts forward a manner of following this third way in the outside world.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> The young IT engineer justifies her wearing of the veil as a means to assert her identity; if she was denied this right, she was ready ‘à se sacrifier, comme les femmes kamikazes’ (*TMA*, p. 19).

<sup>117</sup> *TMA*, p. 277.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 301.

<sup>119</sup> Maria Margaroni, ‘Julia Kristeva’s Voyage in the Thérésian Continent: The Malady of Love and the Enigma of an Incarnated, Shareable, Smiling Imaginary’, *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy*, 21.1 (2013), 83–104 (p. 99).

<sup>120</sup> *TMA*, p. 265.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

While some of the previous sections suggest that Sylvia constructs a complicity with Thérèse which might exclude the reader, elements such as the markers of orality or the sections in which the narrator disagrees with the nun could facilitate a connection between Sylvia and her audience. The narrative is not always dominated by specialised vocabulary or external references, allowing the reader some moments of respite signposted by various markers of orality: ‘pour l’amour de Dieu’;<sup>122</sup> ‘Ouf’;<sup>123</sup> ‘n’en parlons pas’;<sup>124</sup> ‘c’est mon avis, mais quel passeur’;<sup>125</sup> ‘Relâchement, qui parle de relâchement? [...] car on se gave de friandises chez les carmélites, tout en conversant! Vous ne le saviez pas? Mais si!’.<sup>126</sup> These different manners of address suggest a multi-layering of Sylvia’s character: she is not reading Thérèse from the sole perspective of the psychoanalyst, but instead allows herself to interact with the nun on a less formal level. A similar effect is obtained when Sylvia disagrees with Thérèse. All too often the reader might get the impression that Sylvia is writing Thérèse’s apology in her attempts to render her contemporary. However, the moments when Sylvia challenges Thérèse open the space for the reader to insert his/her own opinions and interpretations. Such an example is Sylvia’s doubting of Thérèse’s act of levitation: ‘je ne connais personne qui en arrive à ces exploits de fakir [...] (léviter tout droite à quelques centimètres du sol) [...] et que vous n’avez pas dédaigné offrir en spectacle à un public *extra muros*, malgré votre prétendue humilité’.<sup>127</sup> Added to this disagreement could be Sylvia’s ironic tone (‘quels lieux dangereux que ces couvents espagnols du Siècle d’or!’),<sup>128</sup> or her favouring of Jean de la Croix, while Thérèse had an inclination for Jérôme Gratien: ‘Vous sentez-vous coupable, Thérèse? Il est temps de vous racheter! Entre vous et moi, Jean mérite mieux que Gratien d’être sauvé’.<sup>129</sup> These humorous remarks allow irony and questioning to be added to Sylvia’s interpretations and boundless admiration for Thérèse.

Another element that could connect the reader to the narrative is food, and the multisensorial experience it entails. Food is a vital element that can generate pleasure as it is experienced via multiple senses. Moreover, according to Ruth Cruickshank:

[s]eeking to assuage physical hunger by the incorporation of foodstuffs simultaneously involves inside and outside; the possibilities of pleasure and of mortal danger; the assertion of subjectivity; and the breaching of the subject’s

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., pp. 153, 190.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 190.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p. 309.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 426.



integrity. Appetite is also inextricable from desire, lack and sexuality [...]; eating and drinking parallel and invite questions of the relationship between self and Other; conscious and unconscious [...].<sup>130</sup>

Food fills in a void and reasserts the need for a connection between self and other: the body (the self) needs to be open to food (the other), as the latter ensures the former's survival. Food also represents the unknown, the threatening, the dangerous, and even the poisonous or the deadly. Nonetheless, the self needs to overcome these fears, as food remains indispensable for life. Depictions of food in fiction add an extra sensorial layer to the reading process, as they can trigger the readers' gustatory memory, and thus increase the accessibility of the text. Therefore, reading is both intellectual and sensorial, as its pleasures mark both the mind and the body. This is aptly depicted in Sylvia's remark: 'Je dis que Thérèse aurait pu aimer ce mets noir [le caviar], l'idée me plaît, elle lui va bien. À son ami Alcántara aussi, noires lumières des châteaux intérieurs'.<sup>131</sup> *Les châteaux intérieurs* refers to one of Thérèse's works, *El Castillo Interior* (*The Interior Castle*), in which she depicts her seven stage journey towards a union with God. Caviar, 'ce mets noir' becomes 'noires lumières des châteaux intérieurs', being more than just nourishment. Food becomes a tool for understanding the inner journey, linking the outside to the inner self, and connecting all the component parts of the body.

Food is also an element shared with others, as meal times in the convent are usually communal.<sup>132</sup> Moreover, pleasure for food makes Thérèse more human, and thus more accessible to the readers. For Sylvia, she becomes 'Thérèse ma gourmande [and] Thérèse ma savoureuse'.<sup>133</sup> Food facilitates her connection to diegetic (the nuns, priests, and even Sylvia) and non-diegetic others (the readers). Pleasure in and passion for food add an extra layer of complexity to her character: she is no longer just a distant saintly figure, with a superior understanding of God, but rather an approachable human being. Food helps Sylvia create her fiction (or what she considers to be 'la biographie multicolore de ma colocataire à ma façon'), adding elements of everyday reality to her text. However, this reality is spatially and temporally bound, further complicating reading: 'Votre sœur Juana va envoyer des dindons. De quoi faire des *ollas podridas* et peut-être même des *salpicones* et des *yemas* à satiété, mon ami Juan sera ravi'.<sup>134</sup> These

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<sup>130</sup> Ruth Cruickshank, 'Eating, Drinking and Re-thinking: Marguerite Duras's *Moderato Cantabile* (1958)', *Forum for Modern Language Study*, 49.3 (2013), 300–12 (p. 301).

<sup>131</sup> *TMA*, p. 352.

<sup>132</sup> Communal meals in *TMA* can be compared to the final chapter of *Virgile, Non*, 'La cuisine des anges', which involves the sharing of food with a large group of women (see Chapter Three for further analysis).

<sup>133</sup> *TMA*, p. 352.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 404.

traditional Spanish dishes are not necessarily the easiest to relate to, Sylvia herself initially needing the help of her 'ami Juan' for further explanations (he was also the one who mentioned the availability of caviar in Avila). Food thus becomes a contributor to the reading *Carmel*: it can help readers relate to Thérèse, but it also generates an intertextual impulse into researching and deciphering regional gastronomical specificities.

Food and writing intersect at a more visceral level, as well. During the first part of her life as a nun, Thérèse saw nausea and vomiting as a form of penance, rendering the boundaries of the self porous through this constant movement between the inside and the outside. During the second half of her life, Thérèse stopped inflicting such harsh expiations upon herself, suggesting an increased ability to integrate the exterior, the other. She comes to terms with this permanent, vital, and yet dangerous intersection of the outside and the inside, of the other and the self. These penances were inflicted using a writing instrument: 'vous vous faites vomir en vous caressant au besoin le fond de la glotte avec une plume d'oie, extravagante écriture'.<sup>135</sup> This 'extravagante écriture' enhances the embodied writing discussed above. Writing is returned to the body via the 'plume d'oie'. Thérèse sees vomiting as a means of ridding the self of unnecessary worldly elements, easing the journey towards the Other. However, this technique is subsequently dropped, once she is able to come to terms with her worldly body. As was shown in the Introduction, both words and food are linked by the use of the mouth,<sup>136</sup> further strengthening the link between Thérèse's writing and her ingestion. Words emerge once ingestion is allowed to follow its course, once food fully penetrates the body, rather than forcefully leaves it. It is words that leave the body, rather than undigested food. The expression 'nom de plume'<sup>137</sup> can be linked to Thérèse's situation: while she does not write under a pseudonym, the 'plume' facilitates her emergence as an author, once she stops using it as an instrument for penance infliction. The body represents the source of both her sufferings and her pleasures, and thus the body becomes the preferred vehicle for reaching the other. Thérèse can make sense of both herself and the other by writing the experiences of her body; embodied writing becomes a privileged source of (self-) knowledge.

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., p. 496.

<sup>136</sup> Still, 'Language as Hospitality', p. 115.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., p. 124 (Still develops an analysis of writerly signatures, names and hospitality in relation to Derrida's work and biography).

A similar type of interaction with the other is revealed by the water imagery, as water inundates the porous boundary between self and other, between mind and body. If Thérèse is a ‘femme vase’ [avec un] corps féminin creux’,<sup>138</sup> then she needs to find something to fill this void. This vital element is water, which for Thérèse is simultaneously interior — ‘l’eau qui jaillit de mes entrailles’<sup>139</sup> — and exterior, ‘l’eau [...] qui me vient d’en haut pour s’engloutir’.<sup>140</sup> Water is neither identified with God (the Other), nor with the self (Thérèse), but rather fills the void between the two, occupying the space ‘entre le Ciel du Verbe et le vide d’un corps féminin avide’.<sup>141</sup> Because water is moving, changing, both visible and invisible, it can never be captured in its entirety, it can never fully construct a border between self and other:

Perçue par la bouche et la peau, essentiellement gustative et tactile, l’eau est la fiction par excellence de son corps pensé-touché par l’Autre, pensant-touchant l’Autre. C’est l’élément privilégié d’une réciprocité sans symétrie, qui réalise le contact du milieu extérieur avec la profondeur intérieure. Elle révèle aussi que le corps de l’orante est un corps-orifices et un corps-peau qui opère à proximité et entre continûment en vibration avec tout ce qui l’affecte.<sup>142</sup>

As was shown above, Thérèse is able to create, via her intellectual visions, an alternative third space where the self and the other can coexist. A central element enabling this cohabitation is the water metaphor. Water is penetrating and boundary-breaking, but does not break the unity of the self, it goes through its pores and orifices. Water is also transformative: the water reaching the soil that is Thérèse (*terre – terra – ground, earth*) transforms her into a garden. Water is not a substitute for God, as the latter is the Creator. Water enables the connection and transformation of both Thérèse and the Other; water is the story, the fiction created by and between the two.<sup>143</sup> Writing the fiction together, in a manner that mirrors the vitality of water, becomes essential for survival.<sup>144</sup> Just as water ensures survival, so does fiction become ‘[un] élément vital’.<sup>145</sup> Water is further associated with gardens and flowers, as Sylvia puts together a short list of quotations from authors as varied as Omar Khayyam, Dante, Shakespeare, and Sollers, all exploring floral imagery. She thus allows Thérèse the opportunity to enter an intertextual dialogue with these (secular) literary figures, inscribing her *œuvre* in a possible succession. Moreover,

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<sup>138</sup> *TMA*, p. 303.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114; see also Julia Kristeva, *La Passion selon Thérèse d’Avila* <<http://www.kristeva.fr/passion.html>> [accessed 19 May 2017].

<sup>144</sup> A more developed discussion of Thérèse’s relation to the Other, via the mediation of water, is present in Daroczi, “Thérèse mon amour”.

<sup>145</sup> *TMA*, p. 115.

Sylvia herself appropriates the water and garden metaphors, as an explanation for her own interpretations: ‘j’écoute, je lis, j’absorbe, je m’approprié, je cultive mon jardin’,<sup>146</sup> in a manner similar to Candide at the end of his exploits. Sylvia casts light on her own reading process: as an attentive reader, she absorbs the text and then fertilises her own life with it. Understanding involves both the senses and the intellect, transforming reading into a sensorio-intellectual creative process.

The reader is encouraged to take up such a sensorio-intellectual reading process, by following the examples set by Thérèse, Sylvia, and Kristeva. By looking at how the protagonists themselves read and write, the readers can question and potentially alter their own reading processes. However, reading *TMA* necessitates the development and actualisation of a complex set of reading skills, as the readers need to engage with multiple genres, unpack complex intertextual links, and navigate a liminal space at the intersection of the diegesis with the real world. Reading *TMA* is a dynamic process, pulling and pushing the readers in and out of the text. This push and pull leads to various tensions, as the reader is caught between pleasure (or even *jouissance*) and possible abandonment of the text. A similar tension is present in *MàB*, but with an added pressure produced by the use of the detective framework.

### **Kristeva’s detective novel — hospitable text or Trojan Horse?**

According to industry statistics, the detective novel occupies a strong position in the top five of readers’ preferences, regardless of gender or age group.<sup>147</sup> This highly popular genre is dominated by specific rules and formulae, as ‘a mystery detective story usually contains a detective of some kind, an unresolved mystery (not always technically a crime), and an investigation by which the mystery is eventually solved’.<sup>148</sup> An important part of Kristeva’s fiction falls within the parameters of this genre,<sup>149</sup> often to the surprise of critics, who challenge both the decision to venture into the field of fiction, and the choice of genre.<sup>150</sup> However, when relating this choice to Kristeva’s previous theoretical work,

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>147</sup> Ipsos MediaCT, *Les Français et la lecture*, p. 19.

<sup>148</sup> Rzepka, *Detective Fiction*, p. 10.

<sup>149</sup> *Le Vieil Homme et les loups*, *Possessions*, and *Meurtre à Byzance* are all detective novels.

<sup>150</sup> Bianca Rus, ‘Remapping the European Cultural Memory: the Case of Julia Kristeva’s *Murder in Byzantium*’, *Atlantis* 35.1 (2010), 15–24 (p. 16), and Benigno Trigo, ‘Noir Analysis. How Kristeva’s Detective Novels Renew Psychoanalysis’, *Cultural Critique*, 80 (2012), 27–55 (p. 27).

King considers the abject as a recurrent theme<sup>151</sup> worthy of exploration in crime fiction: ‘the abject, a human entity, rather than a person, who is powerless, connectionless, in both thought and action, a terrible threat to others, and so a natural topic for crime fiction’.<sup>152</sup> Similar connections to Kristeva’s previous works were noted by Trigo, who observes that the first detective novel — *Le Vieil Homme et les loups* — picks up where *Les Samourais* (Kristeva’s first novel) left off, in the fall of 1989.<sup>153</sup> Moreover, the three detective novels to date share their main investigators (journalist Stéphanie Delacour and Inspector Northrop Rilsky). Midttun goes as far as suggesting that Kristeva dedicated the nineties to novelistic writing, following her psychoanalytic trilogy in the eighties.<sup>154</sup> Kristeva considers that this continuation exists at the thematic level as well: ‘I think I explore the same area of problems even in my novels. That is, the difficulty of being a woman, in *Possessions*, and the difficulty of being a stranger, in my last book, *Meurtre à Byzance*’.<sup>155</sup> Other critics consider the choice of genre as an opportunity to explore complex ideas in a highly marketable genre.<sup>156</sup> However, editorial statistics available for *MàB* do not seem to support the view that Kristeva’s adaptation of the detective genre was successful on the market, at the time of its publication.<sup>157</sup> Regardless of sales numbers, one of the significant issues at stake is Kristeva’s understanding of the genre. She does not fully adhere to the detective genre conventions and formulae, raising the question of whether she is writing a detective novel, or an anti-detective one, casting confusion upon readers’ expectations, and the space they are allowed to occupy within the text.

Despite its formulaic character, the detective novel allows for a high degree of reader participation and involvement. Linda Hutcheon considers the reader as the detective’s counterpart, since ‘the logical deductions demanded of the reader place him more often in the shoes of the detective himself, be he an active investigator or an arm-chair wizard’.<sup>158</sup> The reader is simultaneously reading an account of the investigation, as

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<sup>151</sup> Kristeva developed a theory of the abject in her 1980 work *Powers of Horror*.

<sup>152</sup> Stephen King, *Crime Fiction, 1800–2000. Detection, Death, Diversity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 207, italics mine.

<sup>153</sup> Trigo, ‘Noir Analysis’, p. 38.

<sup>154</sup> Birgitte Huitfeldt Midttun, ‘Crossing the Borders: An Interview with Julia Kristeva’, *Hypatia*, 21.4 (2006), 164–77 (p. 165).

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

<sup>156</sup> Dana Cipău, ‘La Politique postmoderniste dans le roman de Julia Kristeva “Meurtre à Byzance”’, *Confluente* (2008), 21–24 (p. 21).

<sup>157</sup> <[http://www.edistat.com/livre\\_tarifs.php?ean=9782213616315](http://www.edistat.com/livre_tarifs.php?ean=9782213616315)> [accessed 3 October 2016]. According to these statistics, *MàB* was present in the top 200 of all publications in metropolitan France for only 2 weeks, with its best position being 152. When only looking at fiction and excluding pocket editions, the novel was present for a mere 4 weeks in the top 50, with the highest position being 36 (held for a week).

<sup>158</sup> Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 73.

well as trying to answer the whodunnit question by interpreting the available clues. Due to this double-reading, Rzepka considers that

the only person with whom one feels truly competitive, moment to moment, is the detective, not the author who has devised the competition, or the criminal who is (imaginatively) the object of pursuit. Both author and criminal, after all, can be presumed to know the solution to the mystery from the outset.<sup>159</sup>

In terms of the availability of knowledge, the reader and the detective have to move from almost no knowledge to full knowledge of the whodunnit (including who, how, and why), whereas the writer and the criminal need to obscure or complicate the route to such closure. Moreover, the reader does not necessarily look forward to closure, since ‘what we desire in reading detection is the prolongation of opportunities for induction [...] for imagining a variety of arrays’.<sup>160</sup> This sets the classical detection tale apart from other genres as a type of fiction ‘designed to induce the reader to invent, moment by moment as many retrospective arrays to match the continuous emergence of new narrative information’.<sup>161</sup> However, this constant task of invention is very similar to writing, complicating Rzepka’s view that the reader is the double of the detective, and the author the double of the criminal. The reader is not just investigating, but also inventing stories, writing fiction — he is both detective and writer. The extent to which (s)he is allowed to carry out his/her first role determines the freedom of creation/writing that (s)he subsequently has.

It is at this point that Kristeva’s adoption of the detective genre becomes problematic, as she does not always allow the reader to become fully the double of the detective. There is often not enough space for the reader’s invention, as Kristeva provides too much information, too quickly. However, this observation is only valid if we consider *MàB* mainly as a detective story. The manner in which the investigation is sometimes relegated to the background, and the fact that it is only in the second half of the novel that we are introduced to the murderer could suggest that the criminal investigation is not Kristeva’s main concern. Often, she seems to be using the framework of the genre to carry out an investigation into the psyche, and into the situation of the other/ the stranger/ the marginal. While Rzepka acknowledges that rule subversion in detective fiction ‘enhances the challenge of the puzzle element’,<sup>162</sup> Kristeva does not just turn formulae on their head,

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<sup>159</sup> Rzepka, *Detective Fiction*, p. 14.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

but rather seizes the entire detective framework, taking advantage of its highly metafictional character.<sup>163</sup> Although it is true that genre conventions have shifted over time, Kristeva does not necessarily contribute to this generic change, but rather approaches the detective novel in an idiosyncratic manner. In Kristeva's work, the murder investigation is complementary to the investigation of reading and writing processes, and to questionings of the self and of the other. This raises important issues regarding readers' expectations, as the pleasure of reading does not come from logical inductions and piecing together of clues, but rather from searching beyond (or behind) genre frameworks, and looking into individual responses to crime, violence, and the other. Thus, for Kristeva, the detective story becomes an extension of psychoanalysis. Most often, the detective story is dominated by human violence, differing significantly from the safe space of the therapist's couch. Therefore, the responses triggered by the detective story would be difficult to obtain *sur le divan*. Nonetheless, these responses still enhance our explorations of the human psyche.

*Pushing the limits of genre and the mise-en-abîme of reading and writing*

Despite its focus on crime, the detective novel is seen to be an optimistic genre — 'le polar est un genre optimiste'<sup>164</sup> — as it allows the detective (and by extrapolation the reader) to know and tackle the source of evil. This remark, made by Stéphanie (the investigative journalist in, and occasional narrator of *MàB*) at the end of *MàB*, contributes to the self-reflexiveness of the text. On several occasions, textual references hint towards the type of fiction we are reading (or rather, we think we are reading): 'dans *un roman*, on aurait dit que Numéro Huit était son alter ego',<sup>165</sup> pointing towards the trope of the detective as the double of the criminal. References to the specific type of *roman* being created/ read are also present:

Comme un *roman policier*, la vie elle-même a besoin de 'décrochages' pour être lisible, vivable. Ne pas suivre les mêmes pistes, les mêmes idées: une bonne enquête [...] nécessite une seconde idée latérale pour se développer: Patricia Highsmith en avait fait même une règle dans l'art du suspense.<sup>166</sup>

<sup>163</sup> For a discussion of the detective story as metafiction, or narcissistic narrative, see Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, 'Chapter Five', pp. 71–86.

<sup>164</sup> *MàB*, p. 372, and Maria Margaroni, 'Byzantium: the Future Anterior of Europe?', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 18.2 (2007), 223–225 (p. 223).

<sup>165</sup> *MàB*, p. 64, italics mine.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179, italics mine.

The idea of *décrochages* or divagations to better approach the investigation finds a rightful place in the category of genre norms and formulae discussed above. Moreover, Kristeva's use of Patricia Highsmith's essay on the art of suspense to back up the narrative development<sup>167</sup> further inscribes the text into the detective genre.

Underlining Patricia Highsmith's status as an authority (it must be noted that the above quotation belongs to Part IV, whose epigraph is a quotation from Highsmith's *L'Art du suspense, mode d'emploi*) highlights the gendered nature of detective fiction, popularly associated with women writers. Jasper notices that 'female writers of detective fiction [...] are thick on the ground',<sup>168</sup> further inscribing Kristeva's work into an existing tradition of women's writing of detective fiction. This tradition is highlighted in the text itself: 'un roman policier, bien avant Agatha Christie, Patricia Cornwell et autres Mary Higgins Clark'.<sup>169</sup> Kristeva tries to innovate from within the tradition, disturbing established conventions. The idea of divagations also becomes pertinent when studying Kristeva's adaptation of the detective novel, as historical and philosophical divagations seem to be her staple. Cipău believes that these divagations from or additions to the detective plot allow for 'lectures plurielles capables de satisfaire les goûts des lecteurs plus exigeants'.<sup>170</sup> This approach can nonetheless have its drawbacks, as too many divagations might obscure the detective plot.

This obscuring becomes problematic only if the text is meant to be a detective novel. However, labels such as 'total novel' or 'a detective novel [with] poetic sequences'<sup>171</sup> suggest a mix of genres. Kristeva herself attests to *MàB* being a multi-genre, polyvocal, and multi-spatial novel: 'En effet *Meurtre à Byzance* est à la fois un polar métaphysique, un roman historique, un récit lyrique et une satire sociale'.<sup>172</sup> This complexity puts forward 'obstacles to the reader who wants to find [...] solutions to the future'<sup>173</sup> (by 'solutions to the future' Trigo refers to solutions to contemporary and future societal concerns). Despite its optimistic outlook, Kristeva's detective novel does not offer solutions, but rather a method of questioning and self-questioning. The 'œil de

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<sup>167</sup> The scene preceding this section is a dinner between Stéphanie, Rilsky and Foulques Weil, the French ambassador to Santa-Barbara, with little or no connection to the investigation. However, Weil will become important towards the end of the novel, as he assists the investigators while they are in France.

<sup>168</sup> Jasper, 'Murder in Byzantium', p. 235.

<sup>169</sup> *MàB*, p. 143.

<sup>170</sup> Cipău, 'La politique postmoderniste', p. 23.

<sup>171</sup> Huitfeldt Midttun, 'Crossing the Borders', p. 171 and Helena Bodin, 'Seeking Byzantium on the Borders of Narration, Identity, Space and Time in Julia Kristeva's Novel *Murder in Byzantium*', *Nordlit*, 13.1 (2009), 31–44 (see p. 33 for a discussion of the 'total novel' / 'anti-Da Vinci Code').

<sup>172</sup> Kristeva, *La Haine et le pardon*, p. 612.

<sup>173</sup> Trigo, 'Noir analysis', p. 46.



flic/de détective'<sup>174</sup> is not always directed outside himself or herself, but rather towards the inside; the methodology of the detective investigation being applied to self-discovery and self-knowledge. This would ensure a complementarity between detective work and psychoanalysis, rather than a replacement of one by the other, as is the case with Rilsky: 'On s'inventait détective, par exemple, plutôt que de faire une analyse'.<sup>175</sup> However, the role played by detective work in this complementary relation is put into question, when Stéphanie talks about Sebastian's own novel: 'Sebastian Chrest-Jones [...] se moque de sa science en s'exploitant dans ce polar qu'est devenue sa vie, à moins qu'il ne se moque du polar tout en se servant d'un genre mineur pour faire le siège de ladite mémoire.'<sup>176</sup> The idea that the writer is mocking the detective genre and is using it to his own ends raises questions about the text we are reading: is Kristeva also mocking the genre, and using it merely as a platform for testing her theoretical concepts? If the author mocks the genre, what sort of relationship can exist between the author and the readers, the latter approaching the text expecting to encounter particular genre norms?<sup>177</sup> It is at this juncture between genre norms and parody that the text can slip from hospitable to hostile.

Both *MàB* and *TMA* have reading and writing at their core, with the protagonists simultaneously reading and writing works themselves. Moreover, the texts they read are available as an intertext outside the diegesis (for example Thérèse's works, or Anne Comnène's *Alexiade*), but the texts they write are not, as, by the end of the diegesis, neither Sylvia nor Stéphanie seems to have finished writing her own work. The reader is put in a position where (s)he reads about other people reading and/or writing. However, this *mise-en-abyme* can also act as an example for how the reader should approach the texts: Sylvia's approach to Thérèse's texts can inform our method of reading *TMA*; whereas Stéphanie's discovery of both Sebastian's unfinished novel and Anne's *Alexiade* influences the text she wants to write, and the way she relates to the investigation (almost replacing her investigative newspaper article with a *polar*). Bodin notices that in *MàB*, Kristeva actualises the concept of intertextuality,<sup>178</sup> as her novel is in a constant intertextual connection with other texts (the *Alexiade* and Sebastian's novel). Stéphanie is the one who weaves these intertextual threads, whilst creating her own text. Her own text is both born out of intertextuality and open to it, as it becomes a 'road map',<sup>179</sup> rather

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<sup>174</sup> *MàB*, pp. 268, 308.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 333.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 353.

<sup>177</sup> This question will be dealt with in more detail in the last section of this chapter.

<sup>178</sup> Bodin, 'Seeking Byzantium', p. 35.

<sup>179</sup> Rus, 'Remapping the European Cultural Memory', p. 19.

than the story of a journey having reached its destination. These observations remain valid for *TMA*, with Sylvia undertaking a similar process to Stéphanie — reading, followed by writing.

The entry into Kristeva's detective universe is marked early on, with Stéphanie's arrival in Santa-Barbara (the fictional country where all of Kristeva's detective novels are set), in the opening lines of the first chapter: 'Une fois de plus, mon chef de service me refilait son inévitable paquet: *L'Événement de Paris* a besoin de Stéphanie Delacour à Santa-Barbara! Notre envoyée spéciale doit se dépêcher! Un scoop, ma chère Stéphanie: les sectes, vous me suivez?'.<sup>180</sup> While these opening lines inform the readers familiar with Kristeva's fiction of their entry into a detective fiction (Stéphanie investigated crimes in the two previous novels, both of them set in Santa-Barbara), they also mark a first *mise-en-abyme* of writing in general, as Stéphanie's findings will become the material for her future newspaper articles.

However, writing becomes more than just a job, it has a direct effect on the body: 'encore hier Audrey me faisait remarquer que je n'arrêtais pas de rajeunir —, "c'est l'écriture, je pense", sublimait-elle en souriant à peine, cette petite Audrey'.<sup>181</sup> This can be linked to a similar image in *TMA*, as others observe that 'Sylvia Leclercq a du tonus',<sup>182</sup> an energy which she attributes to her reading of Thérèse. Writing and reading are not seen as merely intellectual endeavours, but rather as directly affecting the bodies of the protagonists. Moreover, they do not just leave their mark on the body, but also come from the body: 'l'histoire lui passait par le corps, à celle-là [Anne] — ses larmes, ses humeurs, les intrigues du palais, la lutte avec son frère Jean'.<sup>183</sup> Anne's body becomes a mediator, a filter for historical events before they are committed to paper. Anne, considered by Sebastian as 'la première des intellectuelles, peut-être même le premier des historiens modernes',<sup>184</sup> mixes personal and shared histories in her work, complementing the 'point de vue latin'<sup>185</sup> on the Crusades. Her embodied writing enhances her personal view point, and adds to the historical narrative.

Stéphanie takes this idea further, considering that Anne's body survives only for as long as she is writing: 'Personne ne connaît la date de sa mort; la princesse finit d'écrire en 1148, donc elle est morte et point final. [...] *Alexiade*, le seul tombeau connu

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<sup>180</sup> *MàB*, p. 15.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>182</sup> *TMA*, p. 78.

<sup>183</sup> *MàB*, p. 44.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

d'Anne'.<sup>186</sup> Her life (and by extension, her body) and her work are so closely linked, that the end of the latter becomes the end of the former as well. This inextricable connection between writing and survival (/life/body) mirrors Anne's double exile, both physical and intellectual: banished from court to prevent her from taking the throne, she finds refuge in the monastery (physical), and in writing (intellectual). While writing ensures her posterity (and her father's), it also reflects the interdiction to engage actively in the political life of her time (exile from court meant she had the time and availability to write). The *Alexiade* mirrors Anne's intellectual and creative freedom (writing as a woman), alongside the political restrictions imposed on her (exile from court). Her work achieves its full potential almost a millennium later, when it is actualised by Sebastian's and Stéphanie's reading, interpretation, and re-writing. Considering the *Alexiade* as the 'seul tombeau connu d'Anne' further links her to Thérèse. As shown earlier, Sylvia is only able to accept the idea that Thérèse's body did not decompose after burial, if she relates it to the fact that the saint's body lives in her writing (rather than attributing this absence of decomposition to a divine miracle, as was done at the time). Both Anne and Thérèse wrote their bodies into their texts, which helps them escape the damaging effects of time.

However, the association between text and *tombeau* might be inadequate, as the texts are shown to be alive and changing, and marking readers centuries later. Even the people who are meant to be buried in the texts (i.e. Anne) can be re-membered, re-created or resurrected:

Et il [Sebastian] refait l'histoire en même temps que le corps de la princesse, son destin entier, bref, tout ce qui pour Anne se confond avec sa pensée, comme un peintre refait son modèle. Songe à Renoir qui transforme ses bonnes d'enfants charnues en Vénus sorties des eaux. Ou aux baigneuses de Cézanne que le maître visionne en androgynes – certains disent en travelos.<sup>187</sup>

Reading is not just a way of unpacking, de-constructing the text, but also of re-constructing the characters. Reading undoes and pieces back together the stories, in a manner unique to each reader. The comparison with the painters' work becomes illuminating: Renoir recasts the governesses as sensual beauties, whereas Cézanne transforms the women bathers into androgynous figures, or even transvestites; their bodies are used to represent completely different characters. While this constant re-construction can account for the originality of each reading, explaining Sebastian's obsession with Anne (as he discovers a different body/ character each time he re-reads the text), it does not necessarily elucidate what sort of reading we should be engaging in:

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., p. 188.

is Sebastian's reconstruction experiment an extreme of the reading process, or rather a total reading? Sebastian also gives reading between the lines a new meaning, as he fills the textual gaps with the overwhelming presence of Ebrard (who is never mentioned in the *Alexiade*), whom he considers to be his ancestor — 'Ebrard qui vivait une seconde vie à côté de sa vraie vie, *emmurée dans le non-dit de l'Alexiade*'.<sup>188</sup> Absence, *le non-dit*, becomes an overwhelming presence, as Sebastian fills in these gaps with the fiction he created, or rather the fictional ancestry that would bring him closer to Anne. Therefore, he considers (and manages to convince Stéphanie) that '[l']*Alexiade* est un savant camouflage des amours d'autrefois',<sup>189</sup> a camouflage for Anne's hypothetical love for an unmentioned man.

Writing as camouflage requires a particular type of reading, possibly a reading as investigation. This would bring us back full circle to Kristeva's own text, camouflaged as detective fiction. However, camouflaged writing is not accessible to all readers, as the text seems to suggest that only Sebastian and Stéphanie discern Ebrard's presence in Anne's text, even though neither his name, nor the army he belonged to in reality are ever mentioned in the *Alexiade*. These discoveries then fuel their own writing: 'Il [Rilsky] laissera croire à Stéphanie que ce roman d'Anne, le roman de Sebastian, et maintenant le roman de Stéphanie elle-même le passionnent'.<sup>190</sup> Fiction becomes self-perpetuating in 'le flot d'Anne-Stéphanie-Sebastian'.<sup>191</sup> Despite the fact that Rilsky is not fully absorbed by this *mise-en-abyme* of fiction ('il laissera croire'), the latter does have the potential to change his view on the investigation: 'l'hypothèse de Sebastian en serial killer, qu'il avait été prêt à abandonner en écoutant le roman d'Anne selon Sebastian, lui-même revu et corrigé par Stéphanie'.<sup>192</sup> After listening to Sebastian's and Stéphanie's *romans*, Rilsky starts to question his previous blaming of Sebastian ('l'hypothèse de Sebastian en serial killer'). Reading and writing encourage a new way of seeing things, which is further highlighted by Stéphanie: 'Je ne suis ni flic ni psy, *je vois les choses comme je les écris*, un peu à la façon de Sebastian lui-même ou presque'.<sup>193</sup> Writing is equated with vision, suggesting that fiction helps us construct the world around us. Stéphanie's choice of words '*je vois les choses comme je les écris*,' rather than *j'écris les choses comme je les vois* intimates that she has no mediator between writing and knowing the world; the world

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid., p. 254, italics mine.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., p. 222.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., p. 216; while 'roman' could metaphorically be used to refer to Stéphanie's fantasy, she does decide to undertake a wider writing project: from her investigative newspaper articles to a novel.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., p. 214.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., p. 237.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., p. 359, italics mine.

is not initially filtered by the senses (i.e. vision), but directly connected to writing. Writing itself becomes the mediator between the world and the body. As a result, '[m]oi, Stéphanie Delacour, j'écris ce polar métaphysique ou psychologique, je ne sais, avec mon indiscernable humour'.<sup>194</sup> Her work is *metaphysical* because it is the text that makes sense of the world, rather than the body. The 'indiscernable humour' brings her closer to the above-mentioned idea of camouflage, as the traces of humour are hidden, or barely visible.

Nonetheless, Stéphanie knows her novel will have to infiltrate the French literary market:

Ah, les romans, il [Bondy, le rédacteur en chef de Stéphanie] s'en moque, et moi aussi! Depuis que je suis rentrée à Paris, impossible de les éviter, nous sommes une nation littéraire, mille deux cents trente-quatre romans rien qu'à la rentrée de septembre, les gens en parlent à la télé, aux dîners, font même semblant d'en lire dans le métro. La mode est au *clean* et au *trash*, souvent l'un et l'autre, l'envers et l'endroit, au *hard sex* et à la dérision, et encore *clean*, *trash*, *hard sex* et dérision en *reality* littérature – 'autofiction', qu'ils disent.<sup>195</sup>

This, again, ties in with Kristeva's constant criticism of the *société du spectacle*, which permeates both this novel, and *TMA*, alongside some of her theoretical works.<sup>196</sup> Literature becomes a mere commodity, a marketable product that Stéphanie is unable and unwilling to produce. The quantity of books sold, and the subsequent discussions they trigger, are not a marker of aesthetic quality, as the texts remain characterised by clean and/or trash language, or hard sex. Fashion and spectacle affect literature by transforming it into 'reality literature', which is provocatively associated with autofiction. A similar emphasis on fashion and trends of the *rentrée* appears in *TMA*, alongside a derogatory remark about autofiction: 'la littérature n'a qu'à se plier au vent du temps. [...] [L]a guerre des sexes dont raffolent les autofictions des femmes violées, petites filles abusées qui en redemandent'.<sup>197</sup> The *rentrée* becomes a synecdoche for the entire French literary institution, which the protagonists see as subordinated to the *société de spectacle*. They also set their own writing (and, by extrapolation, Kristeva's) outside this tendency, thus presenting it as marginal to literary trends. However, the references to autofiction can become contentious, if we consider Kristeva's autobiographical projections (in both *TMA* and *MàB*, as well as in the rest of her fiction). As the concept of autofiction is not developed (in *MàB*) beyond the idea that it contains a reflection of the events and

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., p. 343.

<sup>196</sup> For a brief overview of Kristeva's analysis of the *société du spectacle* in her theoretical works, see Noëlle McAfee, *Julia Kristeva* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 106–12.

<sup>197</sup> *TMA*, p. 320

language of societal reality, it becomes difficult to assess the differences between autofiction on the one hand, and Kristevan doubles and autobiographical projections, on the other. Most critics emphasise these projections as part of the Kristevan message and project, with Ivantcheva-Merjanska considering Kristeva's Santa-Barbara trilogy as 'une série de "romans autobiographiques" dans le sens de Philippe Lejeune'.<sup>198</sup> The category of 'romans autobiographiques', according to Lejeune's classification, is characterised by a mixture of personal and fictional stories, having various degrees of fictionality alongside autobiographical elements (autobiography, by contrast, has no such degrees).<sup>199</sup> Nonetheless, this categorisation does not help the reader establish a qualitative difference between autobiographical projection and autofiction. Kristeva herself admits that '*Meurtre à Byzance* might well be my most autobiographical [...]. [T]here are several *autobiographical elements* within the novel. But in the manner of *fiction*'.<sup>200</sup> Given that this mix of messages constantly blurs the lines between fiction, autofiction, and autobiography, achieving definitional clarity might not be possible. Thus, one of the few options available is to analyse the purpose of these autobiographical projections in Kristeva's work.

If in *TMA*, Sylvia was clearly Kristeva's alter ego, in *MàB*, both Stéphanie and Sebastian are related to the author. Stéphanie summarises her trajectory as 'la brillante étudiante en philo que je fus d'abord, de chinois ensuite, la structuraliste de choc dans le rôle de laquelle je me suis amusée un petit moment'.<sup>201</sup> This closely mirrors Kristeva's path, both she and Stéphanie having started off as a 'philosophe-linguiste-sémiologue',<sup>202</sup> with Stéphanie adding 'journaliste d'investigation pour en finir'<sup>203</sup> to her portfolio. If we turn towards Sebastian, we observe that his Bulgarian origin is an additional reference to Kristeva's background. This is further reflected in their surnames (*Chrest-Jones* and *Kristeva*), both sharing the word *cross* as a common root. All three of them — Stéphanie, Sebastian, and Kristeva — resort to fiction to carry out their detective, historical, and philosophical investigations, respectively.

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<sup>198</sup> Irene Ivantcheva-Merjanska, 'Cheminements vers l'identité européenne: l'autre langue, la psychanalyse, le dialogue et le roman dans *Meurtre à Byzance* et dans des essais de Julia Kristeva', *Cincinnati Romance Review*, 35 (2013), 49–74 (p. 52).

<sup>199</sup> Philippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte Autobiographique. Nouvelle édition augmentée* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1996), p. 25.

<sup>200</sup> Huitfeldt Midttun, 'Crossing the Borders', p. 176, italics mine.

<sup>201</sup> *MàB*, p. 129.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

There is a deeper level of autobiographical projection that can only be discerned if the reader is knowledgeable about Kristeva's work and paranarrative interventions (i.e. interviews, commentaries etc.). For example, nomadism is a state relished by Stéphanie, Sebastian, and Kristeva:

Je ne me sens vraiment chez moi qu'en avion, loin des racines et entourées d'inconnus, sans frontières: à cette altitude, l'espace n'est à personne.<sup>204</sup>  
[Stéphanie]

Sebastian Chrest-Jones se rendit brusquement compte que cette situation de survol était la seule qui lui convenait dans la vie, il serait même allé jusqu'à dire qu'elle était son élément.<sup>205</sup>

Ce roman [*Meurtre à Byzance*] s'est écrit plus de huit ans durant. Cela a commencé par une rêverie sur mon nomadisme: l'étrange plaisir que j'éprouvais à me sentir 'chez moi' dans les avions.<sup>206</sup>

This detachment is closely related to Kristeva's work on the self and the other;<sup>207</sup> occupying a space in-between (between departure and destination), or being uprooted (for example, when flying, or in a wider understanding, when being a migrant) encourages a self-analysis that helps bring to light the otherness within. Therefore, 'dans la philosophie créative de Kristeva, il est nécessaire d'être étranger, c'est-à-dire traducteur puisqu'il faut être capable d'interpréter le sensible pour écrire'.<sup>208</sup> This explains why Kristeva's fiction is populated by protagonists who assume the 'rôle du traducteur, de l'étranger, du psy, de l'investigateur, du journaliste, de toutes ces figures qui essaient sans cesse de mettre à jour la vérité de notre inquiétante étrangeté'.<sup>209</sup> They are all translators, or interpreters of different fields, understanding the world around them through the lens of self-analysis. However, if we take into account the fact that the reader is a type of translator, as we saw in the Introduction, and the double of the detective as shown above, then the reader can occupy a privileged position in Kristeva's plethora of 'others'. The reader is simultaneously facing the 'inquiétante étrangeté' of the characters, as well as his/ her own *Unheimlich*.

This double responsibility can have both creative and destructive consequences. The former type of consequence is exemplified by Stéphanie, who channels the

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<sup>204</sup> *MàB*, p. 111.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26

<sup>206</sup> Kristeva, *La Haine et le pardon*, p. 634; references to aeroplanes as the preferred space for those considered 'other' appear in *Étrangers à nous-mêmes* (p. 18) as well: 'L'espace de l'étranger est un train en marche, un avion en vol, la transition même qui exclut l'arrêt. De repères, point.'

<sup>207</sup> While *Étrangers à nous-mêmes* deals exclusively with this subject, most of Kristeva's fictions also tackle issues relating to difference, alterity and otherness.

<sup>208</sup> Ivantcheva-Merjanska, 'Cheminements', p. 62.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

interrogations developed through reading in her subsequent writing. The latter is mirrored by Sebastian's endeavours. His creative efforts surpass the boundaries of the body and of memory, striving for a totality — 'Sebastian, ou l'habitat agrandi jusqu'à la mémoire des ancêtres'<sup>210</sup> — that, in the end, proves to be devastating. Rilsky occupies a similar position to Stéphanie, but his manner of dealing with the *Unheimlich* is connected to his work as an investigator, and as such, anchored in everyday reality. Thus, at the end of the novel, in reply to Stéphanie's 'je me voyage',<sup>211</sup> Rilsky observes: 'Tu ne peux pas parler comme tout le monde? Nous voyageons, c'est déjà énorme'.<sup>212</sup> He brings forth an important issue relating to reception: often, the reader cannot perceive the full extent of the author's insight due to the language used. Whilst 'parler comme tout le monde' risks falling into the category of '*reality littérature*' Kristeva warns against, it can also ensure a wider reception and understanding. However, 'nous voyageons' can be seen as more than just a reference to the romance between Rilsky and Stéphanie. 'Nous voyageons' and 'se voyager' are two complementary and simultaneous endeavours, knowing the other contributes to knowing the self and vice-versa, in an ongoing journey of (self-) discovery. Whilst reading can be a useful manner of 'se voyager' the shared dimension should not be overlooked, the 'nous' should not be excluded from the reading process.<sup>213</sup> This shared or communal approach to reading can be linked to *TMA*, and to the reading *Carmel*, further enhancing understanding.

Stéphanie's focus on the self-in-progress does tie in with Kristeva's preference for the 'roman du Sujet' — 'si je me sens d'emblée plus à l'aise dans le roman du Sujet que dans le roman du Moi, est-ce à cause de la psychanalyse'.<sup>214</sup> For Kristeva (as for Lacan), the subject is in progress, whereas the *Moi* is stable ego. Distinguishing between *le Sujet* and *le Moi* can partly explain the difference between Kristeva's work and autofiction,<sup>215</sup> but it cannot be ignored that *le Moi* facilitates the move towards *le Sujet*. This is further enhanced by a childhood memory shared by both Stéphanie and Kristeva: 'Souvent, le dimanche après-midi, j'accompagnais papa aux matches de foot'<sup>216</sup> / 'J'essayais de dire que l'image la plus vraie de "mon histoire" était une photo prise à un

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<sup>210</sup> *MàB*, p. 359.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 372.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 372.

<sup>213</sup> Reading as a group, or as a pair/ a couple/ as 'nous' can be linked to the idea of the reading *Carmel* analysed in relation to *TMA*.

<sup>214</sup> Kristeva, *La Haine et le pardon*, p. 610.

<sup>215</sup> *Le roman du Moi* is closer to autofiction, while Kristeva's metaphysical novel deals with *le Sujet*. However, it cannot be overlooked that an understanding of *le sujet* passes through *le moi*.

<sup>216</sup> *MàB*, p. 124.



match de foot avec mon père, à Sofia'.<sup>217</sup> The photograph becomes important for both women, as it allows them to distance themselves from the *Moi*, and to consider it from the perspective of the *Sujet*. They are able to observe their own self from the outside, from the position of the other. The photograph encourages detachment, transforming the *Moi* into a *Sujet* that can be freely explored. They look at the *Moi* from an outside perspective, without completely ignoring their personal connections to the *Moi*.

The *Sujet* remains linked to the *Moi*, otherwise it would simply become *autre*; a similar effort to distance herself from the *Moi* can be discerned in Kristeva's embedding of autobiographical details in the text. Yeung notes that the character of *Numéro 8*, or *l'Infini* does not just point towards Kristeva's interest in sinology,<sup>218</sup> but also towards her husband, 'as the Infinite is the pet name for the majority of the projects in thought [sic] of Philippe Sollers'.<sup>219</sup> A similar hidden reference links *MàB* to Kristeva's first novel, *Les Samouraïs*. Hermine, Sebastian's wife, remembers that a particular memory from his travels to Bulgaria, linked to his visits to Orthodox churches, 'lui mouillait ses yeux d'écureuil effarouché, à Sebastian'.<sup>220</sup> The reference to squirrels resonates with readers familiar with the Kristevan fictional universe, as the protagonist of *Les Samouraïs* — Olga Morena, one of Kristeva's alter egos — is known as *l'Écureuil*.<sup>221</sup> Kristeva's academic career is also hinted at, as Sebastian works in a university whose distinctive feature is 'des tours floquées à l'amiante'.<sup>222</sup> This points towards the Jussieu campus, where Kristeva holds a chair, which made the headlines due to the dangers posed by the high quantities of asbestos in the building. This reference is clarified at the end of the novel, as Stéphanie drives past 'les tours amiantées de Jussieu'.<sup>223</sup> Some biographical references are less obscure, as Kristeva's name seeps into the text (in a similar way to how it appears in *TMA*): 'j'ai entendu de même à l'Institut du monde arabe l'étrangère Kristeva diagnostiquer ces *nouvelles maladies de l'âme* dont souffrent par excellence les

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<sup>217</sup> Kristeva, *La haine et le pardon*, p. 612.

<sup>218</sup> Evidenced by her learning Chinese before the *Tel Quel* group's trip to China, which then further fuelled her work *Des Chinoises*.

<sup>219</sup> Heather H. Yeung, 'Against Spectacle: International Terror and the Crisis of the Feminine Subject', in *Women's Fiction and Post-9/11 Contexts*, ed. by Peter Childs, Claire Colebrook, and Sebastian Groes (London and New York: Lexington Books, 2015), pp. 51–64 (p. 61). The title of *Tel Quel* magazine, edited by Philippe Sollers, changed to *L'Infini*, in 1983.

<sup>220</sup> *MàB*, p. 102, italics mine.

<sup>221</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Les Samouraïs* (Paris: Gallimard Collection Folio, 1990) (the nickname further links Kristeva to Beauvoir — Écureuil and Castor, *Les Samouraïs* and *Les Mandarins*. Parallels between the two women intellectuals do not fit the scope of the current analysis).

<sup>222</sup> *MàB*, p. 79.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 353.

immigrés’;<sup>224</sup> ‘voilà ce qu’avancent quelques psy à Paris, avec Julia Kristeva’.<sup>225</sup> While the first autobiographical projections mentioned invite the reader into an intertextual exchange (looking for clues outside the text being read, either in other novels or the real world), direct references to Kristeva’s name are not necessarily intertextual, but rather self-reflexive.<sup>226</sup> They highlight the multiple narrative layers present in the work (Anne, Sebastian, Stéphanie and Rilsky, and Kristeva herself), enhancing the ‘meta’ character of the text. Nonetheless, this heightened self-awareness can be detrimental to the reading process, if it pushes the reader too much past the boundaries of fiction, and of the diegesis, affecting his/her suspension of disbelief.

### *Narrative cues and the place of the reader*

While the preceding section dealt with the overarching themes of genre and *mise-en-abyme*, this final section will turn back to the text, to analyse its narrative cues and the place they allow for the reader. Time and space become significant in helping the reader place the narrative in a wider chronotope. However, the temporal and spatial references in *MàB* are often concealing, rather than revealing. The first confusion arises from the title itself, as the reader is soon to discover that the murder(s) did not actually occur in Byzantium, but in Santa-Barbara, ‘Kristeva’s shorthand for a United States reduced to the obscenity of a big screen’.<sup>227</sup> It becomes the repository of all sins, and the source of all evils, making it particularly appropriate for a detective story.<sup>228</sup> This underlying evil is visible from its very name, reminiscent of ‘la barbarie’.<sup>229</sup> In the English translation, Santa-Barbara becomes Santa-Varvara, with more emphasis on the Slavic origin of the saint’s name, thus further cementing the link to Byzantium, and to Kristeva’s Bulgarian origin. Byzantium also receives connotations outside of its geographical location. It becomes an approach to understanding (European) history, (family) origins, and the feminine: ‘the novel shapes and discusses Byzantium in terms of transgressions of several

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid., p. 115, italics mine. *Les Nouvelles Maladies de l’âme* is a direct reference to one of Kristeva’s psychoanalytical studies.

<sup>225</sup> *MàB*, p. 260.

<sup>226</sup> The other examples (references to Sollers or Jussieu) encourage the reader to carry out research work that would link them back to Kristeva. Direct references to Kristeva’s name act as a given, without necessarily enticing any further research or investigative work. These references are also self-fashioning, as she is projecting a *chosen* image of her public persona.

<sup>227</sup> Margaroni, ‘Byzantium: the Future Anterior of Europe?’, p. 223.

<sup>228</sup> As was shown before, detective stories deal extensively with human violence. Santa-Barbara becomes the spatial embodiment of the *société du spectacle*.

<sup>229</sup> *MàB*, p. 109.

conventional borders'.<sup>230</sup> Byzantium becomes an epistemological lens through which the narrator and Stéphanie look at the world: it helps them articulate the future of Europe,<sup>231</sup> and look at women's position as makers and writers of history. The feminine gender of Byzantium in French accentuates this focus on women in general, and Anne Comnène in particular, as she becomes part of 'ma Byzance'.<sup>232</sup> The use of the possessive pronominal adjective further connects Sylvia and Stéphanie, as they both internalise and make their own the work of Thérèse, and Anne respectively (*ma Thérèse; ma Byzance*). Byzantium is for *MàB* what Baroque and the Counter-Reformation are for *TMA*: a historical and cultural context that helps us understand the motivations and creations of the women protagonists. Byzantium amalgamates an ancient Greek heritage with that of the Roman Empire, Eastern Christianity, and royal power struggles, becoming a space of physical (the passing of the crusaders) and cultural intersections, which are reflected in Anne's *Alexiade*. Similarly, the Baroque Counter-Reformation allowed for a renewal of the Catholic Church, which opened up the space for Thérèse's innovations, both at the level of monastic orders, and Biblical hermeneutics. The phonetic similarity between *Byzance* and *bizarre* ('*Bizarre, cette soudaine passion pour Byzance...*')<sup>233</sup> further echoes this uniqueness in thinking and creation: eccentricity (*bizarrierie*) is contained within Byzantium's very name.

Space is thus given creative attributes, which can further affect identity formation. For example, Sue Oliver, the (brothel) Madam turned feminist torchbearer, is a direct product of the city she lives in: 'le succès mondial s'abbatit sur Sue et Santa-Barbara elle-même qui l'avait engendrée'.<sup>234</sup> The lack of morality characterising Santa-Barbara allows Sue Oliver to experiment sexually ('dix heures de travail collectif et sa vulve qui saigne, parfois son visage, ses hanches'),<sup>235</sup> which then further contributes to her authorial success and ensuing celebrity. In a similar way, but with significantly fewer sexual allusions, Anne's place of birth determined her royal status, and fuelled her claims to the throne. Anne is also known as 'la Porphyrogénète',<sup>236</sup> meaning 'born-purple', in direct reference to the room where women of the imperial family of Byzantium gave birth, the Porphyry Chamber (porphyry being a purple igneous rock, the hardest stone known to

<sup>230</sup> Bodin, 'Seeking Byzantium', p. 32.

<sup>231</sup> Margaroni, 'Byzantium: the Future Anterior of Europe?', p. 224.

<sup>232</sup> *MàB*, p. 147 and Bodin, 'Seeking Byzantium', p. 39.

<sup>233</sup> *MàB*, p. 170, italics mine.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 294; another line of inquiry could relate Santa-Barbara and Sue Oliver to televised entertainment and soap operas: Santa Barbara was the title of a 1980s and 1990s US soap opera, while Sue Oliver shares part of her name with Sue Ellen, the protagonist of *Dallas*.

<sup>235</sup> *MàB*, p. 294.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

antiquity and reserved for imperial use).<sup>237</sup> For any child to be called ‘Porphyrogénète’ (Porphyrogennetos), they had to be born in this room, and their father had to be the reigning *basileus* (emperor) at the time of their birth. It is only the ‘Porphyrogénète(s)’ who could be considered for succession.<sup>238</sup> Therefore, both her place and time of birth influenced Anne’s future political claims.

Whereas some spaces act as creators, others can act as links between the fiction and the author’s (and implicitly, the readers’) reality. In Kristeva’s fiction, two such places stand out: Bulgaria, and Paris (specifically, Café Marly, in the Louvre courtyard). Whereas in other novels (including *TMA*)<sup>239</sup> Bulgaria remains just an autobiographical projection, in *MàB* it provides a spatial and temporal *fil conducteur*, representing a return to origins, via Sebastian’s quest: ‘Par la création du personnage de Sebastian, Kristeva révèle pour la première fois son origine et se réapproprie son pays natal tout au long de ce roman’.<sup>240</sup> Sebastian undertakes at least two trips to Bulgaria in an attempt to ‘reconstituer le roman familial’.<sup>241</sup> One of his trips is briefly mentioned at the moment of his disappearance, whereas the other one represents one of the main axes of the novel.

Paris and Café Marly emerge as specifically Kristevan spaces in both *TMA* and *MàB*:

A chacun de mes retours de Santa-Barbara, j’aime boire un verre à la terrasse du Marly, histoire de m’imaginer à la fois au cœur de Paris et complètement ailleurs, nulle part.<sup>242</sup>

Faites évacuer le Marly, la Pyramide, tout. Tout le Louvre, tout Paris, si vous voulez [...] Une nouvelle détonation – sous la Pyramide, cette fois-ci – m’éclate le cœur.<sup>243</sup>

[...] face à lui, dans la salle surplombant la cour des sculptures du Louvre, au *Café Marly*.<sup>244</sup>

Ni moi ni lui, ce n’est pas nous, ce baiser n’est à personne, quelqu’un ou quelque chose hors de nous le traverse: qui embrasse qui ? Le Louvre lui-même participe au désir démesuré, et Notre-Dame peut-être avec la statue tout proche de Louis XIV en cavalier du Bernin, la Pyramide aussi et le Carrousel certainement [...].<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium, Volume 3* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 1701. In addition, porphyria is also known as the royal disease.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1701.

<sup>239</sup> In *TMA* (p. 140), Marianne Baruch, Sylvia’s friend, tells the story of her father born in Bulgaria. In *Les Samouraïs*, Olga leaves Bulgaria to pursue her studies in Paris.

<sup>240</sup> Ivantcheva-Merjanska, ‘Cheminements’, p. 56.

<sup>241</sup> *MàB*, p. 49.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 345.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 368.

<sup>244</sup> *TMA*, p. 45.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

Café Marly is both a real spatial reference ('au cœur de Paris'), and a place beyond coordinates ('complètement ailleurs, nulle part'); it both anchors the characters and facilitates their escape. It occupies a place at the centre of Paris, and at the intersection of civilisations, 'surplombant la cour des sculptures du Louvre'. The Louvre concentrates times, spaces, and cultures into an enclosed space, becoming comparable to an atomic particle: both generator of new entities (like Sylvia and Bruno's all-encompassing embrace), and able to cause large-scale destruction (similar to the terrorist attack in Stéphanie's nightmare). The Parisian references are also reminiscent of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal*.<sup>246</sup> The links to the poet are further reinforced by the occurrences of the expression 'luxe, calme et volupté'<sup>247</sup> throughout the novel. While this expression is the title of a Matisse painting, it must be mentioned that the latter illustrated Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal*. Thus, *MàB* is permeated with references to artistic and literary innovations (fauvism via Matisse, and proto-modernism via Baudelaire), further emphasising its status as a cultural (or intertextual) melting pot (similar to Byzantium).

Space and time are equally significant in structuring Kristeva's fiction. The importance of time is mirrored even in her choice of genre: 'le roman policier est le seul à traiter de ce mal radical qu'est le meurtre, qui abolit le temps humain, le temps de la vie: le mal radical est une catastrophe de la vie'.<sup>248</sup> The detective novel allows for an analysis of human time, in its most singular form – individual life. The entire text is set under the sign of human evil: 'un de ces petits turbopropulseurs qui ne prenait pas plus de vingt-huit passagers à bord [...] insécurisait les néophytes, 11 septembre ou non'.<sup>249</sup> The 9/11 attacks mark *TMA* as well, linking the novels via a common contemporary temporal reference. These events further link human action to religion: the case of the young veiled engineer in *TMA*, and the killing of *Nouveau Panthéon* members in *MàB*.<sup>250</sup> Sebastian escapes these temporal restrictions by setting up his own relation to time. First of all, he loses the notion of time when he ends up killing his lover Fa: 'Il serra la gorge de Fa et perdit la notion du temps'.<sup>251</sup> This same unawareness of the passing of time is visible in Sebastian's diary: 'sans précision de temps, les notes ne s'écoulaient pas, glacées dans leur présence verticale'.<sup>252</sup> The diary loses its relation to time, becoming

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<sup>246</sup> Le Carrousel appears in 'Le Cygne', whereas the expression 'et complètement ailleurs, nulle part' echoes the 'Ailleurs, bien loin d'ici!' of 'A une passante'.

<sup>247</sup> *MàB*, pp. 63 and 316.

<sup>248</sup> Kristeva, *La Haine et le pardon*, p. 627.

<sup>249</sup> *MàB*, p. 26, italics mine.

<sup>250</sup> The *Nouveau Panthéon* resembles contemporary New Age religions, with the narrator focusing exclusively on their malevolent actions.

<sup>251</sup> *MàB*, p. 37.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

only a written inscription; not even the ‘présence verticale’ can account for a flowing of time, as it is ‘glacée’. Sebastian corrupts the diary since ‘aucune de ces pages du *Journal* n’était datée. Son temps était sans temps’.<sup>253</sup> The diary, designed to record time, is personalised to such an extent that it loses its relation to time; only Sebastian can make sense of its chronology. This chronology also becomes a map, a Byzantine itinerary, as Sebastian does not follow maps, but rather time: ‘Sebastian? Ou Sans soi, C/J? Ce n’est pas une carte routière qu’il suivait, mais le fil d’un autre temps, celui d’Adhémar’.<sup>254</sup> Time becomes personal and expanded. This expansion is not an unawareness of the passing of time, but rather a reading of the past in the signs it leaves in the present.

The reading of signs becomes even more pertinent for the detective genre, which is based on the finding and interpretation of clues. Rilsky’s job is complicated because ‘l’Infini opère avec des gants’,<sup>255</sup> leaving no signs of past events in the present. However, he advises his deputy, Popov: ‘vous recommencerez donc tout et à chaque fois, aussi méticuleusement que je vous l’ai dit au début’.<sup>256</sup> The return, the repetition, and the re-stating make it easier to find the different in the same.<sup>257</sup> Despite ‘les gants’, time leaves its mark: ‘[f]or Kristeva as for [Walter] Benjamin, the past exists in its inscriptions in the present, that is, in its material ruins and its textual remainders’.<sup>258</sup> Sebastian develops this further following the vein of Saint Augustine, in his disparate diary notes, arguing for the simultaneity of present, past and future:

‘Il est donc impropre de dire: il y a trois temps, le passé, le présent, et le futur. Il serait plus juste de dire: il y a trois temps, le présent du passé, le présent du présent, le présent du futur. Le présent du passé, c’est la mémoire; le présent du présent c’est l’intuition; le présent de l’avenir, c’est l’attente.’<sup>259</sup>

The present becomes a moment of intersection between past and future, an eternal point of juncture, resembling ‘ma Byzance’:

ma Byzance est une question de temps, la question même que le temps se pose à lui-même quand il ne veut pas choisir entre deux lieux, deux dogmes, deux crises, deux identités, deux continents, deux religions, deux sexes, deux ruses. Byzance laisse la question ouverte, et le temps aussi.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., p. 240.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., p. 240.

<sup>257</sup> Descombes, *Le même et l’autre*, p. 181.

<sup>258</sup> Maria Margaroni, ‘Julia Kristeva’s Chiasmatic Journeys: From Byzantium to the Phantom of Europe and the ends of the world’, in *Psychoanalysis, Aesthetics, and Politics in the Work of Kristeva*, ed. by Kelly Oliver and S.K. Keltner (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), pp. 107–26 (p. 108).

<sup>259</sup> *MàB*, p. 360.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid., p. 147.

‘Ma Byzance’ becomes a performance of dichotomies, a manner of living the intersection (rather than of living at the intersection); ‘ma Byzance’ does not entail a choice, but a way of living with(in) the options. Time and space become inextricably linked in *MàB*; instead of helping the reader situate themselves in a stable chronotope, spatial and temporal references encourage a move towards the intersection, the juncture, the point of contact.<sup>261</sup>

A similar to and fro between stability and confusion results from the onomastic strategies employed in the novel, and the different narrative voices associated with them. Trigo considers the novel to be ‘[an] experimentation with the split voice [...] develop[ing] the ongoing struggle for predominance between an increasingly unstable first and third-person omniscient narrator that morphs in and out of character’.<sup>262</sup> Certain chapters are narrated by Stéphanie, whilst others have a third-person narrator, with free indirect speech interspersed, further fuelling the ‘struggle for predominance’ identified by Trigo. Free indirect speech is more noticeable as some of the characters have verbal tics marking their presence. For example, Rilsky frequently uses ‘nutile de le dire’: ‘Monsieur Minaldi, l’inspecteur Popov, qui vous a déjà contacté, continuera avec vous les recherches qui s’imposent; vous vous tenez à sa disposition, *nutile de le dire* [...]’.<sup>263</sup> In most cases, it is easy to recognise Rilsky speaking and thus associate this tic with his presence. However, there are two instances when the association is unclear: when the chapters are narrated by Stéphanie, and when the third-person narrator takes hold of the tic. The closer the relationship between Stéphanie and Rilsky becomes, the more she starts appropriating his verbal tic. The expression is used by Stéphanie<sup>264</sup> in the chapter ‘Ma rencontre avec Anne Comnène’, soon after the start of her relationship with Rilsky. This appropriation re-emerges several times throughout the text, even when Stéphanie is no longer in Santa Barbara (in Santa-Barbara she would be closer to Rilsky, and to his speech mannerisms): ‘Où suis-je? Au volant de ma Rover, enfin toute seule, sans *L’Événement*, sans Bondy, sans Audrey, sans Nor, ’nutile de le dire’.<sup>265</sup> It could even be argued that the distance between Stéphanie and Rilsky determines the former to use more of his speech mannerisms, as a method of reducing this distance. When back in Paris, for her mother’s funeral, she admits to re-appropriating his staple expression: ‘Alors, j’y vais, avec ce qu’il

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<sup>261</sup> This point of intersection resembles the fault line used to describe Darrieussecq’s conception of the other.

<sup>262</sup> Trigo, ‘Noir Analysis’, p. 40.

<sup>263</sup> *MàB*, p. 85, italics mine.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 353; ‘Nor’ is one of the ways Stéphanie (lovingly) addresses Rilsky in the second half of the novel, as a shorter version of his name, Northrop.

faut de silence, 'nutile de le dire, comme tu dis'.<sup>266</sup> Rilsky's tic remains mostly untranslated in the English version of the novel.<sup>267</sup> While this can reduce the confusion generated by free indirect speech, it also affects our understanding of the relationship between Stéphanie and Rilsky. Stéphanie's re-appropriation of the tic is lost in the English translation, which in turn diminishes the proximity between the two. Sharing language contributes to the evolution of their relationship, increasing the feeling of intimacy. Thus, part of this feeling is subsequently lost in the translation, due to the absence of the tic.

'Nutile de le dire' also appears in the third-person narration, blurring the boundaries between the narrator's omniscience, and free indirect speech:

Bonne nuit, en somme, concluait l'ambassadeur en plein accord avec la philosophie de Rilsky qui, depuis l'arrivée de Stéphanie, n'était occupé à rien d'autre qu'essayer de placer sa vie privée à l'abri de tout ça. Distrayante, la politique, mais jusqu'à un certain point, 'nutile de le dire...'<sup>268</sup>

Despite the clear use of the third person in the verbal forms above, and of the *proposition incise* ('concluait l'ambassadeur'), the expression 'nutile de le dire' raises questions as to whether Rilsky's mental monologue makes its way into the narrative, as a type of internal focalisation. The lack of a verb in the last sentence, and the ellipsis, suggest a free flow of thought. The ellipsis is immediately followed by another intervention from the ambassador, so the flow of thought remains unfinished. The loose association between 'distrayante' and 'la politique', and the use of multiple commas to separate unfinished thoughts, rather than complex constructions, mirrors the mental process of interpretation that can accompany a conversation (like the one between Rilsky, Stéphanie, and Foulques Weil, the ambassador). This further suggests that Rilsky's interior monologue permeates the narrative. The novel becomes truly polyphonic; the struggle is not just between Stéphanie and the third-person narrator, but between multiple characters and narrators.

Similarly, Sebastian intrudes into the narrative, in a chapter meant to present his peregrinations in the South-East of Europe from a third-person perspective:

Des enfants et des vieillards brandissaient devant les vitres de sa Panda rouge, qui ne passait pas inaperçue, des laitues et des tomates [...] Ces gens *nous* haïssent, c'est logique, et, heureusement *pour nous*, ils haïssent encore plus les islamistes,

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<sup>266</sup> *MàB*, p. 281.

<sup>267</sup> The extensive field of translation studies lies outside the scope of the current thesis. The brief references to translation, especially to the English translations of the texts analysed, gesture towards the different reading scenarios that an Anglophone reader could experience. As will be suggested in the Conclusion, these references could represent the initial steps of a future study into the reception of translations. However, throughout the chapters, the references to translation only aim to highlight a few textual examples that would lead to a different reading experience or reading scenario in the case of an Anglophone reader.

<sup>268</sup> *MàB*, p. 176.



ceux-là leur font vraiment peur, tout comme il y a neuf siècles, *que dis-je*, plus même, si c'était possible, et ils doivent bien savoir pourquoi. Les vies humaines tournent en rond comme ces glaçons *dans mon verre de slivovitz*, les destins font trois petits tours et puis s'en vont. *C/J* roulait [...].<sup>269</sup>

The section above forms part of a paragraph framed by the third-person narrator, describing Sebastian's car journey ('[ils] brandissent devant les vitres de sa Panda rouge [...]. *C/J* roulait'). However, the historical overview given by the omniscient narrator (concerning the conflict in Yugoslavia) is gradually complemented by Sebastian's views. The personal intrudes on the historical to such an extent that human destiny is compared to 'ces glaçons dans mon verre de slivovitz'. This goes beyond narrated interior monologue, as we are presented with a visual image from Sebastian's perspective. He takes full hold of the narrative very briefly, only to then let go of it again, and allow the third-person narrator to continue presenting his journey — '*C/J* roulait'. Thus, Sebastian adds his own voice to the already existing multitude of narrative voices vying for the reader's attention. For Midttun 'the concept of intertextuality soon became Kristeva's hallmark. She wanted to show how a text always communicates with another text or other texts, in a polyphony of different voices that meet in the act of reading'.<sup>270</sup> *MàB* presents a double polyphony: one at the intertextual level described by Midttun, with the novel in dialogue with other texts; and another one within the text, a polyphony of narratorial and actorial voices. Both these types of polyphony require an active and attentive reading process, as the reader needs to follow simultaneously multiple texts and multiple characters' voices.

The third-person narrator also seems to have verbal tics, as his/her text is interspersed with the word '*jeez!*', appearing in its English form, italicised, and followed by an exclamation mark,<sup>271</sup> the latter highlighting the emotional charge and the narrator's involvement in the text. Out of the seven examples quoted (see footnote 271 below), only the example on page 161 appears in the English translation (as '*jeez!*' not italicised); all the other ones are not rendered in English. The use of a different language, and a different formatting in the French version emphasise the entry of the strange, the different, the other into the narrative. This dislocation is lost in the English translation. There are other uses of English, in the French text: '*know what I mean*',<sup>272</sup> '*depleted uranium*',<sup>273</sup> '*no*

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<sup>269</sup> Ibid., pp. 158–159, italics mine; *C/J* is another name used to refer to Sebastian, especially during his travels in Bulgaria, in the second half of the novel.

<sup>270</sup> Huitfeldt Midttun, 'Crossing the Borders', p. 165.

<sup>271</sup> *Jeez!* in third-person narration in *MàB* on pages 43, 49, 53, 154, 161, 251, 263.

<sup>272</sup> *MàB*, pp. 153, 160.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

*problem*',<sup>274</sup> and '*This is the question*',<sup>275</sup> all associated with the third-person narrator. In the French original, these are more visible, set apart from the rest of the text, due to the linguistic and graphic differences. In the English translation, they become integrated, as they are no longer italicised, and share the same language with the text around them. While these expressions are not frequent enough to be considered verbal tics (unlike 'jeez!' mentioned above), the use of English still personalises the third-person narration.<sup>276</sup> This use becomes an example of 'the other' disrupting the order of the text.

A much clearer representation of the other appears when *MàB* enters into dialogue with Anne's *Alexiade*. Quotations from Anne's text appear italicised, in quotation marks, clearly setting her text apart from the rest of the narrative. While thematically the *Alexiade* is linked to *MàB*, graphically the reader can immediately recognise the distinction between the two texts. A similar methodology for distinguishing between Sylvia's text and Thérèse's works is applied in *TMA*, though not always consistently. As was shown above, quotations from Thérèse's texts are sometimes acknowledged within the narrative (with quotation marks, italics, and references to the work), sometimes at the end of the text, raising questions about who is carrying out the research work (the narrator or the author). The simple fact that *TMA* engages with a multitude of the saint's texts (as opposed to one *œuvre*, as is the case in *MàB*, with the *Alexiade*) requires a more attentive reader. Furthermore, the translation of the saint's texts is often complemented with the original Castilian, enhancing the linguistic work needed for understanding. The *Alexiade* is only presented in translation, easing the reader's deciphering work. This strategy offers us a visual representation of the other, easing our understanding of the idea that the self contains the other (in a similar way, the text we are reading contains the other, either the original or its translation).

The polyphony of voices and the multitude of possible intertexts is mirrored in the onomastic strategies employed by Kristeva. Most names become carriers of meaning, while the above-mentioned polyphony is enhanced by the fact that some of the protagonists are referred to by more than just one name. For example, we are introduced to Sebastian Chrest-Jones early on in the novel (p. 25). As previously mentioned, his name is quickly linked to Kristeva's, via the common Slavic root – *krest/* cross,<sup>277</sup> hinting

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>276</sup> It remains unclear whether it also sets apart the third-person narrator. The use of English could be another example of free indirect speech, but there is not sufficient textual evidence to argue for either side. The narrative leaves the reader confused, forcing him/her to remain in-between.

<sup>277</sup> Bodin, 'Seeking Byzantium', p. 34.

to the background of the Crusades (fought by the *croisés* — soldiers of the cross). His hyphenated surname combines two traditions, the Slavic one through Chrest, and the Anglophone one through Jones. We later find out that his surname contains both patronym and matronym: ‘Dix ans plus tard, peu avant sa mort, ce grand-père respecté et vénéré révéla à sa famille [...] le fruit de ses amours avec une serveuse de vingt-cinq ans, une certaine Tracy Jones. Ce fruit défendu s’appellerait désormais Sebastian Chrest-Jones.’<sup>278</sup> Despite his attempts to distance himself from the mother (for example, by learning foreign languages to replace his mother tongue), Sebastian carries the maternal heritage inscribed in his name. The patronym also conveys contradictions, as Sebastian observes that ‘les patronymes sont des tombeaux, des papyrus, des sources vives’.<sup>279</sup> The name of the father intimates death (‘tombeaux’), life (‘sources vives’), and genealogy or family history (‘papyrus’). The hyphenation is a hint towards his position as ‘fruit défendu’, a child born outside wedlock (in the brief family history on pages 70–71, all women take the name of their husbands, which is then passed on to the children). It also challenges the position of the father, as Gallop highlights that ‘if the mother’s femininity [...] were affirmed, the Name-of-the-Father would always be in doubt, always be subject to the question of the mother’s morality’.<sup>280</sup> In Sebastian’s case, the presence of the mother is affirmed in his very surname, threatening the father’s place. Moreover, the two surnames relate back to Kristeva herself: ‘les initiales du nom de famille Chrest-Jones consonnent avec les miennes, Kristeva-Joyaux’.<sup>281</sup> The hyphenation marks their status as outsiders or strangers in different ways: Kristeva integrated French society via marriage, while Sebastian has not yet come to terms with his status as ‘bâtard’.<sup>282</sup> Sebastian’s first name also carries multiple meanings, enhancing his link to Byzantium, and to places of intersection. Bodin observes that his name stems from a ‘Byzantine imperial title, *sebastokrator*, meaning “venerable ruler”’.<sup>283</sup> This further connects him to both Alexios I (Anne’s father, and Byzantine emperor), and to his own father, known as ‘Sylvester le Patriarche’.<sup>284</sup> Towards the end of the novel, Rilsky mentions the Basque town of San

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<sup>278</sup> *MàB*, p. 71.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>280</sup> Gallop, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, p. 39.

<sup>281</sup> Kristeva, *La Haine et le pardon*, p. 634.

<sup>282</sup> *MàB*, p. 71.

<sup>283</sup> Bodin, ‘Seeking Byzantium’, p. 34.

<sup>284</sup> *MàB*, p. 92.

Sebastian, itself a place of intersections (between Spain and France, and yet with a very distinct identity), mirroring Sebastian's in-between position.<sup>285</sup>

Sebastian is not the only one whose name contributes to the web of interpretations. Rilsky himself, despite his self-assured demeanour, carries the marks of the stranger or other. His father also comes from Bulgaria, 'le très talentueux chef d'orchestre de Bourgas, Boris Rilsky, le père de Northrop'.<sup>286</sup> Moreover, Bodin believes that 'commissioner Rilsky's name alludes to the famous Bulgarian Orthodox Rila monastery'.<sup>287</sup> This cements the link to his Bulgarian grandfather Sylvester, but also to Sebastian, 'son double négatif'.<sup>288</sup> The idea of the double is marked both physically and psychologically. When the two met for the first time, 'Northrop s'était trouvé devant un bonhomme de cinq ans, tout noiraud, avec les mêmes sourcils, le même sourire que les siens, sauf que lui, il éclatait de blondeur'.<sup>289</sup> They were both 'clone[s] du blond patriarche Sylvester Chrest'<sup>290</sup> and clones of each other. While Sebastian embarks on a search for his origins, Rilsky considers himself to be a stable, distinguished citizen of Santa-Barbara: 'mais les Rilsky sont des gens distingués, des musiciens de père en fils qui ont la musique pour langue d'élection et ne se soûlent pas à fouiller jour et nuit leurs origines; il leur suffit d'être des Santa-Barbarois, un point c'est tout'.<sup>291</sup> However, Rilsky does not follow in his father's footsteps, breaking the chain of 'des musiciens de père en fils' through his detective career. While he does not 'fouill[e] jour et nuit [ses] origines', his profession does entail searching, and digging for the truth. If Sebastian's searches take him abroad, Rilsky carries out similar activities on home soil. Moreover, Rilsky is not as consistent as he initially wants to suggest. Throughout the investigation he even considers himself to be the double of the murderer: 'Numéro Huit n'avait jamais existé: le serial killer, c'était bien et bel lui! Northrop Rilsky et Mister Hyde, depuis quand déjà?'.<sup>292</sup> While this doubling allows him to understand better the psychology of the murderer, it also raises questions about his own identity and alterity. At different stages of the narrative, he becomes a triple double: of the grand-father, of Sebastian, and of the murderer. Additionally, we do not just see Rilsky doubling, but also splitting between his

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<sup>285</sup> San Sebastian is mentioned in relation to arms trafficking and terrorist attacks. Rilsky remembers 'l'explosion d'un jouet piégé à San Sebastian' (p. 331) in August 2001. The same event is mentioned in Darriuessecq's *Le Bébé* (pp. 87-88), linking the temporal frameworks of the two novels.

<sup>286</sup> *MàB*, p. 71.

<sup>287</sup> Bodin, 'Seeking Byzantium', p. 34.

<sup>288</sup> *MàB*, p. 90.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

professional and personal life. The closer he and Stéphanie become, the more intimate her appellations become. He is initially presented as Rilsky (or Patron, for Popov, his deputy), moving on to Northrop, Nor or Nordi: ‘NR (ou Nordi pour les intimes)’.<sup>293</sup> The move from surname to name marks the crossing of the professional–personal boundary, while the several endearing variations denote an evolution of the personal relationship. Despite the initial pragmatic distance Rilsky intends to portray, his own personality is revealed as multifaceted.

This variation in names also characterises two of Rilsky’s three doubles: Sebastian and the murderer. From the fourth part onwards, Sebastian is known as C/J: ‘Sebastian? Ou Sans soi, C/J?’.<sup>294</sup> The graphic representation of the new name can point towards Barthes *S/Z*, but Kristeva’s text remains unclear as to whether this graphic representation retains the same emphasis on sound as in Barthes’s analysis. The hyphen (in Chrest-Jones) has been replaced by a virgule, retaining the initials of the maternal and paternal surnames. If we were to compare this graphic choice to Wittig’s decision to split the ‘j/e’ in *Le Corps lesbien*,<sup>295</sup> C/J becomes a rupture, a breaking away from space and time. It opens up a space for (self-)exploration that would help in shaping a new identity. C/J is the name Sebastian uses throughout his trip, highlighting identity shifts, quests, and instability. If Sebastian can be associated with the unity of the self, C/J allows for the emergence of alterity, the other is allowed space within the boundaries of the self. Moreover, Sebastian is used mostly in Santa-Barbara, whereas C/J is employed throughout the trip; Sebastian becomes a static representation of the self, whereas C/J is mobile and changing.

The murderer himself is known under different names: his initial signature leads the investigators to believe he is ‘Numéro Huit’ or ‘l’Ange de la Mort’.<sup>296</sup> However, having killed more than eight victims, he soon becomes ‘l’Infini’.<sup>297</sup> He then moves from mathematical symbols to language, specifically to Chinese, becoming *Wuxian* (infinite).<sup>298</sup> Whilst Chinese further links the narrative to Kristeva’s own background,<sup>299</sup> it also links the murderer to Fa Chang. It is this move from universal or mathematical, to linguistically specific that allows the investigators to connect the murders to Fa’s twin

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<sup>293</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>295</sup> For a more comprehensive analysis of split pronouns, see Chapter Three analysing Wittig’s work.

<sup>296</sup> *MàB*, p. 61.

<sup>297</sup> The mathematical sign for infinity is obtained by turning 8 (Numéro Huit) ninety degrees to either the left or the right ( $\infty$ ).

<sup>298</sup> *MàB*, p. 244.

<sup>299</sup> Kristeva both studied Chinese, and wrote about Chinese women in *Des Chinoises*.

brother, Xiao Chang. His initial plan of universal punishment becomes personal revenge, which allows the authorities to apprehend him. While Sebastian moves from the personal to the universal (or the historical, following his family history back to the time of the Crusades), the murderer works in reverse, from the universal to the personal. However, neither strategy comes to fruition, as both Sebastian and Xiao die almost simultaneously.

All the above-analysed meanings of names and appellations are revealed gradually throughout the narrative. Their deciphering becomes a detective investigation in itself, compelling the reader to draw together various narrative and intertextual threads. As each name becomes a complex web of meanings, the reader's task is rendered more difficult. Other symbols used in the text, such as food, water, and fire, can be seen as more accessible to the reader, since they involve a sensorial reading. Stéphanie discovers this sensorial reading as she delves into Sebastian's *roman d'Anne*: 'elle s'empare de la prose de Sebastian, une gourmandise que la Parisienne ne se connaissait pas'.<sup>300</sup> This 'gourmandise' is mirrored in *TMA*, with Thérèse being depicted as 'une lectrice gourmande'.<sup>301</sup> As was mentioned above, Thérèse is addressed as both 'ma gourmande' and 'ma savoureuse',<sup>302</sup> suggesting both her own appetite for reading ('gourmande'), and Sylvia's appetite for the nun's work ('savoureuse'). A similar experience of consumption is associated with looking, and with the scopic regime characterising the Byzantine court: 'elle sait qu'à Constantinople les gens raffolent de voir et d'être vus [...]. On vous mange des yeux, à Byzance'.<sup>303</sup> Consuming and integrating the other can also be achieved via the look; seeing and being seen ensure survival in an imperial court rife with intrigue and scheming. Food becomes a metaphor for understanding both reading and the Byzantine scopic regime. Eating, as a sensorial experience, is used for bridging the gap between the text and the body. The idea of consumption is nevertheless pushed to its limits when trying to account for highly creative processes. Consumption becomes self-consumption, and even auto-combustion when used to describe Sebastian's engagement with his work. His research is obtained in 'cet état de combustion mentale',<sup>304</sup> with his thoughts being compared to 'une matière inflammable'.<sup>305</sup> Nevertheless, while these processes are extremely creative ('d'où la combustion, son roman'),<sup>306</sup> they also remain highly consuming, carrying within the seeds of their own destruction. The fire-related metaphors

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<sup>300</sup> *MàB*, p. 184.

<sup>301</sup> *TMA*, p. 109.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 352 (for both references)

<sup>303</sup> *MàB*, p. 202.

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

suggest early on that such processes cannot be sustained in the long term, paving the way for Sebastian's eventual death.

Not even water, the element used for offsetting fire, can reduce the level of self-consumption. Water does not stifle auto-combustion, but rather opens up the self to the other. Water highlights porous boundaries, and facilitates mixing. This opening further fuels combustion, rather than suppresses it. In Sebastian's interpretation, water facilitated the encounter between Anne and Ebrard (his alleged ancestor): '*Son corps brusquement ouvert à Ebrard dans les eaux du lac Ohrid se referma pour toujours; ses huit enfants, dont seuls quatre survécurent, n'ont fait que transiter par un ventre aride*'.<sup>307</sup> Water enabled a meeting with what Anne considered to be the absolute other — the male body. Even if the meeting between Anne and Ebrard was fleeting, with only a brief direct contact between their bodies (Ebrard saving Anne from a possible attack near the lake), water could facilitate a complete communion by traversing their bodily boundaries. In Sebastian's view, it is this encounter that forms the basis for the *Alexiade*, sparking the creative process that was to emerge years later. Thus, water kindled Anne's creativity, while simultaneously depleting her reproductive body. Her womb became 'un ventre aride', a vehicle, a place of transit, rather than a protective, life-engendering space. Sebastian has a similar liminal experience in water — close to giving in, the danger of drowning pushes him to survive: 'Le moment idéal pour se laisser couler. Envie de vomir, de crier, de taper des pieds. Mais le spasme qui aurait pu lui être fatale lui fit retrouver la mémoire des cours de natation'.<sup>308</sup> Resembling food, water becomes an element carrying within it both life and death, and constantly pushing towards a communion with the other. In this association between water and the other, *MàB* further resembles *TMA*. As was shown above, water facilitates Thérèse's sensual and intellectual communion with the Other, and the subsequent creation of their story, or fiction (in a similar way to Anne's meeting with Ebrard, and her later creation of the *Alexiade*). The image of the garden also appears in *MàB* — 'rangez vos armes et cultivez votre jardin'<sup>309</sup> — with a reference that recalls, once again, the conclusion of Voltaire's *Candide*. The garden becomes the space where the results of previous creative endeavours become tangible. It is this tangibility that is obtained by using symbols such as food, water, fire, and gardens; they help give form to abstract concepts such as the 'other within' and encourage a sensorial reading

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid., p. 213, italics mine.

<sup>308</sup> *MàB*, p. 270.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid., p. 276.

process. Thus, reading itself becomes a liminal experience, at the boundary between mind and body, concrete and abstract, self and other.

When talking about the novel, Kristeva is aware of the various reactions that its polyphony and multitude of narrative layers can have on the reader: ‘un tempo narratif accéléré, qui juxtapose des thèmes insolites, apporte évidemment des connaissances nouvelles qui captivent certains lecteurs et en fatiguent d’autres, mais de toute façon, leurs résonances réciproques *empêchent le lecteur de s’installer, le dépossèdent jusqu’à la dépossession de soi*’.<sup>310</sup> The reader does not actually have a stable space in the narrative, but rather a shifting one, changed by the rhythms, and intertexts of the novel. While Kristeva’s alter egos, Sylvia and Stéphanie, welcome this ‘lecture de dépossession de soi’, not all readers are willing or able to engage with this readerly instability. Cipău believes that Kristeva’s *MàB* ‘s’adresse à des connaisseurs exigeants et raffinés’.<sup>311</sup> This view raises issues of elitism, possibly suggesting that the ‘dépossession’ can only be attained by readers with extensive prior knowledge. Nonetheless, the novel does facilitate knowledge acquisition, by sending the reader out to other works (i.e. the *Alexiade*), and by providing visual aids to help the reader historically situate the (inter)texts. *MàB* has maps marking the routes of the crusaders, photographs of churches and ruins encountered by Sebastian during his peregrinations, and reproductions of Byzantine icons to support the historical and literary links to the Byzantine Empire. While these visual aids can assist the reading process, they also ‘test the text’,<sup>312</sup> moving beyond genre boundaries, and familiar textual and literary tools. Moreover, this multitude of extra-textual instruments (maps and ekphrastic photographs)<sup>313</sup> is also a way of testing the reader; pushing genre boundaries does not just affect the text, but also the reading process, since the reader needs to learn how to read these textual innovations. Furthermore, this new type of reading is being learnt while it is carried out: the reader is learning to read while reading, as (s)he cannot rely on previous experiences. Therefore, the reader’s learning is two-fold: knowledge acquisition via the intertexts, and developing new reading methods tailored to a liminal text.

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<sup>310</sup> Kristeva, *La Haine et le pardon*, p. 621, italics mine.

<sup>311</sup> Cipău, ‘La politique postmoderniste’, p. 21.

<sup>312</sup> The expression ‘testing the text’ was used by Alison Rice in her conference paper ‘Testing the Text: The Limitations of Genre in the Work of Worldwide Women Writers of French’ delivered in October 2016 at the ‘Overstepping the Boundaries/ Transgresser les limites. 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Women’s Writing in French’ conference, organised at Senate House, London by the Centre for the Study of Contemporary Women’s Writing (Institute of Modern Languages Research).

<sup>313</sup> Similar extra-textual instruments are used in *TMA*, for example photos of Bernini’s sculpture, maps of Thérèse’s monastic foundations, musical scores etc.



This heuristic approach to reading is consistent with the journey of (self-) discovery dominating the narrative. Despite it being (partly) a detective novel, the text does not offer full closure, ending with Stéphanie's decision to continue the enquiry, under the more personal form of 'se voyager': 'Voilà, c'est le mot: je me voyage, néologisme barbare, tu te voyages, nous nous voyageons, voulez-vous? Un voyage qui déplie les identités, qui remonte et boucle le temps à travers les espaces'.<sup>314</sup> The text hints towards this self-reflexive voyage early on, when Sebastian dispels Hermine's worries: 'Je ne suis pas fatigué, je ne suis pas cancéreux, ça n'a rien à voir avec un déclin, *je suis simplement en route*'.<sup>315</sup> Being 'en route' removes anchorage, and stable reference points. This exiting of daily routine leaves its marks on the body, the latter almost reflecting a gradual exit from life itself, 'Hermine soupçon[ait] un cancer. On l'avait avertie que les grands malades pressentent la fin en devenant mélancoliques'.<sup>316</sup> By letting go of his previous life, Sebastian is testing existence in a similar way to Kristeva's testing of the text, and of the reader. These latter intentions of 'testing the text and the reader' are given substance in Stéphanie's own work: 'je ne donnerai qu'un carnet de route, un genre mineur, hybride, pas possible, pas même visible, peut-être'.<sup>317</sup> Thus, the reader has to piece together the clues from the 'carnet de route', and create a visible path to follow. This process is consistent with the mechanisms of the detective novel: 'Tel me semble être l'unique optimisme possible à l'époque actuelle, qui explique le succès des polars: "Tu peux savoir", dit le roman policier sans forcément donner la réponse mais en nous installant dans l'enquête'.<sup>318</sup> Paradoxically, it is not always clear if Kristeva follows this formula. The information overload that sometimes characterises the novel can reduce the reader's flexibility to navigate the text, and find a place 'dans l'enquête'.

All of the protagonists are extremely knowledgeable: Rilsky 'à la cinquantaine bien tassée, légèrement enrobé, de surcroît cultivé, le mariage parfait de l'intelligence et du pragmatisme';<sup>319</sup> Stéphanie, 'philosophe-linguiste-sémiologue',<sup>320</sup> with interests ranging from journalism to psychoanalysis and Chinese studies; and Sebastian, 'docteur *honoris causa* [...] pour ses travaux sur le métissage des populations',<sup>321</sup> simultaneously nurturing a passion 'sur la Première Croisade et Byzance'.<sup>322</sup> Moreover, all three of them

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<sup>314</sup> *MàB*, p. 356.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101, italics mine.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 344.

<sup>318</sup> Kristeva, *La Haine et le pardon*, p. 654.

<sup>319</sup> *MàB*, p. 63.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

are to differing extents detectives: Rilsky is investigating the murders of Santa Barbara, Sebastian is exploring the lives of Anne Commène and of some of the Crusaders (particularly Ebrard, to whom he believes himself to be related), and Stéphanie is following Sebastian's steps. They all activate their prior knowledge and interests in their various investigations, often leaving the reader behind. As was mentioned in the first section, 'in fictional detection, giving the reader full access to clues is considered essential to ensuring fair play',<sup>323</sup> so the detective(s) and the reader need to discover the clues at the same time, giving them equal chances for discovering the culprit. However, the protagonists' extensive prior knowledge (coupled with Kristeva's wide cultural background) puts them at an advantage. They manage to cover a wider web of possibilities and interpretations, diminishing the interpretive role of the reader. Put simply, they both ask the questions, and offer a multitude of answers, reducing the reader's contribution. Thus, the intertextual richness can have negative effects on the reader, as too much knowledge can increase inflexibility, and become overwhelming.<sup>324</sup> The reader can attempt to offer new answers to the questions raised by the protagonists and the text, or develop new questions. Developing new questions can take the reader outside the fiction, reflecting either on the meta-fictional structure, or on the links between the text and the readers' contemporary reality.

Several critics have linked *MàB* to current political issues, especially given Kristeva's involvement with European institutions, and the focus of some of her psychoanalytical studies.<sup>325</sup> Rus believes that

*Murder* is Kristeva's most politically overt novel [since] [i]t can be read as responding to the political crisis threatening to delay the project of the first Constitution of the European Union, caught into [sic] an unprecedented dilemma of whether or not religious references should be made in the preamble of the Constitution.<sup>326</sup>

Bodin takes a less specific stance, comparing Europe to Byzantium, caught between West and East, between 'globalisation led by America, and [...] the Third World, represented by Islamists, as well as by China and India'.<sup>327</sup> While the specificity of Rus's association (between the novel and the EU constitution) can be called into question,<sup>328</sup> it does

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<sup>323</sup> Rzepka, *Detective Fiction*, p. 18.

<sup>324</sup> This idea is explored at length in Michel Butor's *Degrées*.

<sup>325</sup> For example, the study of the link between immigration and delinquency is referred to in *MàB*, pp. 115-116.

<sup>326</sup> Rus, 'Remapping the European Cultural Memory', p. 17.

<sup>327</sup> Bodin, 'Seeking Byzantium', p. 35.

<sup>328</sup> If we were to follow Kristeva's remark — 'j'ai commence [*MàB*] en 1995' (Christine Rousseau, 'Julia Kristeva, la Byzantine', *Le Monde des Livres*, 6 February 2004, p. I) —, the time she had been working on *MàB* does not coincide entirely with the debates around the EU constitution (early drafting started in 2001,

highlight the contemporaneity and political engagement of Kristeva's text. Moreover, religious differences have indeed affected European cohesion, with constitutionally secular countries like France at one end of the spectrum, and highly religious ones, like Poland, at the other. The inclusion of Eastern European countries in the Union (for example Kristeva's native Bulgaria, or Romania) also meant a reconnection with the less well represented Orthodox and Byzantine heritages of the continent. Therefore, whether directly responding to constitutional impediments or not, *MàB* fills a gap in the European political consciousness, by highlighting the multiple socio-cultural forces at work. Stéphanie's nightmare of the Louvre terrorist attacks, at the end of the novel, can be linked to the 2005 London attacks forming the backdrop of *TMA*.<sup>329</sup> Choosing the Louvre as a target emphasises the significance of cultural memory: the attack was not only aimed at the civilian population, but also at the history encapsulated in the museum artefacts. The attack would act as a cleansing and forgetting mechanism. Therefore, writing becomes a manner of countering both violence and forgetting, echoing Arendt's view that narration and story-telling are a form of (political) action.<sup>330</sup> All three writers — Sebastian, Stéphanie, and Kristeva — use writing against violence and forgetting. Sebastian distances his *roman d'Anne* from the violence of the Crusades, and gives voice to a non-Latin perspective. Stéphanie responds to the Santa-Barbara murders with her *polar métaphysique*, encouraging the *voyage de soi*, which would constantly improve knowledge of the subject. Kristeva responds to contemporary political insecurity with a historically inspired novel, aiming to shed light on certain cultural blind spots.

A slightly more complicated picture emerges when we turn towards the manner in which immigration is dealt with in the novel. Santa-Barbara is constructed as a cultural melting pot 'où chacun est un immigrant à deux ou trois générations près'.<sup>331</sup> Early on, a direct correlation is established between migration and increased levels of delinquency, a correlation that seems to be supported by both Rilsky and Kristeva:

L'écrasante majorité des délinquants se recrute comme par hasard chez les immigrés de fraîche date et leurs descendants: tel était le cas général, l'évidence même, le commissaire en avait les preuves statistiques.<sup>332</sup>

[J']ai entendu de même à l'Institut du monde arabe l'étrangère Kristeva diagnostiquer ces nouvelles maladies de l'âme dont souffrent par excellence les immigrés, dit-elle, davantage que les autres. [...] Selon elle, les migrants, les SDF

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with debates around the ratification process being prominent in 2004 and 2005, closer to the publication of *MàB*, rather than its creation).

<sup>329</sup> It can also establish unnerving links with more recent terrorist attacks carried out in France.

<sup>330</sup> Rus, 'Remapping the European Cultural Memory', p. 19.

<sup>331</sup> *MàB*, p. 89.

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

de tous les pays, les fugueurs de langue maternelle et les exclus des langues d'accueil seraient spontanément toxicomanes, faux self, sujets aux maladies psychosomatiques, vandales même.<sup>333</sup>

The above correlation becomes problematic, as it confounds the self's relation to the other. If the other, the stranger, the immigrant is prone to wrongdoings, the self is dissuaded from breaking dichotomies and oppositions. The fact that this correlation is backed by 'preuves statistiques', by Rilsky (who is the voice of pragmatism and reason in the novel), and partly by Kristeva's psychoanalytic explanations, complicates the reader's understanding: how is the reader supposed to recognise the otherness within, if the evidence available encourages him/ her to condemn the actions of the other? If the correlation is a manner of reflecting on our tendency to jump to conclusions (especially conclusions that cement our position of control), then the above paragraphs require an extremely subtle reading. The reader needs to be able to effectively deconstruct irony, which, as highlighted by the narrator later in the text, is a demanding task: 'un bon ironiste a toujours besoin d'un public intelligent, ce qui manque cruellement au quotidien, hélas, hélas!'.<sup>334</sup> A reading of irony is also a destabilising reading, as it calls into question the authority of both Rilsky and Kristeva. The reader can no longer turn towards the detective or the psychoanalyst–author to confirm that his/her reading is correct.<sup>335</sup> As there are no secure reference points any longer, both the text and the reader become unstable. The reader is riddled with doubt over his/ her interpretations, being thrown back into 'l'enquête'. If this doubt is absent, the reader might have failed in reading the irony, possibly falling back into the easily consumable correlation of 'immigration equals delinquency'. According to Stéphanie, 'l'ironie [...] vous guide en vous élevant vers le vrai qui ne peut se dire'.<sup>336</sup> Irony, in a similar manner to writing, is a guide, 'un carnet de route' paving the way towards 'le vrai qui ne se peut dire'. Irony is both a code that needs deciphering, and a guide towards greater understanding. It can thus become an instrument for audience selection. This would nonetheless affect the participatory nature of reading in general, and of reading detective novels in particular, as only readers with advanced reading and deconstructive skills are able to access the meaning dissimulated by subtle irony.

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<sup>333</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid., p. 236.

<sup>335</sup> This can be related to the moment of the psychoanalytic *passé* at the end of therapy. Rather than closure, the *passé* marks the moment the analysand is able to carry on the questioning process on their own, possibly becoming analysts themselves.

<sup>336</sup> *MàB*, p. 365.

A slightly easier set of ideas to read and interpret is Rilsky's view on the pure and the impure. Nevertheless, while they are easier to read, they are not necessarily easier to implement. When dealing with the sinology expert, 'Rilsky n'allait pas lui dire que l'authentique sagesse n'inspirait pas automatiquement un effort de purification, et peut-être même qu'il appartenait à la sagesse de se mêler à l'impur, mais ce n'était guère le moment de discuter'.<sup>337</sup> The sense of uncertainty implied by the 'peut-être' is dispelled later in the text, by the third-person narrator: 'Ils se protègent de leurs propres miasmes en faisant le ménage dans la société [...]. Se protéger n'est pas s'en purger, or un pur est capable de tout, sauf de se mettre en question'.<sup>338</sup> Wisdom is not associated with purity or purification, but rather with the impure, with mixing, and with self-questioning. This is a view closer to the one articulated by Kristeva in *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, as 'l'étrange est en moi, donc nous sommes tous des étrangers. Si je suis étranger, il n'y a pas d'étrangers'.<sup>339</sup> Mixing with what we initially deemed impure becomes a source of wisdom. This is not a mere inclusion, acceptance or tolerance of the other, but rather a shifting of boundaries, a porosity leading to a change in identities. Porosity facilitates self-questioning, as it advocates a constantly open boundary, prone to exchange. It also diminishes the risk of blind spots, carried by most epistemologies. If the mixing is acknowledged, then there is no purity, and hence no dichotomy between the pure and the impure. However, developing this ability requires a change in national and religious reference frameworks. The self-questioning needs to be both individual, and communal or societal. The difficulty of the endeavour is mirrored by Stéphanie's own political reflections: 'mes errances me conduisent aujourd'hui à une autre époque, en Europe, neuf siècles avant la problématique Union du même nom. Qui hésite encore à s'étendre et s'unifier de l'Atlantique à la mer Noire, Turquie comprise ou non – plutôt non, à mon avis de femme sans tchador'.<sup>340</sup> Stéphanie's view is surprisingly simplistic, especially given the fact that she tries to occupy an in-between space, beyond dichotomies. There is a possibility, however, that she is speaking in metaphors and metonymies, boiling down complicated political issues to simple images, such as the two maritime borders of Europe. The reader risks confusing simple with simplistic, thus mistaking the simplicity of the metaphors for over-simplification and further isolating the other, especially when their difference is highly visible — 'femme sans tchador'. Such remarks enhance the

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<sup>337</sup> Ibid., p. 243.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid., p. 334.

<sup>339</sup> Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, p. 284.

<sup>340</sup> *MàB*, p. 138.

textual instability highlighted above, as the reader is required to question the characters and his/her own understanding.

This instability is heightened by the mix of registers, which complements the polyphony of narrative voices analysed above. Word and expression choices such as ‘piges’,<sup>341</sup> ‘un point c’est tout’, ‘bon, mais laissons-le enfin’, ‘couper les cheveux en quatre, c’est ça’, ‘cela faisait belle lurette’,<sup>342</sup> ‘le ras des pâquerettes’<sup>343</sup> contrast significantly with the formal even academic register of other sections. They can act as markers of orality, opening up the text to multiple reading groups, and counteracting the possible elitism and audience selectivity mentioned above. The readers are not just addressed, but also referred to, especially when discussing the specificities of the French audiences:

Depuis toujours et encore plus maintenant, les Français se sont distingués dans une spécialité nationale: ils s’installent au carrefour du sens et du sensible, et en tirent des prodiges qui vous chatouillent le palais, la peau, le pénis, le vagin, l’anus, ce que vous voulez, ce qu’ils peuvent [...] Il faut être franchement inconscient pour jeter un roman dans les librairies de ces gens-là.<sup>344</sup>

These remarks relate back to Stéphanie’s observations on the public’s preference for ‘*clean, trash, hard sex*’ in the form of ‘*reality littérature*’. They also suggest that the text we are currently reading (and Stéphanie’s future text) is written against the grain, opposing contemporary tendencies and traditions. However, reducing the reader’s cultural baggage to a mere selection of authors whose works are sexually stimulating means neglecting the creative intertextual web each reader has at their disposal. While the remark might make us question our reading habits, it can also distance the readers from the text, and stifle the participatory nature of the reading process; it can significantly decrease the hospitable nature of the text.

This view is further explored, when Estelle Pankow tells Stéphanie: ‘Vous faites du polar en vous moquant du polar’.<sup>345</sup> She considers Stéphanie’s text to be a Trojan horse, an anti-detective novel disguised as a ‘polar’.<sup>346</sup> As was mentioned earlier, the ‘polar’ is a highly popular genre in France, attracting a significant portion of the

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<sup>341</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid., p. 90 (all these four expressions appear in the same paragraph)

<sup>343</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid., p. 356.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid., p. 364.

<sup>346</sup> This technique had been used before by representatives of the *nouveau roman*. However, the *nouveaux romanciers* chose to pervert the detective framework due to their epistemological pessimism (for a more complete analysis of this choice see Simon Kemp, ‘Le Nouveau Roman et le roman policier: éloge ou parodie?’, *Itinéraires* [online], 2014.3 (2015), 1–11), whereas Kristeva uses the same framework for the optimism it offers — the possibility of knowing the source of evil.

readership. This same readership was earlier criticised for their deplorable reading habits. Paradoxically, Stéphanie's text (and to a great extent, *MàB* itself) needs to appeal to this audience (by labelling itself 'polar') in order to then question and destabilise it. Another question that arises is whether 'se moquer du polar' also means 'se moquer du lecteur du polar'. Mocking or parodying the reader can be a method to encourage the latter's self-questioning. On the other hand, it can also further distance him/her from the text, or promote acquiescence without recognition (for example, readers might agree with Stéphanie's assessment of the French public, but fail to recognise themselves as part of that group). While Kristeva's literary and textual techniques are consistent with the 'enquête' (even 'enquête du Sujet') she advocates, they do not always take into account the existence of various readerly thresholds, as not all readers are ready to engage freely with textual instability, constant self-questioning, and self-irony.

## **Conclusion**

In Kristeva's articulation, (active and engaged) reading becomes a liminal experience, with the reader joining her plethora of others (foreigners, writers, psychoanalysts etc.). The author is testing (the limits of) the text, thus compelling the reader to test (the limits of) the self. However, these demands can prove too much for the reader, leading to overstrain, and even abandonment of the text. The selected texts offer countless opportunities for analysing the reading and writing processes, the workings of intertextuality, the implications of multi-genre texts, and the links between fiction and the real world. They also facilitate the introduction of two new analytical tools: the reading *Carmel*, and the text as Trojan Horse. The reading *Carmel* encourages reading with others, combining various personal libraries (of texts and experiences), to increase the understanding of the text being read. The text as Trojan Horse appears in disguise, destabilising readerly expectations. It is this destabilising effect that constantly appears at the heart of Kristevan fiction, exerting pressure on the readerly process.

One manner of dealing with this pressure is to look at how the protagonists read and write: Thérèse, Sylvia, Stéphanie, and Sebastian create worlds both out of the fictions they read, and in the fictions they write. While navigating this double layer of creation (and creativity) can be difficult at times, it also becomes a heuristic process: the reader learns how to read Kristevan fiction by reading it. The reality effects provided by the fire,

water, and garden metaphors can ease this reading and learning process. Moreover, food further contributes to multisensorial reading, determining the reader to engage in a sensorio-intellectual reading, in a similar manner to the protagonists (for example, Thérèse's intellectual visions).

Intertexts acquire new meaning in Kristeva's work, as the written texts are interspersed with ekphrastic photographs, maps, musical scores or mathematical formulae. This intertextual richness facilitates the creation of the reading *Carmel*, and contributes to the encyclopaedic character of the works. Knowledge acquisition thus becomes a notable element of reading. However, Kristeva drives this acquisition forward, to knowledge of the self and of the other. The reader is compelled to find a place on the threshold between the text and the real world, and to interrogate the socio-cultural frameworks that have facilitated the creation of the self-other dichotomy. However, often the messages sent by the texts can be mixed, further blurring the reader's position: for example, Rilsky's contention that wisdom comes from the impure, combined with his belief that delinquency rates are higher among immigrant communities.

Paradoxically, Kristeva's texts can be seen to both encourage and stifle the reader's active engagement. The web of intertextualities, the opportunities for multisensorial reading, and the encyclopaedic character can incite the reader to prolong the reading process, and even to come back to the texts in subsequent re-reads. However, the numerous autobiographical projections, the theoretical overload, the polyphony of voices, the ambiguity of the narrative cues, and the digressions from the main plotline narrow the space the reader can carve out for him/herself in the fiction. Put simply, the reader cannot enter a dialogue with the text, as (s)he is spoken to, rather than spoken with; the text asks and answers the questions, providing little opportunity for readerly investigations (especially when it comes to the detective framework). This reduction of the readerly space in fiction can prompt the reader to move to the meta-fictional level, unearthing the codes that inform literary creation and genre expectations. However, such a shift between the fictional and the meta-fictional levels requires sophisticated reading skills that might not be available to the average reader.

The next chapter, focusing on Darrieussecq's fiction, will continue the exploration of the ways in which the selected authors articulate the relation to the other. The fiction of honesty will also be introduced, as an example of the hospitable text, allowing the reader to carve out a creative space in fiction for him/herself, and to build a relationship of trust with the narrator.



## CHAPTER TWO

### Experiencing the Other as Fault Line in Marie Darrieussecq's Novels

#### Introduction

In a 2012 interview with Shirley Jordan, Marie Darrieussecq plotted her work in relation to various feminist trends:

J'ai fait partie des premières, avec Virginie Despentes ou par exemple Lorette Nobécourt, à dire des choses du corps féminin qui ont pu déranger à la fois les féministes classiques qui se recommandaient de Beauvoir ou les féministes qui se recommandaient d'un essentialisme à la Kristeva ou à la Cixous. On était dans quelque chose de beaucoup plus à la Monique Wittig, plus violent, plus radical.<sup>1</sup>

Darrieussecq writes the (female) body into literature, in an effort to reverse the silencing processes affecting women's desires and pleasures. Writing the body becomes essential for feminist endeavours and for truly knowing the other (in this case, the woman as other). However, this writing of the body is not essentialist or shrouded in euphemisms; it is direct, violent, radical, and therefore new on the French literary scene. Nonetheless, the comparisons with Kristeva and Wittig need to be nuanced, as Darrieussecq shares with Kristeva an interest in psychoanalysis and in putting forward new discourses of maternity. While the focus on the body links her to Wittig, the latter's activist involvement and innovations at the level of language and grammar distance her from Darrieussecq's current work. Examining Darrieussecq's work in the middle of the thesis (between chapters focusing on Kristeva and Wittig) allows for such nuancing, as the analysis will move beyond the writing of the body, towards the manner in which our relations to the other are articulated in her fictional works, and towards the choice of representing the other as a fault line — *un bord, une faille* — in need of exploration.

For the past twenty years, Marie Darrieussecq has been a constant presence on the French literary scene, marking the *rentrées littéraires*, prompting significant interest from academic and critical *milieux* (both within and outside France), and receiving extensive

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<sup>1</sup> Shirley Jordan and Marie Darrieussecq, 'Entretien avec Marie Darrieussecq', *Dalhousie French Studies*, 98, Marie Darrieussecq (2012), 133–46 (p. 136).

media attention. The latter is partly due to the immense success of her debut novel, *Truismes* (1996) which sold 400,000 copies in the first year after its publication, having reached audiences in forty countries.<sup>2</sup> While not all of her subsequent works had the same commercial success, Darrieussecq remains a key reference for contemporary French literature, having created an aesthetic universe that can be identified as Darrieussecq-ien. This aesthetic universe explores the creative possibilities offered by various genres, narrative voices, and spatio-temporal settings, while simultaneously interrogating the limits of language. It is this work at the limit, or at the margins, that runs through the entirety of this Darrieussecq-ien aesthetic universe, calling for a constant re-examination of self-other relations.

The main aim of this chapter is to explore the mechanisms through which Marie Darrieussecq represents the other as a fault line, and to analyse the possible impact this has upon the reading process, and upon overall reception. We would usually consider a fault line to be a separation between two entities, a crack in the (stable) ground that makes it difficult to reach someone on the other side. Often, a construction resembling a bridge is needed to join the two separate edges of the fault line. However, focusing on the bridge prevents us from looking at the depth of the fault line, a depth in need of exploration, which would allow us to enlarge the image we have of the world. The novels analysed in this chapter enact a displacement of the traditional fault line image outlined above — in these novels, the fault line no longer separates the self and the other, but the other becomes the fault line whose depths need to be explored to enhance understanding. The association of the other with the fault line stems from the vocabulary used by Darrieussecq to describe some of her narrators, protagonists, and characters, a vocabulary that presents them as ‘creux’, ‘faille[s]’, ‘trou[s]’, ‘pli[s]’, ‘repli[s]’. In order to enter into dialogue with them, the reader does not need to build a bridge, but rather to accept the challenge of exploring the depths. This exploration is reminiscent of the tension identified by Attridge (and analysed in the Introduction) between responsibility for the other and responsibility for the self. Given Kristeva’s assertion that ‘l’étrange est en moi’, the fault line is also internalised. Firstly, the self has unexplored depths, and secondly, the self can become a fault line for the other (in a similar manner to how the other became a fault line the self has the possibility of exploring). Therefore, the fault line is both internal and external; exploring one type of fault line can provide us with tools to explore the other type.

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<sup>2</sup> John Lambeth, ‘Entretien avec Marie Darrieussecq’, *The French Review*, 79.4 (2006), 806–18 (pp. 806 and 813).

Most of Darrieussecq's protagonists tend to occupy or be related to marginal and liminal spaces<sup>3</sup> or *non-lieux*,<sup>4</sup> such as airports, the *banlieue*, the sea, and even the Basque country. Because 'le lecteur est laissé indéfiniment en ballottage',<sup>5</sup> (s)he has no stable reference points for interpretation; not being able to settle on either side of the fault line, the only option left is to explore its depths. Thus, the fault line becomes an appropriate image to capture both diegetic and extra-diegetic interactions with the other. The others that populate Darrieussecq's novels go through a series of liminal experiences: various bodily transformations (metamorphoses into a sow and puberty), the birth and the death of a child, or the endless wait for an unresponsive partner. If readers want to be part of a meaningful dialogue with these others, they need to engage with their liminal experiences. However, because these experiences are liminal, readers might have very few tools to relate to them (their personal library of experiences and intertexts might not include them). It is through reading that these tools can be acquired or developed. Thus, reading becomes a process of learning how to deal with and respond to liminal experiences, at least in fiction, if not also in real life.

There is a constant *mise-en-abyme* of self-other relations in Darrieussecq's universe: first of all, as an author she sees writing to be an act of dispossession, 'je pense que pour moi l'écriture c'est une forme de disparition en fait, de prendre le large, m'oublier moi, m'affronter à ou entrer dans un autre univers'.<sup>6</sup> Writing becomes the self's way of becoming other. Secondly, her narrators and protagonists are faced with otherness via stories of transformation, disappearance, or dealing with difference. Reading, writing and other creative processes are often portrayed in the texts as attempts to come to terms with the (differences of the) other. The ambiguity of the endings renders definite conclusions difficult to attain. The fault line is not closed but, on the contrary, the reader is encouraged to explore further, which can in turn lead to a more fluid relation with the other.

It is the combination of these topics — the other as fault line, the *mise-en-abyme* of self-other relations, and the turn towards creative processes as a way of dealing with difference — alongside her ever-growing *œuvre*, and public and commercial success that

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<sup>3</sup> Jean H. Duffy, 'Liminality and Fantasy in Marie Darrieussecq, Marie NDiaye and Marie Redonnet', *MLN*, 124.4 (2009), 901–28.

<sup>4</sup> Emer O'Beirne, 'Navigating "Non-Lieux" in Contemporary Fiction: Houellebecq, Darrieussecq, Echenoz, and Augé', *Modern Language Review*, 101.2 (2006), 388–401.

<sup>5</sup> Annabelle Marie, Jean-Louis Cornille, 'Portrait de Marie Darrieussecq se livrant à une forme particulière d'altruisme', *Estudios Románicos*, 23 (2014), 129–40 (p. 135).

<sup>6</sup> Marie Darrieussecq and Jeannette Gaudet, "'Des livres sur la liberté": conversation avec Marie Darrieussecq', *Dalhousie French Studies*, 59 (2002), 108–18 (p. 108).

posit Darrieussecq as a compelling case-study in a wider analysis of the reception of French women writers. As mentioned above, she shares with Kristeva a background in psychoanalysis.<sup>7</sup> However, while Kristeva's fiction is linked to her psychoanalytic theory, according to Kemp, Darrieussecq's work 'avoids psychoanalytic interpretations and focuses on the immediate and the physiological'.<sup>8</sup> We can further nuance this understanding: while Darrieussecq's texts do not openly employ psychoanalytic terms or explanations, she does credit her work as a practising psychoanalyst in widening her creative horizons.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, psychoanalysis has allegedly allowed Darrieussecq to come to terms with her own personal ghosts, and move away from an approach that equates writing with scriptotherapy. Psychoanalysis helped the author reach a point where she was able to start writing about the  *sujet*, rather than the  *moi*: 'En parlant sur le divan de mes problèmes, en les cernant, en les mettant à leur juste place, je cessais aussi de considérer l'écriture comme une thérapie, et j'étais plus ouverte au plaisir de l'autre'.<sup>10</sup> Another common feature between the two writers is their interest in re-negotiating discourses of maternity,<sup>11</sup> as they both highlight the restricted and restricting frameworks we still use to talk about the mother-child relationship.

Most of the critical work on Darrieussecq to date tends to deal with the first half of her work, especially with her first four novels: *Truismes* (1996), *Naissance des fantômes* (1998), *Le Mal de mer* (1999), and *Bref séjour chez les vivants* (2001). This chapter will keep *Truismes* as an analytical starting point, but will focus on more recent works, including the autobiographically inspired *Le Bébé*,<sup>12</sup> the *Rapport de police* study,<sup>13</sup> and three of her most recent novels: *Tom est mort*, *Clèves*, and *Il faut beaucoup aimer les hommes*. *Tom est mort* was the novel that prompted Camille Laurens to accuse

<sup>7</sup> Simon Kemp, 'Darrieussecq's mind', *French Studies*, 72.4 (2008), 429–41 (p.440).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 429.

<sup>9</sup> Darrieussecq and Gaudet, "Des livres sur la liberté", p. 112.

<sup>10</sup> Marie Darrieussecq, "Parler de soi débarrasse de soi", in *Récit de divan, propos de fauteuil. Comment la psychanalyse peut changer la vie*, by Sophie Carquain and Maryse Vaillant (Paris: Albin Michel, 2007), pp. 129–35 (p. 132).

<sup>11</sup> For example Julia Kristeva's 'Stabat mater' and Darrieussecq's *Le Bébé*.

<sup>12</sup> Shirley Jordan considers *Le Bébé* to be 'un carnet ethno-auto-biographique'. Darrieussecq echoes this view, when she refers to the text as '[non] pas une autofiction, c'est strictement autobiographique, c'est un document' (see Jordan and Darrieussecq, 'Entretien avec Marie Darrieussecq', pp. 133 and 134). The idea of a 'carnet ethno-biographique' or a 'document' widens the autobiographical scope of the text; therefore, for the purposes of this chapter *Le Bébé* will be considered as an autobiographically inspired/autobiographical text. The label of autobiography will not be used, as the text does not comprise all the elements required by Lejeune's definition (namely, the fact that the author, narrator, and character need to have the same identity; see Lejeune, *Le Pacte Autobiographique*, p. 15). In *Le Bébé*, the mother-narrator is not named, nor are the other characters around her. This anonymity contributes to widening the scope of the text, as it speaks about mothers, babies, and parents, rather than simply about a particular family.

<sup>13</sup> *Rapport de police* will mostly provide theoretical elements for enhancing the analyses, rather than being the subject of an in-depth examination as the other texts will be.

Darrieussecq of ‘plagiat psychique’, an accusation that determined the latter to present her response in *Rapport de police*. *Clèves* and *Il faut...* are the only two novels to date to share the same protagonist. Moreover, *Clèves* was seen to achieve in fiction what *Rapport de police* did for literary criticism — showing the richness intertextuality can provide, and the manner in which existent themes can be re-appropriated and re-interpreted. A further connection can be established between *Le Bébé* and *Tom est mort*, as we are encouraged to consider the latter to be ‘un livre noir, noir et solaire, le noir jumeau de celui-ci [*Le Bébé*]’.<sup>14</sup> Even if almost twenty years separate *Truismes* from *Il faut...*, there are elements in both novels that reassure the reader of his/her entrance into Darrieussecq’s creative universe. These links become relevant for the reading process, as they equip the reader with tools to create their own readerly space in fiction; nonetheless, they also affect the readers’ freedom in the creation of this space and their levels of engagement with one or more of Darrieussecq’s works.

This chapter will analyse such intra-*œuvre*<sup>15</sup> clues, and establish connections between *Truismes* and later novels. This is despite the fact that very often critics see a clear separation between *Truismes* and Darrieussecq’s subsequent work:

*Truismes* is distinguished from Darrieussecq’s subsequent writings by its ironic tenor and its urge to excess, which make it a more boisterously entertaining and ideologically provocative work than those which follow.<sup>16</sup>

Mais avec *Le Mal de mer* et *Naissance des fantômes* et même avec *Bref séjour* l’écriture est intimiste, très sensible aux petites variations d’humeur, alors que dans *Truismes* il y un érotisme affiché, une voix narrative naïve et limitée.<sup>17</sup>

This chapter will aim to nuance such contentions, proving that themes introduced early on in Darrieussecq’s work are fully explored in later novels. Darrieussecq herself has refined the relations between her works. In a 2002 interview she saw *Naissance des fantômes* as the starting point of her fiction:

*Naissance des fantômes*, c’était pour moi le coup d’envoi de ma fiction, mon futur travail, après avoir posé une espèce de borne comme ça, *Truismes*, d’avoir vidé mon sac d’un coup. *Naissance des fantômes*, c’était la naissance des autres livres. [...] Donc *Naissance des fantômes*, naissance de la fiction.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> *Le Bébé*, p. 79.

<sup>15</sup> The term intra-*œuvre* is used to refer to a particular type of intertextuality, namely links between texts written by the same author. Intra-*œuvre* is preferred to intratextuality, as intratextuality suggests links within the same text, whereas intra-*œuvre* refers to links across multiple texts written by the same author.

<sup>16</sup> Shirley-Ann Jordan, *Contemporary French Women’s Writing. Women’s Vision, Women’s Voices, Women’s Lives*. (Bern: Peter Lang, 2004), p. 77

<sup>17</sup> Lambeth, ‘Entretien avec Marie Darrieussecq’, p. 810.

<sup>18</sup> Darrieussecq and Gaudet, “Des livres sur la liberté”, p. 112.

However, in a 2006 interview, she claims to consider her first three novels as belonging to a continuum:

pour moi, il y a une trilogie avec *Truismes*, *Naissance des fantômes* et *Le Mal de mer*. Je comprends que c'est peut-être étonnant, mais ce sont trois livres qui se ressemblent en fait. Je sais très bien que la surface stylistique est différente, mais pour moi c'est la même histoire.<sup>19</sup>

Having the advantage of accessing Darrieussecq's most recent works, this chapter will attempt to point towards the intra-*œuvre* dialogues between *Truismes*, *Clèves* and *Il faut....* Analysing a wider selection of Darrieussecq's novels enables us to identify certain recurring elements that signal the existence of a specifically Darrieussecq-ien aesthetic universe. While these recurring elements could reassure readers of finding themselves in a known environment, they also highlight difference and multiple possibilities for interpretation. Recurrences and repetitions can become highly destabilising, as evidenced by Descombes: '[o]n doit alors cesser de définir la répétition par le retour du même, par la réitération de l'identique: elle est, bien au contraire, la production de la différence'.<sup>20</sup> The recurrence of certain elements in Darrieussecq's creative universe does not narrow down the reach of her fiction, but rather creates a kaleidoscope of viewpoints.

This chapter builds an argument in three layers, moving from intertexts to texts, and finally to meta-texts. The first layer examines the four types of intertextual links that can be established within the Darrieussecq-ien creative universe. The second layer returns to the texts, focusing on elements such as language, textual hospitality, and time. One of our first contacts with the other is via language, and as such initial (mis)understandings are mediated through its mechanisms and (mis)uses. Therefore, the argument will explore the use of clichés and of a scientific lexicon, also focusing on various ways of naming the unnameable, and on the uses of the mother('s) tongue. Moving from language to narratorial techniques, the analysis will introduce the concept of the fiction of honesty as an example of the hospitable text, and subsequently examine the inscriptions of time in fiction. The fiction of honesty can adjust the relation between the narrator and the reader, setting the parameters for the contribution the latter can have to the text. The inscriptions of time manage the rhythms of reading, the time spent with the text, and the possible returns to it. The final layer of the argument will turn towards the meta-text or the *mise-en-abyme* of the processes of reading and writing, as many of Darrieussecq's characters undertake both actions within the diegesis. The characters' need to tell their story will be

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<sup>19</sup> Lambeth, 'Entretien avec Marie Darrieussecq', p. 810.

<sup>20</sup> Descombes, *Le Même et l'autre*, p. 180.

highlighted, as well as the subversive potential of reading and writing. It is through these two processes that the protagonists are able to connect to other characters or fictional consciousnesses; reading and writing become essential in exploring the other as fault line.

### **Intertextualities in Darrieussecq's fiction**

The in-depth study of some of Darrieussecq's most recent works, alongside her first published novel, *Truismes*, helped identify at least four different types of intertextualities in Darrieussecq's creative universe. The first type is related to popular culture, and contemporary events such as news items or events of national and international importance. Most often these intertexts are easily observable by the majority of the readership. However, they are time bound; they have their own *kairos*<sup>21</sup> which is closer to the time of writing and publication, rather than necessarily the time of reading. For example, in *Truismes* the figure of Edgar and his political discourses are reminiscent of the figure of Jean Marie Le Pen and the Front National party. In *Le Bébé*, several news items lend authenticity to the text and make the mother worry about the world her son will be living in: 'Un avion s'encastre dans le World Trade Centre [...] Je me fais de souci pour son avenir';<sup>22</sup> 'Libération, 22 août 2001: "La polémique fait rage en Espagne sur l'origine du jouet piégé qui a tué, lundi matin au Pays basque, une femme de soixante-deux ans et grièvement blessé son petit-fils de seize mois"''.<sup>23</sup> Similar news items mark Solange's return to France from Cameroon:

Dans l'avion du retour elle lut la presse française. Le musée d'Angoulême avait rouvert. [...] Un réseau sur Internet nommé Facebook, fort de son succès outre Atlantique, était lancé en France. [...] Les parents de Maddie, enlevée au Portugal, clamaient leur innocence. Le sénateur d'Illinois Barack Obama gagnait les primaires dans le Mississippi [...].<sup>24</sup>

In other instances, the news items are more context specific, but they still remain easily accessible or searchable. For example, in *Tom est mort*, the narrator mentions the case of the Australian family who lost their child in the bush, and the authorities' subsequent mistakes: 'À l'époque, en Australie, les flics étaient gentils, je parle des flics chargés d'enquêter sur les mères. Quelque temps avant notre arrivée, ils avaient eu leur affaire

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<sup>21</sup> The right time for certain things to happen or to be understood.

<sup>22</sup> *Le Bébé*, pp. 126–27.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 87–88.

<sup>24</sup> *Il faut...*, pp. 293–95.

Grégory, dans le désert, du côté d’Alice Springs’.<sup>25</sup> Critics have even suggested intertextual links between Yvan’s transformation into a werewolf in *Truismes* and Michael Jackson’s *Thriller* music video.<sup>26</sup> More direct links between Michael Jackson’s music and Darrieussecq’s texts are visible in *Clèves*: ‘cette chanson [*Billie Jean*] lui fait bouger les pieds et les hanches irrésistiblement’.<sup>27</sup>

A second type of intertextuality is present between Darrieussecq’s works and literary works by other authors. In certain instances, the reader is clearly pointed in the direction of these intertexts. For example, in *Tom est mort* the narrator uses specific references to Charlotte Delbo, Victor Hugo, and Georges Perec: ‘J’ai noté 140/100 le poème de Hugo [*Demain, dès l’aube*] [...] J’ai noté 150/100 tous les livres de Charlotte Delbo [...] Et 100 à Georges Perec’.<sup>28</sup> In a similar manner, in *Truismes*, the Knut Hamsun fragment appears both as an *exergue* and requoted within the body of the text,<sup>29</sup> while Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* drives Kouhouesso’s creative endeavour: ‘il voulait adapter *Cœur des ténèbres* au cinéma, faire autrement que Coppola avec son *Apocalypse Now* et en tout cas *sur place*’.<sup>30</sup> *Le Bébé*, furthermore, mentions authors that have explored the figure of the baby: ‘La mort de son fils Rudy accompagne Bloom entre chaque ligne d’*Ulysse*, comme un fantôme. [...] Il y a dans *Pet Semetary* [sic], de Stephen King, une scène finale extraordinaire, où le fils de quatre ans revient d’entre les morts trucidar sa mère’.<sup>31</sup> However, these intertextual links are not always clearly pointed out, and in such cases they depend upon the reader’s previous interactions with other texts. For example, Claire Marrone identified connections between *Le Bébé* and works by Annie Ernaux, especially in terms of form, tone, and style.<sup>32</sup> In *Rapport de police* Darrieussecq herself points towards intertextual links that are not clearly named in her novels: ‘Dans *White* est cachée une phrase de Nietzsche sur le désert qui croît! Et dans *Tom est mort* un vers de Nerval crie!’.<sup>33</sup> One particular type of intertextual dialogue can be found between *Clèves* and Madame de La Fayette’s *La Princesse de Clèves*. While the connection between the two texts can fall within this second type of intertextuality (between Darrieussecq’s texts

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<sup>25</sup> *Tom est mort*, p. 131.

<sup>26</sup> Colette Sarrey-Strack, *Fictions contemporaines au féminin. Marie Darrieussecq, Marie Ndiaye, Marie Nimier, Marie Redonnet* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2002), p. 78.

<sup>27</sup> *Clèves*, p. 106.

<sup>28</sup> *Tom est mort*, pp. 186–87 (the mother-narrator is trying to plot the different texts on the stress scale; while the highest score on this scale is 100, she decides to personalise the scale and introduces scores of up to 150).

<sup>29</sup> *Truismes*, p. 100.

<sup>30</sup> *Il faut...*, p. 68.

<sup>31</sup> *Le Bébé*, pp. 52–53.

<sup>32</sup> Claire Marrone, ‘Echoes of Annie Ernaux in Marie Darrieussecq’s *Le Bébé*’, *Dalhousie French Studies*, 76 (2006), 93–99.

<sup>33</sup> *Rapport de police*, p. 13.



and literary works by other authors), it can also fall within the remit of the first one (popular intertexts), as Madame de Lafayette's text is a widely known novel, appearing on the school curriculum. Moreover, the novel caused considerable controversy when Nicolas Sarkozy publicly doubted its relevance to contemporary times and professions. This particular text could be seen to occupy a borderline position between the two types of intertextuality already analysed, namely popular and literary.

A third type of intertextuality refers to the *intra-œuvre* links mentioned above, establishing connections between Darrieussecq's own works. While she states that 'j'écris le livre que je ne sais pas encore écrire',<sup>34</sup> a reader familiar with her work can identify elements pointing towards the existence of a Darrieusecq-ien creative universe. One such element, noticeable from her first novel, is the image of the lost child that haunts the text. In *Truismes*, the narrator herself suffers a miscarriage, 'A côté de moi par terre il y avait six petites choses sanglantes qui remuaient. Vu la forme que ça avait j'ai bien vu que ça ne ferait pas long feu';<sup>35</sup> the narrator's mother is also said to have had to have an abortion, as the family could not afford a second child: 'Ma mère elle-même, il n'y avait pas si longtemps que ça, avait attendu le cinquième mois pour se faire avorter en pleurant, on avait trop besoin de son salaire à la maison'.<sup>36</sup> If in the first novel the theme of the lost child is left largely unexplored, it becomes central in *Tom est mort*, marking other works along the way (in *Naissance des fantômes*, the narrator, whose husband disappears without trace, mentions having had several miscarriages; the characters of *Bref séjour chez les vivants* are haunted by the loss of their younger brother through drowning; in *White* the female protagonist is connected to a mother who murdered her children, while in *Le Pays* the family has to deal with the memory of a dead child). Tom is not the only lost child that features in the novel *Tom est mort*; the narrator herself claims to have had a brother who passed away:

Un frère ça me manquait. Ma mère avait perdu un fils, tout bébé. Un mort par génération, j'essayais de ne pas trop y penser. Une malédiction, une dîme de l'enfant mort. Ma mère, il fallait croire qu'elle s'en était remise (mon père, non), remise à sa façon, comme une vieille grange, comme un hangar où on enferme le vieux bazar du chagrin.<sup>37</sup>

A similar scenario re-appears in *Clèves* (and by extension in *Il faut...*), Solange being made aware that she had an older brother she had never met:

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 195.

<sup>35</sup> *Truismes*, p. 91.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>37</sup> *Tom est mort*, p. 172.

Au salon aussi il y avait une photo. Elle était là comme les rideaux, la cheminée, les étains, et tout un tas de choses qui n'ont pas de nom parce que justement elles sont là, là d'avant, avant elle, Solange. Le petit garçon appartient à la photo comme l'objet pendu appartient au mur [...].<sup>38</sup>

La photo scellée sur la dalle est la même que celle de la table de chevet [...] Sur la dalle, la date indiquait, chiffres hypnotiques, qu'il était mort avant sa date à elle [...] elle et le fils de ses parents s'étaient ratés de peu.<sup>39</sup>

Son père avait perdu son fils. Kouhouesso avait perdu son père enfant.<sup>40</sup>

The plagiarism accusations raised by Camille Laurens forced Darrieussecq to refer to the loss of a child that marked her own family:

Il m'est arrivé d'être attaquée parce que je n'avais pas vécu ce que j'écris. Il m'est arrivé d'avoir à invoquer un frère mort pour justifier mon droit à écrire un roman.<sup>41</sup>

Il se trouve que dans ma famille, il y a un secret [...] Et ce secret tourne autour de..., je n'ai pas envie... un jour je l'écrirai. Ce secret tourne autour de la mort d'un enfant.<sup>42</sup>

Readers engaging with more than one of Darrieussecq's works can follow the representations of this ghostly presence, and try to understand the different manners in which it affects the lives of the protagonists. However, the fact that the image of the lost child marks both fiction and reality can affect the reading process, leaving the readership in a state of ambiguity. Paradoxically, the more a reader knows about the child that haunts (from engaging with both Darrieussecq's fiction, and critical work or interviews), the less precisely (s)he can situate this child solely within the space of fiction. Stojanovic further highlighted this paradox when analysing the metafictional roles of the ghosts: 'she [Darrieussecq] linked the ghosts of her novels to a personal tragedy, thus running the risk of having her readers focus on the people these ghosts allegedly represent rather than what they do and how they function in the novel'.<sup>43</sup> By mentioning the family connection, the haunting child risks seeping outside the diegesis, rather than maintaining its liminal, ghostly position; the haunting child can become the memory of the lost brother, rather than a ghost with its role in fiction.

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<sup>38</sup> *Clèves*, p. 34.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 268 (the idea of 's'être raté de peu' is explored in more depth by Kathryn Robson in her article on *Tom est mort* and the plagiarism accusation it generated, see Kathryn Robson, 'Psychic Plagiarism: The death of a child in Marie Darrieussecq's *Tom est mort* and Camille Laurens's *Philippe*', *French Studies*, 69.1 (2015), 46–59 (p. 59)).

<sup>40</sup> *Il faut...*, p. 193.

<sup>41</sup> *Rapport de police*, p. 310.

<sup>42</sup> Lambeth, 'Entretien avec Marie Darrieussecq', p. 811.

<sup>43</sup> Sonja Stojanovic, 'Marie Darrieussecq's Ghost', *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures*, 69.4 (2015), 190–202 (p. 192).

Another element linking several novels is the presence of marginal spaces and territories, especially the Basque country. No obvious connection to the Basque country is present for most of *Truismes*, but in the second half of the novel, while the narrator tries to comfort Yvan during his transformation, she refers to the ‘collines basques’.<sup>44</sup> This landscape relates to a primeval environment, enhancing the lyricism of the paragraph, and the creative abilities of the narrator. In subsequent novels, the Basque country is closely related to identity formation and belonging. Her Basque origins differentiate Solange from other French nationals, ‘À l’époque elle n’avait pas osé signaler au prof que son second prénom, Oïhana, signifiait la Forêt en basque. Les Basques sont les Africains de l’Europe’,<sup>45</sup> while in *Le Bébé*, the Basque heritage is reflected even in lullabies and child’s play: ‘Père et mère, le patrimoine de comptines: hasards géographiques dont il fera, si ça lui chante, ses racines.’<sup>46</sup> When Darrieussecq’s own Basque origin is added to the mix, the picture becomes even more complicated. In a similar way to the child that haunts the text, the Basque origin blurs the limits between fiction and reality. Nonetheless, the specific regional heritage is used to highlight marginal positions, and the epistemologies of people living at the periphery (be it geographic or symbolic peripheries).<sup>47</sup> The concept of nessology might be useful to further analyse these points of view. Nessology, a concept introduced to analyse cultural production coming from the islands of the Atlantic,<sup>48</sup> can be reinterpreted when dealing with Darrieussecq’s characters. While the Basque country is not geographically an island, it is a space of otherness, different from the distinctly European languages and identities that surround it. It is an island of otherness, of non-European-ness in the middle of Europe. This distinctiveness is emphasised especially in *Le Bébé*, *Clèves*, and *Il faut...* More specifically, the Basque origin is associated with the maternal heritage: ‘Sa mère s’est mise à réapprendre la langue d’ici. Soi-disant que ses grands-parents ne parlaient que ça, même pas français ni rien.’<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> *Truismes*, p. 128.

<sup>45</sup> *Il faut...*, p. 118.

<sup>46</sup> *Le Bébé*, p. 130.

<sup>47</sup> Darrieussecq and Gaudet, “Des livres sur la liberté”, p. 112, and Marie-Claire Barnet, Shirley Jordan, and Marie Darrieussecq, ‘Entretien avec Marie Darrieussecq’, *Dalhousie French Studies*, 93, Women and Space (2010), 123–29 (p. 127).

<sup>48</sup> Concept introduced by Francisco-J. Hernández Adrián, nessology (from *nesos*, meaning island in Ancient Greek) refers to the particular epistemological view point of artists working and living on islands, as they see the whole world moving around them (especially people coming and going via ports). The artist observes the rest of the world from the tip of the island, taking it all in without fully being part of it. For a more extensive explanation see Jill Robbins and Roberta Johnson, ‘Introduction: Rethinking Spain from across the Seas’, *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature*, 30.1 (2006), 10–19 (p. 15).

<sup>49</sup> *Clèves*, p. 221.

A third recurring image in Darrieussecq's world is the animal imagery, especially the marine type. While *Truismes* clearly deals with animality through the story of transformation, a connection with primeval times via the animal realm is present in subsequent novels (for example, the procession of animals and humans in *Il faut...* briefly reconstitutes the history of the planet; while the pangolin becomes a symbol of exotic, uncharted space).<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, the references to the animal world are crafted in such a manner as to add lyricism to the texts, even to non-fictional ones, like *Rapport de police*:

C'est vrai, je m'y connais en singes. Et en truies. Et en fantômes. Et en fantasmés. C'est mon métier, et plus que cela. J'ai un *savoir-faire* en métamorphoses. Parfois, mon front se couvre de très anciens coquillages, et je plonge rendre visite à des baleines, et nous devisons en flottant; et le plancton prend des formes extravagantes dans les rayons de soleil sous la mer.<sup>51</sup>

This connection to the animal realm is highlighted in a short text written by Darrieussecq during one of the creative events organised by Villa Gillet: 'Une femme, un animal, comme on voudra une animale. Si j'avais un totem ce serait la baleine ou l'éléphant: gros, anciens, sages animaux. Animaux de souffle'.<sup>52</sup>

The fourth and final type of intertextuality identified in connection to Darrieussecq's works relies heavily on the readers' own contributions, and is therefore highly variable from reader to reader, or from one reading community to the other. The best way of illustrating the mechanisms of this layer of intertextuality is by quoting the example used by Darrieussecq in *Rapport de police*, when talking about the reactions to her second novel, *Naissance des fantômes*:

Pour ce même livre, à Buenos Aires, les questions, après une conférence, prirent un tour qui me bouleversa: dans ce pays aux trente mille disparus, ce roman avait été lu comme une protestation *in memoriam*, comme un geste politique. Cet accueil fut le plus bel hommage qu'on ait rendu à *Naissance des fantômes* et j'ignorais, en l'écrivant, qu'il parlait aussi de ça.<sup>53</sup>

While the novel does not mention the plight of the Argentinian people during the 1970s, Argentinian readers applied their own personal library of experiences to the text,

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<sup>50</sup> *Il faut...*, p. 260 (for the animal procession), and pp. 245-48 (for the pangolin).

<sup>51</sup> *Rapport de police*, p. 28.

<sup>52</sup> Marie Darrieussecq, 'Mon Mot Préféré', *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, 16.5 (2012), 725. In her short stories outlining recent literary metamorphoses, Catherine Axelrad identifies these transformations as AME, ancient metamorphic epidemic. Both 'animal' and 'âme' share the same latin origin (*anima* meaning breath), linking Axelrad's acronym to Darrieussecq's totem animal (for the short story, see Catherine Axelrad, 'Report on the Eradication and Resurgence of Metamorphic Illnesses in the West, 1880-1998', in *Ovid Metamorphosed*, ed. by Philip Terry (London: Chatto and Windus, 2000), pp. 237-43).

<sup>53</sup> *Rapport de police*, p. 385, and Barraband et Gassmann, 'Entretien avec Marie Darrieussecq', *La Lettre de l'enfance et de l'adolescence*, 59 (2005), 9-16 (p. 13).

interpreting it in a manner that was in line with their socio-historical background. The quotation above suggests that such an intertext was not initially intended by the author. In a subsequent novel (*Bref séjour chez les vivants* (2001)), one of the characters lives in Argentina, and while walking around the Plaza de Mayo, she sees the mothers of the *desaparecidos*.<sup>54</sup> A link can be established between the reception of and the reaction to *Naissance des fantômes* in Argentina, and the spaces represented in *Bref séjour chez les vivants* (Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires). However, we are in no position to establish any causality between the two elements (did the author integrate the reference to Argentinian history as a response to the reception of her second novel, or was the reference already planned before the encounter with her readers?). Nonetheless, what we can infer is that Argentinian readers would have a different relation to that particular reference than readers who are unfamiliar with the historical events depicted. An exhaustive account of this variable and flexible type of intertextuality is neither possible nor desirable. It does nonetheless contribute to the posterity of the work. Moreover, the existence of a reading community (or even a reading *Carmel*, as introduced in the previous chapter) could help in envisaging the sharing of these multiple intertextualities and interpretations.

### **Carving out new linguistic and literary spaces**

Language is one of our first means of interaction with the other: we use language to articulate who the other is, and how we relate to them. However, language itself is ridden with norms, stereotypes, and pre-constructed frameworks, becoming a shorthand for referring to the other, without having to account for their particularities. Language structures our reality, and can therefore further cement a variety of stereotypes (i.e. gender or racial stereotypes). Instead of revealing otherness, language can obscure it and fall back into over-generalisations. It is this obscuring mechanism that Darrieussecq aims to reveal, as in her works she experiments with language, trying to peel off these additional linguistic layers. The author moves from experimenting with language *per-se* to highlighting the tropes and metaphors we construct using it (i.e. the humanity/ animality dichotomy, the Oedipus complex, or the covering up of the possibility of children's death). When revealing these linguistic deficiencies, the author does not always offer

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<sup>54</sup> Shirley-Ann Jordan, 'Figuring out the Family: Family as Everyday Practice in Contemporary French Women's Writing', in *Affaires de famille. The Family in Contemporary French Culture and Theory*, ed. by Marie-Claire Barnet and Edward Welch (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2007), pp. 39–58 (p. 48).

alternatives; the reader is tasked with carving out this new language. The reader has both a constructive and a deconstructive task: firstly, (s)he needs to discern the mechanisms through which language structures everyday reality, and secondly (s)he needs to find tools to break this structuring work. In a subsequent extra-textual move, these linguistic changes can be transferred from the text to the outside world.

Even though the pool of themes available in Darrieussecq's fictional universe can be limited, language offers infinite opportunities for exploration:

vouée à répéter les mêmes thèmes, je n'ai pas tant la sensation de creuser un même sillon que de changer de sillon à chaque fois, de porter ailleurs mes fantômes. Voir le monde à neuf encore une fois. Ouvrir une fenêtre où je ne l'ai jamais ouverte. Ouvrir le langage à une autre page.<sup>55</sup>

This opening of language is achieved through various means, one of them being the interaction with clichés, *lieux-communs*, stereotypes, and truisms. While the title of *Truismes* clearly indicates such interactions, a similar process occurs in *Clèves, Il faut...*, and *Le Bébé*, the latter two undertaking a more complex analysis of clichés within the text itself. As clichés are part and parcel of our social interactions, the author aims to show their emptiness by using them in their most literal sense — 'le corpus du texte coupe les ailes aux symboles';<sup>56</sup> no symbolic reading is encouraged, as the clichés are fully enacted or believed. The narrator of *Truismes* and the protagonist of *Clèves*, (teenage) Solange, are characterised by a similar naiveté<sup>57</sup> when dealing with the transformation of their bodies, and their interactions with the opposite sex. The objectification of women is fully embraced when the protagonist of *Truismes* ponders on her relation to Honoré: 'je lui sais encore gré de sa bonté, de sa patience, rien ne l'obligeait à me garder puisque je ne l'attirais plus sexuellement'.<sup>58</sup> Women's social status is seen as being determined only by their ability to satisfy their partners. Moreover, not even the advantage of hindsight allows the narrator to move beyond such considerations:

sans doute que le mieux pour les jeunes filles de maintenant, je me permets d'énoncer cet avis après tout ce que j'ai vécu, c'est de trouver un bon mari, qui ne boit pas, parce que la vie est dure et une femme ça ne travaille pas comme un homme, et puis ce n'est pas les hommes qui vont s'occuper des enfants, et tous les gouvernements le disent, il n'y a pas assez d'enfants.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> *Rapport de police*, p. 195.

<sup>56</sup> Olga Wrónska. "La faim, c'est moi" – L'identité narrative au féminin', *Estudios Románicos*, 19 (2010), 293–301 (p. 300).

<sup>57</sup> Certain sections in *Truismes*, characterised by humour and irony, can complicate the contention that the narrator is fully naïve. She does have moments of realisation, but they are often overshadowed.

<sup>58</sup> *Truismes*, p. 47.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

While the above sentence appears to be an amalgamation of clichés (finding a husband, looking after children, increasing the national population etc.), it does highlight their absurdity when taken *au pied de la lettre*, as the only (and best) option available. Furthermore, it can underline the fact that feminist work also needs to be carried out at the linguistic level, since the language available to women remains phallogentric. It is visible that feminist thought and ideas have not persuaded all groups of women, allowing some of them to perpetuate the very stereotypes others are trying to dismantle.

Women from particular social groups do not have the tools to talk about their bodies and needs, without constantly referring back to a masculine other; the available language forces them always to mention this masculine other. A similar inability is reflected in *Clèves*, when Solange is incapable of seeing the double-meaning in her father's contention that when women have their period, men also suffer: 'l'idée que c'est difficile aussi pour les garçons aide un peu. Sinon la rage est trop forte'.<sup>60</sup> She tries to find physiological explanations for this distress through analogies with her own experience ('des bouts de peau saignante'),<sup>61</sup> without realising that their suffering is caused by the inability to have sex with their partners. While this can be partly explained by Solange's age (early teenage years in the first part of the novel), similar stereotypes reappear in the second part, when Solange is approximately fifteen years old. Clichés of the 1980s are used to talk about sexually transmitted diseases, 'c'est une maladie qui tue les gens en H. Les Homosexuels, les Haïtiens, les Hémophiles et les Héroïnomanes'.<sup>62</sup> This statement might be seen as deriding clichés from the point of view of the omniscient narrator, however the sentence is uttered by Solange's father, who often employs discriminatory remarks without any clarification. This is reminiscent of similar views in *Truismes*, where even doctors are reluctant to talk explicitly about sexually transmitted diseases: '[la dermatologue m'a dit qu'] il y a des maladies qui traînent, surtout dans les squares avec tous ces pigeons'.<sup>63</sup> Sexuality and the body remain such taboos that truth-distorting euphemisms are the only tool available to talk about these issues. This linguistic lack is symptomatic of both a social inability to speak openly about women's bodies, and of an absence of sharing of women's experiences in the private sphere, as none of the teenage girls seem to engage with their mothers (or with older female relatives) on the topic. This leaves them with no possibility of articulating their bodily experiences, especially their periods, but for convoluted and hollow euphemisms: 'quand on est indisposée', 'il faut

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<sup>60</sup> *Clèves*, p. 62.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>63</sup> *Truismes*, p. 57.

bien calculer que les Anglais débarquent pas. Parce que se traîner toute la journée indisposée à l'église et tout, bonjour l'angoisse, et une tache sur la robe blanche, je vous dis pas la honte'.<sup>64</sup> As a possible solution to this linguistic lack, early on, Solange appeals to the dictionary, but some of her questions remain nonetheless unanswered: there are either no entries for the words she is looking up ('il n'y a rien du tout à pédé';<sup>65</sup> 'Dans le *Nouveau Larousse universel* il n'y a qu'un trou entre encroûter et encuver',<sup>66</sup> where *enculer* should appear), or some entries send her to other ones, in an endless loop of linguistic deficiency ("pénis [penis] n.m. Organe d'accouplement mâle" qui renvoie à verge').<sup>67</sup> The protagonists (Solange and the narrator of *Trusimes*) do not have the necessary linguistic tools to talk about women's bodies or their place in society. The reader is made aware of this lack by the protagonists' constant use of clichés and euphemisms, however (s)he is given very little guidance on how to overcome this lack; the space is left open for his/ her own linguistic strategies.

While both *Le Bébé* and *Il faut...* deal with clichés, the views expressed are more nuanced. Moving beyond the simple contention that clichés are always negative and devoid of substance, the narrative voice in *Le Bébé* 'makes peace with certain clichés':<sup>68</sup>

Les clichés reprennent sens pour moi, les formules, oui, puisque sans métaphore je donnerais ma vie pour lui. C'est la première fois que cette phrase est vraie, que j'entends sa vérité; la première fois qu'elle est mienne.<sup>69</sup>

The reader is no longer encouraged to do away with clichés, but to explore the kernel of truth within them, to undertake a process of distilling language until its core is reached:

[...] le cliché, qui énonce, malgré l'usure, une part de réalité. Le bébé me rend à une forme d'amitié avec les lieux-communs; m'en rend curieuse, me les fait soulever comme des pierres pour voir, par-dessous, courir les vérités.<sup>70</sup>

However, the fact that these 'vérités' can only be expressed through clichés highlights 'language's expressive limitations'.<sup>71</sup> Maternity has been shrouded in so many discourses — from the Immaculate Conception to the idea of an irrefutable maternal instinct that is the basis of a territory inaccessible to men<sup>72</sup> — that mothers do not have the necessary linguistic tools to express their relation to their children. While certain clichés about

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<sup>64</sup> *Clèves*, p. 117.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>68</sup> Jordan, *Contemporary French Women's Writing*, p. 98.

<sup>69</sup> *Le Bébé*, p. 43.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>71</sup> Jordan, *Contemporary French Women's Writing*, p. 98.

<sup>72</sup> Barraband et Gassmann, 'Entretien avec Marie Darrieussecq', p. 16.



babies can be a fruitful starting point, they also run the risk of ‘rend[re] les femmes idiotes’.<sup>73</sup> The narrator does not offer a solution to this expressive lack, but she does open the debate, potentially allowing other women to find new means of expression. The deconstructive work carried out by *Le Bébé* becomes a response to the radio-show the mother-narrator listens to in search of answers: ‘quatre ou cinq femmes sont réunies dans cette émission de radio [...] j’attends de ces chercheuses ce dont je suis incapable, une théorie du bébé — au moins une ébauche’.<sup>74</sup> The radio-show offers the same clichés, leaving the mother’s plea unanswered. Her *cahiers* become an attempt to fill this void, a tool in the search for answers. They can also represent a model to be followed by other mothers, acknowledging the fact that any debate about maternity and motherhood needs to allow sufficient space for both general, common experiences, as well as idiosyncratic ones.

Bringing such un(der)-discussed topics to the fore is an element characteristic of Darrieussecq’s work, as she writes the marginal, or even the unnameable. In all the novels analysed in this chapter, either a marginal character or a marginal experience is inscribed into language, and given a space in literature. *Truismes* and *Clèves* both deal with the transformations of the female body, and the manifestations of female sexuality, desire, and pleasure. While the fantastic element characterising *Truismes* is absent in *Clèves*, a similar *corps démesuré* marks both narratives; Darrieussecq undertakes in writing a process akin to Niki de Saint-Phalle’s sculpting of the *Nanas* series, allowing the female body to speak for itself.<sup>75</sup> Whereas previously the female body was silenced, it is now allowed to take monstrous proportions,<sup>76</sup> it becomes a loud body. This metamorphosis brings forth the issue of animality, most often constructed as marginal or opposed to humanity. Darrieussecq inverts this dichotomous relationship, by having her human characters act in a more beastly manner than the narrator transformed into a sow. Moreover, the recurring animal imagery allows the author to ‘changer de regard pour donner à voir un monde qui, pour être habituellement invisible à nos yeux d’humains [...] n’en existe pas moins’.<sup>77</sup> However, Catherine Rodgers points out that this fantastic metamorphosis, while shocking, can actually diminish the impact of the entire narrative, allowing it to become more easily consumable, a reading for (humorous) pleasure, rather

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<sup>73</sup> *Le Bébé*, p. 138.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>75</sup> Sarrey-Strack, *Fictions contemporaines au féminin*, p. 180.

<sup>76</sup> Jordan, *Contemporary French Women’s Writing*, p. 89.

<sup>77</sup> Anne Simon, ‘Déterritorialisations de Marie Darrieussecq’, *Dalhousie French Studies*, 93, Women and Space (2010), 17–26 (p. 22).

than one of questioning and change.<sup>78</sup> This view echoes Kristeva's reading of Freud's *Unheimlich*:

il souligne tout particulièrement les œuvres où l'effet d'étrangeté est aboli par le fait même que l'univers entier du discours est fictif. Tels sont les contes de fées [...]. En conséquence, l'artifice neutralise l'inquiétante étrangeté et rend vraisemblables, acceptables et agréables tous les retours du refoulé.<sup>79</sup>

While *Truismes* cannot be considered a 'conte de fées', its fantastic elements mirror the idea of the 'artifice', rendering the return of the repressed bearable and acceptable. *Clèves*, on the other hand, is devoid of such fantastic elements; its story of bodily transformation is easily identifiable as puberty, while temporal clues situate the narrative in the 1980s, in an imaginary Basque village. Even though the departure point of the narrative is known to most women, the protagonist remains unable to name her experiences and to inscribe them into language. It is almost as if she was transforming into a sow, since language does not account for the changes she goes through. Because language becomes incredibly limited and limiting, Solange needs to find another manner of expression; therefore, her body becomes her main interface with the world, releasing desires, passions, and pleasures: 'Solange [...] réfléchit avec son corps, ou plutôt avec son sexe et les sensations que lui procure celui-ci'.<sup>80</sup>

In the case of *Le Bébé*, the author does not just write the marginal ('le bébé [...] est ainsi l'objet le plus mineur qui soit pour la littérature'),<sup>81</sup> but she also writes against such marginality. Quoting Guillaume Dustan — 'je trouve qu'on ne pense pas du tout assez à ce qu'est un bébé, à ce que c'est qu'être bébé. Personne ne fait ça. C'est vraiment un drame'<sup>82</sup> — the mother considers that 'mon entreprise est de salut public'.<sup>83</sup> This view is reinforced by Darrieussecq in subsequent interviews :

On m'interdisait d'avoir un discours intellectuel sur le bébé. Comme si le bébé était un sujet mineur, un peu sale, à laisser aux femmes en attendant qu'il grandisse et devienne intéressant. Et de fait il y a peu de livres sur les bébés parce que c'est "interdit" en littérature: on ne peut pas être mère et écrivaine.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Catherine Rodgers, 'Aucune évidence: les truismes de Marie Darrieussecq', *Romance Studies*, 18.1 (2000), 69–81 (p. 80).

<sup>79</sup> Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, p. 277.

<sup>80</sup> Chiara Rolla, 'Clèves de Marie Darrieussecq: parcours de lecture et tentative(s) de définition(s)', *Cahiers de narratologie*, 23 (2012), 2–14 (p. 3). This idea will be discussed in more detail in subsequent sections, as it relates to the concept of multisensorial reading.

<sup>81</sup> *Le Bébé*, p. 43.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>84</sup> Barraband et Gassmann, 'Entretien avec Marie Darrieussecq', p. 14.

Therefore, *Le Bébé* acts against such views and taboos, trying to set the scene for ‘une réforme globale [...] sur la vision qu’on a du bébé’.<sup>85</sup> This is partly undertaken by naming some of the incestuous taboos associated with the mother-son relation — ‘mon amour maternel est d’abord pédophile, attirance passionnée pour son petit corps, besoin de m’en repaître’<sup>86</sup> — but also by pushing psychoanalytical explanations beyond the *lieu commun* of the Oedipus complex: ‘la fonction symbolique du père est connue: séparer l’enfant de la mère, prévenir l’inceste. Mais le bébé est à la fois une érection et un trou, c’est sur tous les fronts qu’il s’agit de tempérer l’amour géniteur’.<sup>87</sup> The Oedipus complex does not explain the parents’ relation to the child, but rather the child’s relation to the mother. Narrowing down the initial stages of life to the Oedipus complex marginalises both the mother and the child, simultaneously excluding the father and positing him on a hierarchically higher position than the rest of the family. Paradoxically, this hierarchy results in excluding the father from early family dynamics, marginalising all family members (the father is outside the mother–child dyad, whereas the mother and the child are still at the limits of the symbolic).

Another method of writing the baby into language and literature is by distilling and decomposing the former to reach its purest and clearest form. Writing is marked by this process of refinement that allows rhythms and musicality to resurface:

J’écris pour définir, pour décrire des ensembles, pour mettre à jour les liens: c’est mathématique. J’écris pour renouveler la langue, pour fourbir les mots comme on frotte des cuivres – *le bébé, la mère*: entendre un son plus clair.<sup>88</sup>

The first step towards obtaining such clarity is by adding the definite article in front of the nouns *bébé* and *mère*. Thus, they become individualised, inscribed in language, and not as easily spoken for: ‘L’absence d’article est comme certains tutoiements, un chantage à l’intimité et un mépris de la pensée. [...] La résistance commence par le maintien de l’article’.<sup>89</sup> It is this individuality of the baby and of the mother that Darrieussecq explores in the text. A similar ‘uncomplicated and straightforward structure’<sup>90</sup> is visible from the very title of *Tom est mort* – the reader immediately needs to deal with the impact of death. The novel opens with a reprise of the title, while the first page has the same sentence repeated three times, marking the reader’s direct entry into the narrative. This initial

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>86</sup> *Le Bébé*, p. 19.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>88</sup> *Le Bébé*, p. 44; Darrieussecq’s choice of ‘mettre à jour les liens’ can be linked to the multiple types of intertextualities exemplified at the start of the chapter; her fictional work updates intertextual links, enlarging the space for interpretation, and inherently the space the reader can occupy within the text.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 43–44.

<sup>90</sup> Marrone, ‘Echoes of Annie Ernaux in Marie Darrieussecq’, p. 94.

sentence could have echoes with the opening of *Naissance des fantômes* ('Mon mari a disparu'), of Ernaux's *Une femme* ('Ma mère est morte'), and even with Camus's *L'Étranger* ('Aujourd'hui maman est morte').<sup>91</sup> The direct approach is partly imposed by language itself, as the mother discovers that the conjugation of verbs becomes a structuring element, separating life and death: 'J'ai d'abord écrit elle [the narrator's sister-in-law] *était* française, mais non, elle *est* française, elle est toujours. La grammaire m'oblige à conjuguer qui est mort et qui est vivant [...]'.<sup>92</sup> Grammatical structures force the narrators to speak clearly when talking about the baby or the death of a child.

However, different languages have different structuring abilities, with the mother(s) tongue being in constant tension with other acquired languages. Darrieussecq's work often juxtaposes French and English, bringing in references to Basque, a language that remains unknown even to the author herself:

[L]a langue basque que j'ai parlée petite mais que j'ai oubliée, qui est la langue préhistorique, pour le coup, qui est non indo-européenne. On ne sait pas d'où elle vient. Toutes les femmes de ma famille la parlaient. Je l'ai perdu vers l'âge de deux ans, et quand j'avais vers six ou sept ans ma mère la parlait à ma grand-mère pour que je ne la comprenne pas. Donc, c'est la langue du secret, la langue de sexe et de la mort, les deux choses qu'on cache aux enfants.<sup>93</sup>

In *Le Bébé*, the new-born son only has access to the mother's tongue via others, as the former forgot it from an early age: 'Sa grand-mère maternelle le câline en basque et s'inquiète en français'.<sup>94</sup> The Basque language becomes an enclosed, protected and protecting territory, marking both a connection to and a separation from the mother. This separation is evidenced a few pages later, when someone from outside the family speaks Basque to the baby, establishing a connection that the mother cannot access: 'une équipe de télévision basque venue m'interviewer lui fait des guilis dans cette langue de mon enfance [...] Quand ma mère parle sa langue au bébé, j'accepte pour mémoire, je leur laisse cette connivence. Mais quand ce sont des inconnus, j'ai l'impression qu'on me l'enlève'.<sup>95</sup> The separation from the mother is marked early on by the access to language. While traditional psychoanalytic explanations consider this separation to be signalled by the entrance into the symbolic order via the acquisition of the mother tongue, in the case of the narrator's baby, the separation is highlighted by the baby's ability to relate to a language the mother has forgotten. Furthermore, the baby can perceive linguistic

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 94, footnote 5.

<sup>92</sup> *Tom est mort*, p. 197.

<sup>93</sup> Darrieussecq and Gaudet, "Des livres sur la liberté", p. 115.

<sup>94</sup> *Le Bébé*, p. 132.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

specificity, by distilling French to its most common sound – ‘il est en train de réduire le français à sa plus simple expression, le E’.<sup>96</sup> Even his baby-talk is marked by the French phonetic system: “‘Areuh” [...] le *r* est bien marqué, la vibration française’.<sup>97</sup> Thus, the baby absorbs the world around him, to then re-present and re-member it in language. Language allows him to know his surroundings, but also to start creating an identity for himself, as ‘je ne vois pas ce qui sépare mon petit des petits animaux, à part le langage’.<sup>98</sup> Language is shown to be a manner of shaping and interrogating (national) identities.

The interplay between the mother tongue and another acquired language (in this case, the father’s language) is clearly evidenced in *Tom est mort*. Firstly, Tom’s death happens in English — ‘la mort de Tom se passe en anglais’<sup>99</sup> — partly because the family is living in Sydney at this point, but also because English is not the narrator’s mother tongue. This linguistic choice, far from suggesting the narrator’s detachment from the events, highlights her inability to come to terms with the loss; if Tom’s death is not articulated in French, the mother can still keep part of him to herself. It takes her ten years to be able to write ‘Tom est mort’ in her mother tongue. Secondly, Tom himself had a particular relation to the languages spoken in his family: ‘Et je disais: *good night*, et Vince répondait, *’nigh ma*, et Tom répondait, *’nuit m’man*, parce que c’était comme ça, comme ça chez nous, que Tom n’a jamais voulu parler anglais, c’était un problème, et le problème, tout à coup, a disparu’.<sup>100</sup> Tom’s refusal to speak English, the language of the father, could be interpreted as a sign of his early death — he will not get the chance to fully enter into the symbolic order, marked by the law of the father, so he does not need to separate himself from the mother via a new a means of expression. His siblings, on the other hand, only speak English, the father’s language: ‘Stella n’a jamais appris le français. Stella comme Vince ne parle toujours que la langue de son père’.<sup>101</sup> Tom’s difficulty with languages is underlined by his maternal grandmother as well: ‘Elle évoquait l’année scolaire, le problème des langues, Tom qui n’en parle aucune bien.’<sup>102</sup> Tom does not acquire the necessary linguistic tools to join fully the world outside the realms of the family, anticipating his premature passing. While it would be far-fetched to assume that Tom is aware of his future, and as such decides not to make an effort in learning the

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>99</sup> *Tom est mort*, p. 23 (also pp. 34–37 for the English words used during the conversation that takes place at the funeral parlour).

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

languages spoken in his family, the narrator's insistence upon this issue suggests her need to retrospectively find signs and explanations, the need to assign logic to an otherwise unbearable event: 'Après sa mort, tout fera signe, le n'importe quoi deviendra horoscope, je deviendrai folle, accablée par la mémoire des signes, par leur implacable logique, par les avertissements, partout, que je n'ai pas su lire.'<sup>103</sup> As French was an element connecting Tom to his mother, after his death the narrator is unable to relate fully to the language of the father: 'après la mort de Tom mon anglais, sa compréhension même, avait en quelque sorte rétréci'.<sup>104</sup> The narrator herself tries to abandon the symbolic order by taking refuge in silence. It is this silence that she then passes on to her younger daughter, 'à presque deux ans, Stella ne parlait toujours pas, alors qu'elle disait papa et maman avant la mort de Tom'.<sup>105</sup> Stella becomes the embodiment of the *stèle* the mother saw 'au cimetière Montparnasse, à Paris',<sup>106</sup> a statue sculpted by a bereaved father, representing his lost young son. Tom's death freezes the transmission of language between the daughter and the mother, producing a double silence; if previously all three children had access to two different languages, after Tom's death silence becomes the only remaining option.

An equally complex association between French and English is present in *Il faut...*, with additional references to *camfranglais*. Firstly, both protagonists are foreigners in English — 'En anglais il traitait d'égal à égale. D'étranger à étrangère'<sup>107</sup> — which raises the issue of power relations and inequalities inscribed in languages. Solange's mother tongue, French, still bears the marks of colonial oppression, affecting her relation to Kouhouesso, who is *un étranger* in French as well: 'les phrases dites par lui devenaient d'autres phrases dans sa bouche. Mot pour mot, les mêmes phrases prenaient un sens qu'elle ne voulait pas. Un sens affreux. Ce phénomène non magique la faisait attendre un homme dont ses ancêtres à elle avaient asservi et massacré les ancêtres'.<sup>108</sup> Colonial history remains inscribed in language, rendering communication problematic: 'non, c'est que sur les Noirs, les Blancs n'ont rien à dire aux Noirs. Même

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 51; the mother's need to assign logic to the events echoes the reader's negentropic processes highlighted in the Introduction.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 33; this reference can be further linked to petrification and to Stella as a Medusa-like figure, since she could have been the last one to see Tom before his fall: 'je m'autorise à me demander, si elle l'a vu, le jour de sa mort, si le dernier moment est passé par ses yeux' (p. 165). Stella (like the *stèle* in the cemetery) keeps one last(ing) image of Tom. This petrified image takes its toll on Stella herself, petrifying her own voice.

<sup>107</sup> *Il faut...*, p. 90.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

répéter, ils ne peuvent pas'.<sup>109</sup> This linguistic failure could represent part of the protagonists' inability to fully engage in their relationship with one another. Moreover, certain feelings and sensations can only be expressed in one language, leaving an open space for interpretation and doubt to creep in: 'Ça se passait en anglais. En français, peut-être, ça ne se serait pas inscrite avec une telle force, enfin elle ne sait pas.'<sup>110</sup> Translation does not manage to fully capture the intensity of their connection: '*I want to stay inside you for ever. Comment dirait-on une phrase pareille en français? Je veux rester à l'intérieur de toi pour toujours?*'.<sup>111</sup> However, Solange's search for French equivalents enhances her status of *étrangère*, of other in English, and suggests that complete intimacy can only be achieved for her in the mother tongue; English instantly creates a distance for Solange. Therefore, she considers that 'chaque échange en français était une victoire. Une preuve, même, de son amour pour elle. Elle l'attirait sur son terrain. Il ne l'oubliait guère. En français'.<sup>112</sup> Nonetheless, Kouhouesso is still *un étranger* in French (his infelicities of expression are seen by Solange as 'ce français si désuet, si mignon'),<sup>113</sup> and his use of the language might not be proof of his love for Solange, but rather just a way of pleasing her. While Kouhouesso has access to Solange's mother tongue, the reverse is not true; *camfranglais* remains an unknown territory for Solange, further exacerbating the distance between the two: 'il se passa cette chose stupéfiante que Kouhouesso prononça des syllabes inouïes et que l'autre [le concierge] répondit dans la même extravagante gamme; et elle restait debout, béante, comme un poisson hors eau'.<sup>114</sup> Since lack of linguistic know-how converts Solange into 'un poisson hors eau', the correlation between language and life/survival is further enhanced.

Moreover, there are instances when language is inadequate for representing the surrounding landscape: 'une sorte de haie monstrueuse. Le mot forêt lui-même était inefficace',<sup>115</sup> 'elle apprenait des mots. Il y avait beaucoup d'arbres qui poussaient loin de la langue française'.<sup>116</sup> Language is no longer able to offer her a point of reference, the foreign territory she finds herself in (Cameroon) cannot be inscribed into the languages she speaks. However, this is the country Kouhouesso grew up in, further marking the gap between them. While Solange is making efforts to internalise the new territory and its

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 210.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 225.

language, the text does not offer clarification on whether this is a successful or even possible process: ‘La greffe n’avait pas pris entre le français et ces formes extravagantes, ces racines volumineuses, cette verticalité tenue’.<sup>117</sup> While the *greffe* suggests a healing process, and an attempt of linking the two languages, the use of the pluperfect significantly diminishes hopes that this could occur; French becomes an unwelcoming language, hindering communication rather than facilitating it. Kouhouesso, *the other*, comes from a place whose parameters are inexpressible in Solange’s language.

It is not just Kouhouesso’s place of origin that cannot be inscribed into Solange’s language; their very relationship is not easily articulated, as there is a lack of positive models and frameworks for mixed-race couples. In *Il faut...*, a mature Solange is faced with a type of difference so far unexplored in Darrieussecq’s work — difference in skin colour between partners.<sup>118</sup> Solange’s relation to Kouhouesso significantly heightens her awareness of embedded racial stereotypes:

[E]st-ce que les Noirs n’ont pas tendance à être en retard ? Est-ce que les Africains n’ont pas un rapport au temps disons un peu particulier ? Le rayon la troue. Est-ce une pensée raciste ? Est-elle sous un bombardement de rayons racistes ? Est-ce que Kouhouesso est noir au sens de – est-ce que Kouhouesso c’est les Noirs ? Comme elle, elle serait les Basques?<sup>119</sup>

If as a teenager Solange accepted clichés without questioning, her maturity and experience of being *une étrangère* in a new country and a new language confer on her a new depth of interrogation and analysis. She is not only concerned with attempting to define the other, but she simultaneously tries to find out what constitutes her own identity: ‘elle était blanche et elle ne le savait pas’.<sup>120</sup> Her initial reticence in admitting to her friends (Rose and Olga) that her new partner is black could be symptomatic of both her difficulty in tackling the situation, and her understanding that such difficulties are very much present at the societal level. While her intention to ‘s’ouvrir la peau pour lui montrer l’universelle couleur Benetton de son sang’<sup>121</sup> might be laudable, its applicability and naiveté will soon be questioned by the narrative. Solange might be able to carve out a place for herself ‘dans le noir universel de la chair, jusqu’au blanc universel de l’os’.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 225.

<sup>118</sup> While the issue of race is not fully explored until this most recent novel, hints at such topics are given as early as *Truismes*, with the image of the *marabout* raising questions about racial difference.

<sup>119</sup> *Il faut...*, p. 63.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 53; the choice of brand is not coincidental, as Benetton is known for its controversial advertising campaigns, featuring AIDS patients, world leaders kissing or a new-born baby; for more examples of Benetton’s controversial and even censored campaigns see

<<https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/gallery/2011/nov/17/benettons-most-controversial-adverts>> [accessed 28 June 2017].

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 284.



However, this process is not mirrored by her partner, nor by society at large, eventually leading to the end of her love story. The text is ambiguous as to whether Solange manages to carve out this space by fully exploring and moving beyond racial issues, or by avoiding them, and focusing mostly on the intensity of her feelings for Kouhouesso. The narrative does not offer an answer to problems arising in a mixed-race couple, but it does open the discussion towards such issues, discussion which was missing in the life of the protagonists. Once this space was opened the reader is left to continue this deconstructive and re-constructive work. Solange's naiveté also plays a part in her inability to deal positively with difference. Despite being *une étrangère*, she occupies a privileged position as a financially independent (white) career woman. This privileged position points to the existence of a hierarchy of difference or a hierarchy of immigration, with various degrees of marginalisation. Solange's naiveté could partly be traced back to her childhood and teenage years (explored in *Clèves*), partly to the industry she works in. She is constantly called upon to exaggerate her traits as a foreigner (for example, exaggerating her French accent in English, when playing alongside Matt Damon), without questioning this particular typecasting. Solange's cinematic work does not, therefore, facilitate the interrogation of gender, national and racial stereotypes that contribute to the construction of both films and reality.

While a mixed-race couple is a societal taboo that is currently being dismantled, in *Tom est mort*, the author tackles the ultimate taboo, the ever-present and yet unspeakable fear of losing a child: 'Que les enfants soient mortels, c'est ce que l'Occident ne supporte plus. C'est l'ultime lieu du scandale'.<sup>123</sup> This absence is highlighted by the very fact that the loss of a child has not appeared on the stress scale,<sup>124</sup> and by the absence of a word to describe a mother who lost her child (unlike the words *orphelin* and *veuve* that account for the loss of other family members).<sup>125</sup> The need to embark on the exploration of this topic is highlighted by 'la rentrée littéraire de septembre 2007 [qui] fut marquée par l'écriture du deuil, en particulier le deuil d'enfant [...]. La presse littéraire a été unanime à remarquer ce phénomène, sans l'analyser plus loin qu'un signe dépressif, un air du temps voilé de noir'.<sup>126</sup> Writing about mourning raises the question of how we read such accounts and how we can have a critical stance when undertaking literary

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<sup>123</sup> *Le Bébé*, p. 53

<sup>124</sup> *Tom est mort*, p. 63.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>126</sup> *Rapport de police*, p. 177.

analysis; can we overcome the emotional involvement?<sup>127</sup> One possible response would be closing off, refusing to imagine the events or to step into the mindset of parents who have lost their children, for fear of bringing the same tragedy closer to us. According to Kathryn Robson, in order to avoid such refusals, ‘reading narratives of child death requires us to learn to read (and respond to) otherness’.<sup>128</sup> For Levinas, ‘death announces an event over which the subject is not master, an event in relation to which the subject is no longer a subject’<sup>129</sup> since ‘death is the impossibility of having a project’.<sup>130</sup> Death affects our relation to time (since it stifles any future project); the death of a child further disturbs expected chronologies, as children should not normally die before their parents. Therefore, the death of a child involves both the loss of the self (‘the subject is no longer subject’), and the loss of basic chronologies (children should outlive their parents). Reading about death in general, and about a child’s death in particular, brings us closer to this position of loss. This loss creates a void the self can no longer fill. It is at this point that the other is allowed to emerge. This could be the other within, death as other, or simply the other whose story is being read. Reading someone else’s story of loss does not mean speaking in their place (by trying to imagine how the loss would affect us), but creating the space where they can speak for themselves. An example of this appears in *Tom est mort*, where the mother’s presentation of French literary texts dealing with loss prompts one of the other members of the grief group to write a poem about her own experience of losing a child. Reading about loss gave her the opportunity to find the right words and space to articulate her own liminal experience. An active engagement with Darrieussecq’s work helps the reader create this space that welcomes the other. Reading Darrieussecq’s fiction becomes a heuristic process, with the author making use of linguistic and literary devices to show how this space could be developed.

One such device is the writing of sensations coupled with the use of a scientific lexicon, which according to Simon Kemp sets Darrieussecq apart on the contemporary French literary and creative scene.<sup>131</sup> This adds an extra layer of engagement to her texts ‘due to our subjective recognition of the mental events she evokes, coupled with an acknowledgement of the cogency of the science accompanying them’.<sup>132</sup> Firstly,

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<sup>127</sup> Gill Rye, ‘Family Tragedies: Child Death in Recent French Literature’, in *Affaires de famille*, ed. by Marie-Claire Barnet and Edward Welch, pp. 267-81 (p. 271), and Céline Lamy, ‘Un enfant sauvé du néant,’ <<http://ecrits-vains.com/critique/lamy11.html>> [accessed 24 August 2015].

<sup>128</sup> Robson, ‘Psychic Plagiarism’, p. 59.

<sup>129</sup> Levinas, ‘Time and Other (part 3)’, p. 41.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>131</sup> Kemp, ‘Darrieussecq’s mind’, p. 441.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 432.

scientific explanations tend to produce an increased level of credibility. Secondly, as we are presented with the physical manifestation of the characters' feelings and fears, we can interpret them using our own experience of similar sensations; our emotional and sensory memories are brought into play, opening up the reading process to include multisensorial reading. For example, the narrator of *Tom est mort* admits that 'dix ans après, ce qui me manque bloque encore ma respiration, sous le sternum, physiquement. Je n'ai jamais vraiment retrouvé mon souffle'.<sup>133</sup> In a first interpretive move, the reader can attempt to relate to the narrator by dwelling on circumstances that might have caused him/her similar physical reactions; the reader can at least understand the physical manifestations of the loss, if not the loss itself, by engaging in the multisensorial reading encouraged by the writing of sensations. Shifting the focus of interpretation from the reader back to the mother-narrator, we observe that the loss of the child is physically inscribed on the mother's body, preventing her from breathing, and not allowing the outside to enter her body fully. The absence of the child is mirrored by the lack of air. Because this absence is physically felt, it takes the form of a painful presence. If she were to ever recover the ability to breathe normally, it would entail letting go of this ever-present absence.

Soon after Tom's death, the pain takes over his mother's vocal cords, preventing any exchange with those around: 'Ma volonté s'exerce sur mes cordes vocales pour les paralyser, mais dès ce moment, la paralysie m'a débordée, j'ai perdu le contrôle sur mon propre refus. Je croyais refuser de parler, mais déjà je ne pouvais plus m'empêcher d'être muette'.<sup>134</sup> The inadequacy of language to express such loss marks each of the characters differently: 'J'étais muette, pas sourde, mais ma mère me parlait fort et en articulant. Mon père criait pour moi, pour nous. Ce cri creusait un trou où Tom avait été, à cet emplacement béant, qu'il fallait maintenir béant'.<sup>135</sup> The connection with Munch's *Scream*<sup>136</sup> underlines the spectrum upon which mourning is inscribed: from enforced and complete silence, to over-articulation of words, to screaming. The intensity of the scream is also highlighted early in the narrative, when the mother feels 'enfermée dans un cri rouge et cubique'.<sup>137</sup> While this amalgamation of sensations, in which sounds are given colour and shape, defies logical explanations, it accounts for the impact the events have

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<sup>133</sup> *Tom est mort*, p. 66.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120; the use of 'creusait', 'trou' and 'béant' can be linked to the image of the other as a fault line, in this case the other being the lost child, an entity the self cannot come to terms with. The lost child does not disappear, but rather he breaks the fabric of reality, creating a fault line that the mother keeps exploring for more than ten years.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

upon the mother; reason and order are no longer sufficient. In this case, the reader needs to complement negentropic reading with multisensorial reading; our senses and our sensory memory need to be engaged in order to understand the wide spectrum on which loss is manifested, and thus to allow for the emergence of what we might deem illogical or irrational reactions.

While often science is resorted to as a means of enhancing logic and rationality, in *Tom est mort* the use of scientific vocabulary emphasises the yet unknown mechanisms of the mind, rather than elucidating its functioning:

Il paraît que le cerveau peut mettre une vie entière à apprendre que le bras n'est plus là; à déconnecter les neurones qui s'occupaient de ce bras. Il y a sans doute un travail neuronal du deuil, des dérivations, des impasses et des courts-circuits, toute une électricité à revoir, des synapses à réviser.<sup>138</sup>

The 'travail neuronal du deuil' is not just a coming to terms with the loss, but rather an engagement of all the anatomical components of the brain. While the mother-narrator acknowledges the need for these physical transformations in the brain to take place, she also highlights the difficulty of the process: if it takes almost an entire life for the brain to adapt to the loss of a limb, the loss of a child becomes unquantifiable in temporal terms. Nonetheless, this physical inability of the brain to adapt to the loss means that the mother-narrator can still hold on to Tom's memory: 'Il me semble que l'information n'a toujours pas atteint les zones les plus lentes de mon cerveau, et je mourrai en croyant Tom vivant.'<sup>139</sup> The fact that the brain is one of the human organs not fully understood offers the mother hope for locating Tom's presence: 'Il a dû se glisser entre deux feuilles du temps. Je sais que la physique ne peut rien pour les morts. Mais les courbes de l'espace, et celles du cerveau. On ne sait rien'.<sup>140</sup> Paradoxically, scientific lexis offers the narrator the possibility of conjuring up unscientific explanations.

This materiality or physicality of the brain appears in *Il faut...*, as well. To be closer to Kouhouesso, Solange only engages with the books he has read, and the films he has seen 'pour y trouver des indices, des sentiers, *le plan du cerveau* de Kouhouesso, *la forme de sa pensée*'.<sup>141</sup> Kouhouesso's thoughts are not envisaged as something immaterial, that cannot be grasped, but rather as physical elements present in the physical brain; they have a shape, and they are part of the wider 'plan du cerveau'. His brain even

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p. 232.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>141</sup> *Il faut...*, p. 201, italics mine (the use of the word *sentiers* can be linked to the image of the forest in Cameroon analysed above; image that Solange cannot accurately represent in the French language).

has paths ('sentiers') like a forest. This physicality acquires new dimensions when Solange tries to articulate her relationship with 'un homme noir': 'La question exaspérante lui était posée comme en rêve, involontairement. Une foule en colère la gueulait poing levé sous ses *fenêtres mentales*. Une foule mécanique, avec des grandes clefs dans le dos'.<sup>142</sup> Les 'zones et courbes du cerveau' from *Tom est mort* become 'fenêtres mentales' in *Il faut...*. They serve a similar purpose of trying to fill in the gaps left by science since Solange's only manner of explaining and re-presenting her obsession is by likening it to a crowd of mechanical dolls. This mobile and highly visual image mirrors both the workings of her mind (the manner in which the question of an interracial relationship ceaselessly taunts her, and works its way through her mind), and the societal situation (it is not just Solange who cannot articulate this relationship, society at large is unable to provide her with appropriate frameworks). A similar image appears later in the text, when 'le mot nègre sonnait comme une cloche dans *le crâne déjà douloureux* de Solange'.<sup>143</sup> The constant emphasis on racial difference does not just provoke exhaustion, but a deep pain of the innermost layers of Solange's skull ('le crâne déjà douloureux'). The adverb 'déjà' suggests that this is not a first occurrence, possibly going as far back as the image of the mechanical dolls, leading Solange to oversaturation. This pain can only be expressed by paralleling it with the auditory sensation caused by an incessant bell sound ('sonner comme une cloche'). This psychic pain is an element Solange can share with the reader, even if the latter has not had to come to terms with the difficulties of a mixed-race relationship in real life.

In *Clèves*, the only way Solange can render her (sexual) desire understandable (to both herself and the reader) is by likening it to an appetite for food:

Elle se sent à la fois trop présente et vaporisée, incapable de se tenir à une limite ferme, à un point donné de la salle. Quoi faire de ce grand trou qui la dévore ? Elle pourrait fumer et boire et manger et avaler, se remplir de tout le banquet, de tout le village, de tout ce qui manque — tout manquerait encore.

Elle pense aux choux à la crème et à Arnaud. À Arnaud et aux choux à la crème. Ils se superposent, bourratifs, affreusement désirables.<sup>144</sup>

The first part of the above quotation presents desire as the manifestation of a lack, of an absence. Solange's reaction is so powerful that nothing she is accustomed to (*fumer, boire, manger, avaler, le banquet*) can help her fill the void. The last sentence envelops Solange's feelings in a more familiar and accessible image: the desirability and sensuality

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., p. 64, italics mine.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p. 118, italics mine.

<sup>144</sup> *Clèves*, p. 227.

of the dessert helps her understand her emotions towards Arnaud. Similarly, the reader can start to understand the intensity of her experience, by resorting to his/her own pool of similar sensory memories (either a similar desire for another person, or a similar appetite for a food item which is imbued with sensual attributes). Moreover, the above example also emphasises the idea that Solange's interactions are mediated by her body as the adjectives *bourratifs* and *désirables* suggest sensation more akin to the visceral, rather than to reason.

While food can help the reader relate more easily to the narrative, as it provides 'reality effects'<sup>145</sup> (as evidenced by Solange's association between Arnaud and *choux à la crème*), it can also act as a device to further highlight the marginality of the characters and of their experiences. Historically, meeting the other was associated with rites of hospitality and the sharing of food: 'la rencontre commence souvent par une fête de la bouche: du pain, du sel et du vin [qui fusionnent dans] le rite de l'hospitalité'.<sup>146</sup> However, Darrieussecq's works present a reversal, even a perversion of the hospitality ritual: food is inaccessible and inhospitable, denying any connection between the self and the other. For example, in *Truismes* the narrator's new diet only enhances her marginality and social exclusion: 'Il y avait beaucoup de racines aussi, qui sentait bon la réglisse, l'hamamélis et la gentiane, et dans la gorge c'était doux comme un dessert, ça faisait baver en longs fils sucrés.'<sup>147</sup> While the sensation described is reminiscent of eating a dessert, it is produced by plants that are not normally associated with human consumption. Later on in the text, the type and quantity of food consumed are used to highlight the absurdity of the political system, as Edgar's parties are excessively extravagant and without any connection to social realities: 'des bouts de cerf rôti, des tranches de giraffe, des pots entiers de caviar, des gateaux au sirop d'érable, des fruits d'Afrique, et des truffes surtout'.<sup>148</sup> This amplified appetite portrays the humans as a pack of famished animals, while the narrator in sow form is witnessing their bestiality from the margins; her behaviour becomes more human than that of the people present. This New Year's Eve party in *Truismes* finds echoes in the Christmas party presented in *Il faut...*, as a representation of intra-œuvre intertextuality:

Jessie, torse nu, barbe blanche et boxer rouge, recevait en offrant de petits bols pleins d'une neige où étaient plantés d'adorables nains bûcherons. Les nains étaient en chocolat et la poudreuse se prenait par le nez. Il fallait un peu de temps

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<sup>145</sup> Cruickshank, 'Eating, Drinking and Re-thinking', p. 302.

<sup>146</sup> Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, p. 22.

<sup>147</sup> *Truismes*, p. 69.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

pour décoder la tenue d'Alma: soutien-gorge en fourrure grise, mini-short façon Bunny, bottes Timberland en nubuk, et une muselière en cuir avec des rênes que Jessie faisait claquer sur son dos nu, pour rire. Le plus perturbant peut-être était l'étrange coiffe ficelée sur sa tête: des bois de cerf dorés [...]. 'Elle est déguisée en renne', expliqua Jessie d'un ton d'évidence. Il faisait mine de la chevaucher [...].<sup>149</sup>

The symbols of Christmas celebrations are re-appropriated, marking the eccentricities of the show business world. People deliberately take on animal characteristics, significantly diminishing their own humanity. 'Les nains en chocolat' and 'la poudreuse' offered on arrival are an attempt to imitate the hospitality rite, but they are significantly different from the bread and wine that were meant to quench thirst and satisfy hunger. They further highlight the unconventionalities of the entertainment industry, and the need to escape reality via the use of drugs. The characters effect a double escape from reality: firstly, through their cinematic work and secondly, through their consumption of drugs and alcohol. Even when using food to integrate the host culture, culinary choices can highlight dichotomies and separation, rather than mixing and syncretism:

Ils prirent un taxi, dînèrent au *Terminus Nord*. Elle aurait aimé lui faire visiter la Goutte d'Or, mais il n'avait aucune envie des quartiers africains, aucun goût pour cet exotisme, ni *ndolé*, ni poulet-arachide: il voulait du foie gras et de la confiture des figes, des huîtres, des bulots, une sole grillée et pouilly-fuissé.<sup>150</sup>

When in Paris, Kouhouesso does not want to engage with diasporic African communities and traditions (the Goutte d'Or neighbourhood is known for its North-African and sub-Saharan communities, while *Terminus Nord* is a 1920s Art Nouveau and Art Déco brasserie), and his culinary choices starkly mark this split. Instead of welcoming the other, food builds a hierarchy of tastes and origins, further marginalising the other. Food becomes divisive, rather than welcoming.

This second chapter section focused on the ways in which language leaves a mark on the world, structuring our relations with the other. Darrieussecq engages with linguistic constructions, such as clichés and stereotypes, to highlight their deficiencies, and the way they perpetuate narrow views about women, babies, mothers or racial minorities. However, these stereotypes also contain grains of truth which the author aims to uncover, distilling language to its purest forms. The reader is involved in this linguistic work, as (s)he has to both deconstruct existing clichés and fill in the void once their lack of applicability has been revealed. The reader both deconstructs and reconstructs language, the narrator or author offering only minimal guidance (usually this guidance is

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<sup>149</sup> *Il faut...*, pp. 147–48.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.

concentrated in the deconstructive work, rather than the reconstructive one). This readerly work is complemented by multisensorial reading and the exploration of the limits of scientific vocabulary (while scientific lexicon can increase textual credibility, it cannot explain every physical manifestation of the characters' emotions). When linked to national identity, colonialism, and the (female) body, language was both revealing and obscuring: it shrouded the other in clichés and stereotypes, or, on the contrary, it attempted to name so far unnamed experiences. Therefore, language is a tool that can be manipulated in our engagement with the other. The type of linguistic manipulation we engage in can affect the levels of trust between self and other. Part of this trust is created by the fiction of honesty, as will be shown in the following section.

### **Fictions of honesty**

The fiction of honesty comprises all the devices through which a relation of trust is established between the reader and the narrator. Most often, the latter has control over the type and amount of information the reader receives. The manner in which this information is delivered can significantly influence the reader's involvement with the text and support for the narrator. It is this process of delivery that is the main focus of the fiction of honesty, the latter being an analytical tool aiding interpretation. The fiction of honesty does not assume that the narrator is trying to manipulate the reader; rather, it examines the mechanisms that draw the reader closer to the text, and that help him/her establish a personal connection with the narrative during the reading process. The term fiction refers to an aesthetic construction, while honesty was chosen over truthfulness, because within the diegesis the narrator might not be telling the truth, but (s)he could still be honest towards the reader (the narrator might not know the whole truth, or in some cases (s)he could be refusing to accept it). The fiction of honesty allows the reader access to the narrator's inner world, but it also demands attentive listening; this relation is one of both sharing and responsibility. Thus, the fiction of honesty is not a one-sided association, with the narrator as source of the message, and the reader at the receiving end. It is more akin to a dialogue, with the reader actively involved. The fiction of honesty<sup>151</sup> is an example

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<sup>151</sup> The term 'fiction of honesty' carries a certain ambivalence within it, as it can be read as 'honest fiction' or 'honesty as fiction'. The idea of 'honest fiction' is close to the 'fiction of honesty' analysed above, since it points to the way in which the story is told with (what we perceive to be) honesty. The idea of 'honesty as fiction' can be linked to the fact that the stories we tell (no matter how honest or truthful we believe them



of the hospitable text, letting the reader in, and allowing enough space for reading to manifest itself as co-creation.

Darrieussecq's work provides fertile ground for analysing the workings of the fiction of honesty. For example, in *Truismes*, *Le Bébé*, and *Tom est mort* all three (first-person) narrators use a *cahier* to write the text we are reading: 'je ne vous parle pas de la difficulté pour trouver ce cahier';<sup>152</sup> 'taches d'huile, de lait de premier âge et de thé sur ce cahier';<sup>153</sup> 'et si je commence ce cahier'.<sup>154</sup> The *cahier* is reminiscent of the personal diary, suggesting that the reader has direct access to the narrator's immediate and unmediated emotions.<sup>155</sup> In *Truismes* and *Le Bébé* the effect of 'raw immediacy'<sup>156</sup> is heightened as the *cahiers* are stained due to the environment in which the narrators are writing: 'la boue, qui salit tout, qui dilue l'encre à peine sèche',<sup>157</sup> and the oil, milk, and tea stains that the mother has to deal with while writing. The *cahier* is closely connected to the narrative voice, all three texts being characterised by a first-person narrator, who enhances the impression of a dialogue between the reader and the narrator.

In *Truismes*, this effect is further increased by the use of direct addresses. The narrator displays a conversational manner while writing, which 'oozes first-person sincerity',<sup>158</sup> engaging with her entire readership, as well as with particular groups: 'je supplie *le lecteur, le lecteur chômeur en particulier*, de me pardonner ces indécentes paroles [...] et je prie *toutes les personnes qui pourraient s'en trouver choquées* de bien vouloir m'en excuser'.<sup>159</sup> Her excuses — 'je suis désolée de le dire'<sup>160</sup> — and attempts to self-censor the narrative ('j'invite toutes les âmes sensibles à sauter cette page [...] et encore une fois je supplie les lecteurs sensibles de ne pas lire ces pages')<sup>161</sup> highlight and even parody the inability to talk freely about women's sexuality. As a (fictional) woman, the narrator feels the need to excuse herself for manifesting her desires. Remarks such as 'vous comprenez, je vous épargne les détails',<sup>162</sup> and 'vous savez de quoi je parle [...] si

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to be) are still constructed as stories, and therefore the tools of fiction (of storytelling) help us weave the stories of our own reality.

<sup>152</sup> *Truismes*, p. 11.

<sup>153</sup> *Le Bébé*, p. 94; moreover, the text itself is divided into two cahiers: 'premier cahier printemps été' and 'deuxième cahier été automne'.

<sup>154</sup> *Tom est mort*, p. 10.

<sup>155</sup> Marrone, 'Echoes of Annie Ernaux in Marie Darrieussecq', p. 94.

<sup>156</sup> Jordan, *Contemporary French Women's Writing*, p. 101.

<sup>157</sup> *Truismes*, p. 11.

<sup>158</sup> Jordan, *Contemporary French Women's Writing*, p. 79.

<sup>159</sup> *Truismes*, p. 12; italics mine.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

vous me suivez<sup>163</sup> allow the reader to actively take part in the writing of the text, by filling in the gaps left by the narrator. The text allows the reader space for co-writing and co-creation. The narrator's reluctance to name certain actions only amplifies their importance in the narrative; 'tout le discours de l'apparent respect des moeurs'<sup>164</sup> is turned on its head as 'elle incite le lecteur à anticiper des scènes osées'.<sup>165</sup> Attempts to hide certain events are reversed, and their visibility is heightened by the very fact that the reader is left to imagine them, rather than being offered an already existing description. The narrator's conversational manner is enhanced by her speech mannerisms, as the text is interspersed with expressions such as 'pour ainsi dire', 'comme qui dirait', 'je ne sais pas comment dire', giving the text an unpolished feel that might draw the reader closer to it.

Speech mannerisms reappear in *Clèves*, characterising the language used by teenagers, often interspersed with 'trop', 'genre', 'tellement': 'De toute façon, jeune comme elle est, ce serait bien le diable – enfin tout ça ne l'intéresse pas tellement. (Il faut qu'elle arrête avec les tellement). Elle a tellement d'autres choses à penser'.<sup>166</sup> Such mannerisms help to situate the text temporally, and to identify the age of the characters, being a reflection of the chronotope (1980s rural France). Nonetheless, Sarraute considered tics, clichés, and mannerisms to be a reflection of inner struggles, rather than just of the outside spatio-temporal coordinates: 'ils sont ici, on le sent, ce qu'ils sont dans la réalité: la résultante de mouvements montés des profondeurs, nombreux, emmêlés'.<sup>167</sup> When relating this remark to Solange's tics, they become a way for her to fill in the gaps left by the linguistic deficiency analysed above. Her desires and pleasures cannot be articulated in fully formed sentences, but they do reach the surface of the self via these mannerisms.

The representation of desires and pleasures also raises the issue of the *discours indirect libre* in a third-person narrative (both *Clèves* and *Il faut...* are characterised by a third-person narrator, but the narrative voice is very often confused with that of the female protagonist, Solange). Simon Kemp has highlighted the ambiguity and the confusion caused by this narrative strategy in some of Darrieussecq's earlier novels:

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>164</sup> Rodgers, 'Aucune évidence', p. 78.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>166</sup> *Clèves*, p. 337.

<sup>167</sup> Nathalie Sarraute, *L'Ère du soupçon. Essais sur le roman* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, Collections Folio/Essais, 1956), p. 121.

The melding of discourses involved in *style indirect libre* lends ambiguity to the linguistic status [...] of the thoughts expressed [...]. Narrated monologue makes it impossible for us to be sure.<sup>168</sup>

These clarifications hold true for both *Clèves* and *Il faut...*, complicating the reader's relation to the text. Different narrative modes can be found even within the same sentence: 'Le salaud avait fait lui aussi une psychanalyse Jungienne, lui avait-il dit'.<sup>169</sup> The parenthetical element 'lui avait-il dit' clearly marks the presence of the third-person narrator and the *discours rapporté*, however, the noun 'le salaud' seems to be much more a portrayal of Solange's voice, reacting against Kouhouesso's answer. Solange's consciousness significantly marks the narrative flow of *Clèves* as well: 'Il ouvre la fenêtre et allume une Marlboro. Dans l'obscurité (pas une seule lumière, pas une seule maison) il est presque beau. Massif. Viril. Ce serait tellement pratique d'être amoureuse de lui'.<sup>170</sup> The first sentence evokes the actions and the landscape, but the last one entirely mirrors Solange's voice. 'Tellement,' one of her often-used speech mannerisms, indicates her presence, while the two preceding adjectives —'Massif. Viril' — could highlight the progression from the third-person narration to the *discours indirect libre*. The reader no longer looks at the scene through the eyes of the third person, heterodiegetic narrator, but rather through Solange's eyes, who considers M. Bihotz's body to be 'massif' and 'viril'.<sup>171</sup> The fiction of honesty contributes to creating a narrative framework where the relationship between reader and narrator is (or at least appears) unmediated by other voices. The reader is given access to the narrators' *cahiers*, while direct address, speech mannerisms, and the *discours indirect libre* enhance the closeness between the reader and the narrators. This closeness requires an active and engaged reading, resembling dialogue.

## Inscriptions of time

The authenticity of the narrative is heightened when the text is interspersed with news items, and references to contemporary personalities, establishing extra-diegetic links with the reality of the reader. For example, in *Le Bébé*, the 9/11 attacks prompt the mother's look towards and worry for the future: 'Les tours s'effondrent. [...] Je me fais du souci

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<sup>168</sup> Kemp, 'Darrieussecq's mind', p. 437.

<sup>169</sup> *Il faut...*, p. 172.

<sup>170</sup> *Clèves*, p. 305

<sup>171</sup> This could also represent one of the few literary instances when the male body is looked at and even objectified (as Solange will end up using M. Bihotz to satisfy her own sexual desires) by a teenage girl.

pour son avenir'.<sup>172</sup> In a similar manner, Solange's return from Cameroon is marked by her reading the French press, and catching up with all the events she missed, the flight thus becoming a return to reality, for both the protagonist and the reader. Moreover, the mentioning of cinema personalities ('Elle se jette dans l'angle vert, elle crie, *Matt Damon* saute sur elle et le sang gicle';<sup>173</sup> 'tête que fera l'agent de Solange quand il apprendra qu'elle a dit à *Steven*, au grand *Steven Soderbergh*, qu'elle le rappellerait')<sup>174</sup> adds an extra layer of credibility to the narrative, projecting the reader into the world of Hollywood cinema. All these news items are very much anchored in a specific time,<sup>175</sup> raising the more general question of how temporalities are inscribed into fiction.

In *Truismes*, the flow of the text mirrors the narrator's wish to tell her story as soon as possible — 'Mais il faut que j'écrive ce livre sans plus tarder'<sup>176</sup> — therefore the text is not divided into chapters and there are no breaks. The narrative flow is uninterrupted and very much focused on the personal chronology, as the narrator 'expédie en quelques deux pages un coup d'état, une guerre, une épidémie et une famine pour s'adonner le reste du temps au détail du corps et à la description de son lot de boursoufflures, irrptions cutanées, et maux de cœur'.<sup>177</sup> The same focus on personal time is present in *Le Bébé*<sup>178</sup> (as attention is shifted from events such as the 9/11 attacks mentioned above, back to the baby), and the text is characterised by breaks that testify to the habits and needs of the baby. The asterisks in the text are inscriptions of the moments the baby needs the mother, so the latter has to abandon the process of writing: 'les appels du bébé découpent ces pages, d'astérisque en astérisque'.<sup>179</sup> Thus, even the white spaces and the textual breaks are filled with meaning, inviting us to read between the lines; the baby is present both in the text and in the empty spaces marked by the asterisks. This process of reading between the lines is encouraged by other punctuation marks as well, indicating certain rhythms and opening up the space for interpretation: 'Je ne sais quel journaliste se scandalisait, à la mort de Duras, que jamais son enfant n'eût de place dans ses livres, comme si une femme devait nécessairement... La bêtise est une longue fatigue'.<sup>180</sup> The ellipsis could be marking a breath or a sigh, a space to be filled by the

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<sup>172</sup> *Le Bébé*, pp. 126–27.

<sup>173</sup> *Il faut...*, p. 33, italics mine.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29, italics mine.

<sup>175</sup> For example in the case of *Le Bébé* and *Il faut...* the time of the diegesis is closer to the time of publication, while in the case of *Clèves*, the temporal gap is wider.

<sup>176</sup> *Truismes*, p. 11.

<sup>177</sup> Wrónska, "'La faim, c'est moi'", p. 299.

<sup>178</sup> Marrone, 'Echoes of Annie Ernaux in Marie Darrieussecq', p. 97.

<sup>179</sup> *Le Bébé*, p. 34.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

reader's (and the narrator's) frustration and disappointment. When coupled with the conclusion-like sentence that follows it, the ellipsis allows for the time to consider seriously the roles of women who are both mothers and writers. The ellipsis breaks the temporal limits of the text, providing the reader with the opportunity to enter a long-standing controversial debate (i.e. women's decision to have both children and careers). The ellipsis allows the reader the flexibility to take as much time as needed to tackle this debate. The ending of the text — 'neuf mois après la naissance du bébé'<sup>181</sup> — carries symbolic value, especially as the baby was born prematurely. Since nine months are normally needed to bring the baby into the world, nine months were needed to inscribe him into time, and to carve out a place for him in literature.

As a retrospective account, *Tom est mort* presents at least a two-fold relation to time, since narrative time (the present of the narrator, the time during which she writes her *cahier*) and narrated time (the events she writes about, the time surrounding Tom's death, ten years prior to her writing) do not overlap. The narrator is reluctant to go back and alter her text, so corrections are made when her husband mentions them, rather than following a chronological pattern:

J'ai décidé de lui [à Stuart, son mari] faire lire régulièrement. [...] Il n'aura le droit de rien ôter, de rien censurer, mais s'il lui vient une réaction, un souvenir ou un rectificatif, je l'inscrirai, j'inscrirai son hypothèse à lui.<sup>182</sup>

As a consequence of this decision, Stuart's interventions are usually graphically marked by section breaks, and are underlined by the narrator: 'Tu n'as pas tout raconté, dit Stuart',<sup>183</sup> 'Stuart me raconte les jours où il prenait la voiture et partait au hasard'.<sup>184</sup> Therefore, the reader's journey through the text is almost simultaneous with Stuart's reading, allowing the reader to infiltrate the family dynamic; the fiction of honesty is enhanced by the existence of this small reading group. Stuart becomes a *narrataire* — 'quelqu'un à qui le narrateur s'adresse'.<sup>185</sup> Therefore, a new actor enters the reading process, alongside the reader and the narrator. The *narrataire*, while a product of fiction, is also a reader or a listener, resembling the extra-diegetic readers. The fictional *narrataire* occupies a liminal position, intruding on the intimacy between the narrator and the reader. However, the *narrataire* can also challenge the story told by the narrator, enlarging the space available for questioning. The *narrataire* can therefore influence the

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., p.188.

<sup>182</sup> *Tom est mort*, p. 113.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., p. 178.

<sup>185</sup> Gerald Prince, 'Introduction à l'étude du narrataire', *Poétique*, 14 (1973), 178–96 (p. 178).

level of textual hospitality in various ways: by interfering in the reader-narrator relation it can diminish the reach of the fiction of honesty, but it can also enlarge the space occupied by the reader by offering a new interpretive optic or simply additional information, and by possibly querying the (sole) authority of the narrator.

The mother-narrator remembers being caught in an increasingly repetitive and cyclical time shortly after Tom's death. In an attempt to try and capture his (ghostly) voice and presence, the mother installed hidden recorders around the house. Each day, she would listen to the recordings of the previous day, which meant that the cassette player used for listening to the tapes was constantly being recorded as well. As there was more than one recorder around the house, one day would not be enough to listen to all the recordings from the previous twenty-four hours. Due to this endless *mise-en-abyme* of time, the mother was unable to catch up with the present: 'les jours qui me séparaient du présent s'accumulaient'.<sup>186</sup> She was trapped in a dangerous repetition, as she was listening to herself listen. This repetitive time is also secluded, as she has no one to share it with. Her baby daughter Stella does not react to what the mother perceives to be Tom's voice, and none of the other family members are aware of the recorders, since the mother makes sure to hide them. The reader understands that Tom's voice is a figment of the mother's imagination, and therefore cannot join her in exploring this cyclical and repetitive articulation of time. Puncturing this dangerous repetition is something the mother-narrator can only do on her own.

Alongside narrative, narrated, and repetitive time, the text brings forth the idea of *kairos*, of the right time for certain things to happen or to be understood. Writing itself has its own *kairos*, as evidenced by the narrator, 'quand j'aurai le cœur un peu moins lourd, peut-être, comme ce jour d'oubli sur la plage alors je raconterai l'histoire de Stuart et moi'.<sup>187</sup> This also implies that only ten years after Tom's death, did the mother find the right time to write about it, and to name it at the end of her *cahier*. In a similar manner, reception and interpretation have their own *kairos*: the mother reinterprets parts of her intertextual library (for example, Kieslowski's film, *Bleu*)<sup>188</sup> in a different manner after the loss of her child; while certain people she was initially unable to relate to cast a new light upon subsequent events — 'je comprenais après coup la dame au chapeau'.<sup>189</sup> The

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<sup>186</sup> *Tom est mort*, p. 139.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

idea of *kairos* can connect diegetic and extra-diegetic time, as there might be a right time for reading and re-reading, as well as a right time for analysing.

The awareness of extra-diegetic time can affect the impact of the fiction of honesty. The processes of editing, publishing, and marketing create a distance between the reader and the narrator. Darrieussecq's media presence can also contribute to increasing the awareness of all these processes, further detaching the reading from the writing of the text. An early reference to publishing is present in *Truismes*: 'Je me doute que l'éditeur qui acceptera de prendre en charge ce manuscrit s'exposera à d'infinis ennuis.'<sup>190</sup> The reader is cast into a state of doubt and ambiguity, as (s)he has no certainty that the text was not altered or censored. The line between the diegesis and the extra-diegesis is a fine one to thread, mirroring the image of the fault line used so far in the chapter. Within this context of ambiguity, we can include the issue of plagiarism, and the possible questions it raises in the reading community. Darrieussecq has not been immune to accusations of plagiarism, two of the most well-known being those of Marie NDiaye and Camille Laurens.<sup>191</sup> Such allegations can have a significant impact upon writers, as was highlighted by the case studies presented in *Rapport de police*, both in terms of their personal lives and their status as authors (depression and even suicide, publishing adjustments or decrease in sales).<sup>192</sup> They can also find an echo in further works: the example of Marie NDyaie's novels in which the issue of plagiarism is clearly dealt with, of Darrieussecq's *Rapport de police*, and even of her novel *Clèves*.<sup>193</sup>

These claims can also affect the reading process, rendering the reader doubtful, and breaching the confidence (s)he might have in the text, the narrator, and the author. *Plagiomnie* does not just reveal the relation certain writers have to otherness,<sup>194</sup> but it can also affect the reader's ability to come to terms with alterity, influencing his/her level of active engagement with the text. Accusations of plagiarism surrounding a text can diminish the reader's trust in the text and the author, and the levels of readerly hospitality (s)he displays. Such accusations can transform a fiction of honesty into one of dishonesty:

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<sup>190</sup> *Truismes*, p. 11.

<sup>191</sup> *Rapport de police*, pp. 12–13.

<sup>192</sup> Darrieussecq and Gaudet, "Des livres sur la liberté", p. 117.

<sup>193</sup> Chiara Rolla considers *Clèves* to be an application in the realm of fiction of the arguments presented in *Rapport de police* (Rolla, 'Clèves de Marie Darrieussecq', p. 9), highlighting the infinite possibilities of intertextuality. However, it would be far-fetched to claim that the plagiarism accusations prompted a re-interpretation of *La Princesse de Clèves*. References to this project appear as early as *Le Bébé* (p. 147), five years before Camille Laurens' accusations, and almost ten years before the publication of *Clèves*.

<sup>194</sup> According to Darrieussecq, *plagiomnie* mirrors certain writers' inability to deal with otherness (*Rapport de police*, p. 19). Darrieussecq introduces the word to refer to the moment when 'ce désir d'être plagié conduit à une calomnie, à la désignation d'un plagiaire et au recours au scandale' (p. 12).

the reader can refuse to trust a text that pretends to be something else (i.e. an original creation, when there are suspicions that it might be plagiarised). The line between plagiarism and intertextuality can be a fine one to tread: intertexts encourage readers to become detectives and co-creators, whereas plagiarism can stifle any readerly dialogue. The reader is compelled to navigate this ambiguous space, this fault line, and to come to terms with the existence of links between different texts. As an exhaustive reading of all intertexts is not a realistic option, the reader needs to be able to accept this uncertainty. An active reading can transform this space of uncertainty into one of readerly creativity, rather than one where suspicions of plagiarism are allowed to creep in. Achieving such a transformation can be facilitated by analysing the manner in which others read, particularly the protagonists of the novels.

### **Reading and writing fiction**

This final section will focus on the *mise-en-abyme* of the reading and writing processes in the novels studied, emphasising the subversive potential of fiction, and the main characters' need to tell their stories. All of Darrieussecq's female protagonists are presented as readers and writers (to various degrees), with the exception of Solange, whose need to tell her story manifests itself mostly orally: 'Elle essaie de tenir son journal comme Rose. [...] Mais c'est fastidieux. [...] Alors peut-être enregistrer. C'est le magnétophone sur lequel son père a essayé d'apprendre l'anglais.'<sup>195</sup> However, in *Il faut...* Solange shares some of her reading experiences, and constantly takes part in creative endeavours (mostly films, but she does try to modify the script for Kouhouesso's film: 'Elle ébaucha quelque brouillons de scènes dans un fichier *HOD-2*').<sup>196</sup> Reading and writing ensure survival, and help the characters come to terms with various transformations.

For example, the narrator of *Truismes* regains her human form and abilities after having read the books hidden in the asylum: 'Je me suis mise à lire tous les livres que je trouvais [...]. J'étais assise sur mon derrière toute la journée dans le grenier maintenant [...] j'avais de nouveau ce réflexe de me tenir sur les pattes arrière.'<sup>197</sup> Her newly regained human form allows her to escape the asylum just before it is burnt down, and her ability

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<sup>195</sup> *Clèves*, p. 36.

<sup>196</sup> *Il faut...*, p. 110.

<sup>197</sup> *Truismes*, pp. 97–98.



to speak (connected to her previous readings) helps her get away from *une rafle*: ‘Je pouvais articuler à nouveau, c’était sans doute d’avoir lu tous ces mots dans les livres, ça m’a fait comme qui dirait un entraînement’.<sup>198</sup> This connection between reading and speaking is emphasised later on in the text as well: ‘Je me suis mise à dévorer tous les livres du marabout [...]. Un truc de bien c’est que peu à peu j’ai retrouvé l’usage de la parole, et on a pu papoter tous les deux’.<sup>199</sup> The use of the word *dévorer* connects reading to food and ingestion, and by extrapolation to survival, placing reading and eating on an equal footing. Moreover, the speed and eagerness comprised in the meaning of *dévorer* suggest a certain need to catch up with the lost time, an awareness that the knowledge acquired will be useful in future endeavours. Reading and speaking are connected by the action of *papoter*, which highlights a sense of sharing and community; the narrator shares her stories with the marabout after having recovered her ability to speak. She is able to meaningfully interact with an *other* after having engaged in reading. Darrieussecq herself put forward the idea that the narrator’s writing becomes more sophisticated as the text develops: ‘Je suis persuadée que le vocabulaire s’enrichit et que la syntaxe se complexifie à mesure que le livre avance. Alors qu’au début elle ne dit que des bêtises.’<sup>200</sup> While this evolution is not entirely attributed to her reading, the latter does contribute to the process, by allowing her access to a richer vocabulary needed to express her transformation and to write her body.<sup>201</sup> The narrator becomes aware of this development towards the end of the text: ‘Je ne savais pas d’où je sortais tout ça, ça me venait, c’était des choses que je découvrais très au fond de moi, et je trouvais les mots même les plus difficiles, même les plus inconnus.’<sup>202</sup>

This newly found lexis supports her writing, a creative endeavour that is further connected to her human side: ‘à chaque Lune la truie se redresse sur ses pattes et pleure. C’est pour ça que j’écris, c’est parce que je reste moi avec ma douleur d’Yvan’.<sup>203</sup> Writing, pain and humanity are all linked, despite the fact that the narrator spends most of her time in sow form:

J’écris dès que la sève retombe un peu en moi. L’envie me vient quand la Lune monte, sous sa lumière froide, je relis mon cahier. C’est à la ferme que je l’ai volé. J’essaie de faire comme me l’avait montré Yvan, mais à rebrousse-poil de ses

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>200</sup> Lambeth, ‘Entretien avec Marie Darrieussecq’, p. 815.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., p. 815.

<sup>202</sup> *Truismes*, p. 129.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., p. 141.

propres méthodes: moi c'est pour retrouver ma cambrure d'humain que je tends mon cou vers la Lune.<sup>204</sup>

Despite the isolation from human civilisation, the conclusion of the text can still be considered to be 'forward-looking'.<sup>205</sup> The narrator is able to find her 'cambrure d'humain', and has come to terms with her transformation, discovering a language that allows her to speak of and write her body. Her *cahier* can be seen as a reversal of Pandora's box — after having released all the evils upon the world, the narrator does not close the box/ *cahier*, but rather allows for hope to creep out and potentially affect the future reader. Several boxes feature throughout the text carrying products and clothing items that would mould the narrator into a woman mostly used for satisfying the needs of her partners (for example, the boxes containing make-up products or the present from Honoré). The *cahier* breaks away from this pattern, opening up towards alternatives and possibilities. According to Marina Warner 'tales of metamorphoses express conflicts and uncertainties, and in doing so, they embody the transformational power of story-telling itself, revealing stories as activators of change'.<sup>206</sup> Through their very nature, tales of metamorphoses require us to deal with the other, as there are at least two personae involved in the process of transformation. These tales do not offer definite answers and solutions, but rather 'a way of imagining alternatives, mapping possibilities, exciting hope, warding off danger by forestalling it, casting spells of order on the unknown ahead';<sup>207</sup> they become 'apotropaic acts'.<sup>208</sup>

This apotropaic character of writing is visible when looking at *Le Bébé* and *Tom est mort* in conjunction. The narrator of *Le Bébé* tackles the issue of writing the death of children, after becoming a mother herself:

Aujourd'hui je tuerais autant de bébés qu'il faut à l'écriture, mais en touchant du bois. Ce n'est pas le tabou qui m'inquiète, c'est la répétition, la malédiction, tout ce qui névrotiquement fait croire à l'ombre portée de l'écrit sur la vie. Écrire sans superstition: éloigner de soi les fantômes.<sup>209</sup>

Writing can ward off the ghosts, the repressed, the *refoulé*, by compelling the narrators and readers to face them in fiction(s). According to Shirley Jordan, 'underlying her [Darrieussecq's] entire creative process is the idea that by anticipating and narrating

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid., pp. 148–49.

<sup>205</sup> Jean H. Duffy, 'In the wake of trauma: visualising the unspeakable/unthinkable in Marie Darrieussecq and Hélène Lenoir', *Word & Image: A Journal of Verbal/Visual Enquiry*, 27.4 (2011), 416–28 (p. 426).

<sup>206</sup> Marina Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses, Other Worlds. Ways of Telling the Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 210.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., p. 212.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., p. 212.

<sup>209</sup> *Le Bébé*, p. 54.

horror one may forestall it'.<sup>210</sup> Thus, *Tom est mort* becomes a way of protecting *le bébé*: 'La Tombe d'une jeune personne est le titre d'une sculpture de Louise Bourgeois: "ces piliers attentifs [...] expriment une peur, sont une sorte d'exorcisme pour protéger la santé de mes enfants" explique-t-elle. J'ai écrit *Tom est mort* dans le même esprit d'exorcisme'.<sup>211</sup> The loss of a child is a common anxiety, a repressed fear haunting parents. Writing about it becomes a manner of protecting the children: 'j'écris pour conjurer le sort [...]. J'écris ce cahier pour éloigner de mon fils les spectres, pour qu'ils ne me le prennent pas [...]'.<sup>212</sup> However, writing does not just guard the children, it also protects the parents/the mother; it allows them/her to come to terms with the fear, further fuelling the creative processes: 'Je vais bientôt pouvoir écrire sur autre chose'.<sup>213</sup>

If writing *Tom est mort* can be seen as an apotropaic act from the point of view of Darrieussecq the writer, it fulfils a different function for Mrs. Winter, Tom's mother and the narrator of the text, as she writes her story ten years after her son's death. Her *cahier* is a manner of counter-acting forgetting, and giving substance, physicality to absence. She admits to wanting to offer as exhaustive an account as possible: 'Un souvenir me vient encore, j'essaie de tout écrire'.<sup>214</sup> Tom's absence is a constant presence in the mother's life. Even when she admits to not thinking about him, she uses writing to bring his memory back to the forefront of her thoughts:

Il y a quelques jours, sur la plage, je regardais surfer Vince. [...] Le regard que je portais sur mon fils n'était pas brouillé par la mort, dix ans plus tôt, de mon autre fils. Tom ne dansait pas entre mes yeux et Vince [...] Il me semble avoir eu, pendant deux heures sur cette plage, une fenêtre de santé mentale. Je ne filais pas le fantasme d'un Tom surfeur lui aussi.<sup>215</sup>

The writing process confers substance to absence — the narrator does not just write about past events and thoughts, but also about what she did not think (or rather what she believes she did not think). Even if the memory of Tom was truly absent during those two hours, why does the narrator feel the need to address this absence in writing? Is there a sense of guilt for not thinking about Tom? Can writing contribute to (self-)forgiveness? Any answer to these questions would be a tentative one, and vary from reader to reader, depending on personal interpretations of textual clues.

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<sup>210</sup> Jordan, *Contemporary French Women's Writing*, p. 95.

<sup>211</sup> *Rapport de police*, p. 368; italics mine.

<sup>212</sup> *Le Bébé*, p. 79.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>214</sup> *Tom est mort*, p. 86.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82; the choice of words 'une fenêtre de santé mentale' can suggest Tom's presence, despite the mother's belief to the contrary. The *fenêtre* can be linked to the loggia from which Tom fell out. Despite the mother's attempts, Tom will probably never fall out from the *fenêtres mentales*.

However, the text does offer an indication as to why the mother chooses writing over any other medium. Unlike her husband, who finds the written word ‘insupportable’<sup>216</sup> and prefers the moving images of family films,<sup>217</sup> the mother–narrator cannot watch them ‘pour l’instant [...] l’insupportable réalisme des films’.<sup>218</sup> Moreover, she has a background in literature, which she shares with others when asked by the support group psychologist to focus on her *compétences*: ‘Je me suis lancée. J’ai dessiné, sur des transparents un schéma gradué pour essayer de comprendre ce que la littérature pouvait pour nous, si elle pouvait quelque chose’.<sup>219</sup> She re-appropriates the stress scale, allowing for a score of 150 out of 100 that would account for the loss of a child. Various French works are presented, translated, and then plotted on the scale: ‘J’ai noté 140/100 le poème de Hugo.<sup>220</sup> [...] Ensuite j’ai noté 0/100 *La Princesse de Clèves* [...] J’ai noté 150/100 tous les livres de Charlotte Delbo. J’ai donné 10 à Marcel Proust [...] Et 100 à Georges Perec’.<sup>221</sup> This newly acquired literary knowledge determines one of the participants to write a poem ‘entièrement sans i’.<sup>222</sup> Thus, the text suggests that reading (or knowledge of various intertexts) is a generator of writing, ‘la lecture c’est l’Autre de l’écriture’.<sup>223</sup>

The example of the grieving mother deciding to write a poem of her own (following the example of Perec’s work) becomes even more pertinent if we take into account the fact that she was previously disengaged from the rest of the group (and the narrator in particular), and that the writing exercise was not encouraged by the coordinator of the support group (‘le psychologue a dit que son atelier “capacités personnelles” n’était pas un atelier d’écriture, qu’il s’agissait de parler *d’autre chose*’).<sup>224</sup> Each member had their own particular manner of coping with loss; what reading managed to accomplish was to suggest a few possible (unexplored) methods of dealing with it: reading more (fully engaging with the texts suggested by the narrator), re-writing a particular text (the mother–narrator rewrites Hugo’s poem in prose form to provoke a renewed reading), or writing a personal text using some of the methods put forward by the intertexts (the

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., pp. 156–58

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., p.185.

<sup>220</sup> *Demain, dès l’aube*, presented without any verse breaks, to allow for a re-interpretation of the flow of time (see *Rapport de police*, p. 13.)

<sup>221</sup> *Tom est mort*, pp. 186–87.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., p. 188; since the writer of the poem is Anglophone, a poem ‘entièrement sans i’ refers both to the letter ‘i’ and the first-person pronoun ‘I.’ This attempt echoes Georges Perec’s novel *La Disparition* written *sans e/eux*.

<sup>223</sup> *Rapport de police*, p. 390.

<sup>224</sup> *Tom est mort*, p. 188.

example of the mother who writes a poem without ‘I’). As is suggested by the end of this scene, which develops into an argument between the support group members (‘elle est partie en claquant la porte et c’en a été fini pour moi aussi, ce groupe de parole’)<sup>225</sup>, the methods put forward by reading will not suit all members. However, reading offers options for exploration, rather than imposing coping mechanisms. The text does not suggest that reading and writing will be the answer for every grieving parent, but it creates the space for parents to experiment with reading and writing to see if it would suit their manner of handling the situation. This scene reflects the relation between the reader of *Tom est mort* and the mother–narrator: by reading the mother’s text, the reader offers her the space to tell her story and find coping mechanisms. The reader does for the mother–narrator what the mother–narrator did for the other members of the support group: (s)he uses the reading experience to create a space for making sense of the grieving experience.

In the case of the mother–narrator, writing becomes a search for the right words, allowing her to name the unnameable. Reading can help her along the way, but ultimately it is through writing that she can name Tom’s death, or rather the aftermath of his death (the discovery of his body), as nuanced by Robson.<sup>226</sup> Within the family dynamic, the memory of Tom will disappear when Stella, the youngest child, disappears: ‘Nous morts, Tom finirait de disparaître avec la minuscule mémoire de Stella, Stella la petite sœur, l’aïeule, la dernière à l’avoir vu vivant. Et puis, plus rien.’<sup>227</sup> However, the final remark — ‘et puis, plus rien’ — is not entirely true, as her *cahier* can survive the members of the family. Writing in general, and the fiction of honesty in particular, can act as a mechanism of passing on memories of Tom; despite his physical absence, he can become omnipresent. The reader enables the mother’s writing project (through the very act of reading), and can also act as a repository for her story, by keeping Tom’s memory alive. Thus, reading and writing become means of interfering with chronology, challenging the finitude imposed by death.

Solange, on the other hand, does not have the opportunity to express herself in writing like Darrieussecq’s other female protagonists. The need to tell her story is acutely felt, especially in *Il faut...*

Il ne s’était jamais soucié de son enfance à elle – imaginait-il la connaître déjà, l’enfance des filles blanches, l’enfance identique que racontent tous les livres, tous les films ? Mais sa rivière à elle; mais l’été, mais la chaleur surprenante des pays tempérés, mais les forêts très denses. Elle aurait censuré les épisodes sexuels, elle

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid., p. 188.

<sup>226</sup> Robson, ‘Psychic Plagiarism’, pp. 58–59.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., p. 215.

ne le sentait pas prêt à la connaître adolescente, la petite sauvage, la jeune anthropophage.<sup>228</sup>

Her meetings with Kouhouesso are saturated with his stories and plans, not giving Solange the opportunity to share hers. She does not just need to tell her story, but also for it to be listened to by someone engaged: her story needs a meaningful reception. This necessity is further evidenced when she tells her story to Siphindile, the inn-keeper in Cameroon: ‘l’ennui était tel [...], l’ennui et l’angoisse, qu’elle lui raconta tout, Kouhouesso, son absence, son silence massif, à quoi Siphindile répondit que les fesses de la marmite ne craignent pas le feu’.<sup>229</sup> Siphindile is not an attentive recipient of Solange’s story, as her answers are mostly truisms, proverbs that could apply to almost any situation: ‘Le brouillard du matin n’arrête pas le pèlerin, en somme. À cœur vaillant rien d’impossible. Elle le voulait? Il suffisait d’y mettre les moyens.’<sup>230</sup> Solange’s situation suggests that sharing one’s story is an essential part of living. Moreover, the fact that each story needs to be listened to (carefully) implies that the self needs the other.

This need to be listened to suggests a change (even an evolution) from Solange’s teenage experience in *Clèves*, where an intensely scopical regime (focused almost exclusively on the gaze) validated her existence: ‘À rester dans sa chambre, elle se désintègre. Sans yeux qui la regardent, sans témoin qu’elle est là, ses atomes la quittent. Poussières qui flottent aux vitres, un nuage ténu, un voile percé par les rayons.’<sup>231</sup> Her very existence depends upon the gaze of the others, both her identity and her physical being need to be validated from the outside. There is a move from the need to be looked at, to the need to be listened to; a move from being the object of the gaze, to the subject of speech. The moment Solange attempts to write her own version of the script, the reader gets a glimpse of her own creativity, which was often stifled by her job as an actress, usually being given directions by someone else: ‘c’était frappant, à quel point ce roman laissait peu de place aux femmes et aux Africains [...] Elle songeait à des améliorations’.<sup>232</sup> In her version, the female character would become central: ‘Le Cœur des ténèbres, c’était elle: éclairant de sa bonté, de son grand cœur, l’envoûtement infernal de la colonisation’.<sup>233</sup> The storyline would no longer be dominated by the masculine characters, allowing her an equal participation: ‘un rôle sublime. Couvrant tout le film.

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<sup>228</sup> *Il faut...*, p. 192.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>231</sup> *Clèves*, p. 133.

<sup>232</sup> *Il faut...*, p. 109.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

Le genre de rôle où elle serait sur l’affiche avec George [...]’.<sup>234</sup> Solange’s need to see *la Promise* as a central character in the film echoes her need to be central to Kouhouesso’s life.

While the above sections tried to prove the manner in which reading and writing are essential to the characters’ evolution, the following section will examine the validity of this claim for the readers, analysing the subversive potential of fiction. One of the main achievements of Darrieussecq’s fiction is bringing marginal, and even invisible experiences to the forefront. According to Joanna Russ ‘only at the margins does growth occur’.<sup>235</sup> Minor and unspoken subjects are burst open, shaking public perceptions. Most often, these topics are related to women’s experiences: bodily transformations (and even monstrosity), sexual awakening, or motherhood. Women’s bodies are no longer perceived only as *menacé[s]*, but also as *menaçant[s]*,<sup>236</sup> and writing about them is a type of witchcraft: ‘aujourd’hui, une sorcière c’est une femme qui écrit’.<sup>237</sup> Associating women’s writing with sorcery suggests both a socially peripheral position, and a certain power that eludes rules of conformity. Fear, repression, fascination, and curiosity are all associated with sorcery, and by extension with women’s writing; attempts at silencing only result in new methods of expression and survival.

This idea is analysed even further by Andrew Asibong, when he considers the narrator of *Truismes* as *mulier sacra*, ‘sacred in the sense of being outside both social and worldly categorizations, and, instead, untouchably “post-human”’.<sup>238</sup> She is seen as eluding the Law and

on the ruins of a properly traumatic encounter with her own sacredness, the narrator is re-born in unthinkable pig form and – crucially – is able to intervene in the wretched city she has left behind via the unspeakable story which she must nevertheless write and tell before it is too late.<sup>239</sup>

It is this story that can subsequently offer the reader ‘something weirdly comparable to the relatively safe position from which [...] the sow survive[s] the cataclysmic passage into bare life. Like the triumphant *mulier sacra*, the reader is prodded and bullied into glimpsing – and maybe even assuming – a provisionally survivable sacredness of his or

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>235</sup> Russ, *How to Suppress Women’s Writing*, p. 129.

<sup>236</sup> Wrónska, “‘La faim, c’est moi’”, p. 295.

<sup>237</sup> Darrieussecq and Gaudet, “‘Des livres sur la liberté’”, p. 115.

<sup>238</sup> Andrew Asibong, ‘*Mulier sacra*: Marie Chauvet, Marie Darrieussecq and the Sexual Metamorphoses of ‘Bare Life’’, *French Cultural Studies*, 14.2 (2003), 169–77 (p. 169).

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., p. 173.

her own'.<sup>240</sup> The problem with this possibility is that the reader eventually needs to come back to the world dominated by the Law, his/her 'sacredness' is only temporary, and closely connected to reading and remembering the text. The manner in which each reader performs the transition from 'survivable sacredness' to the world of the Law establishes the extent to which fiction fulfils its subversive potential – a transition that restores the initial state of affairs marks the reading as entertainment; on the other hand, a transition that takes with it a spirit of interrogation can render the text subversive. Entertainment and subversion are not exclusionary outcomes, but rather complementary ones. Nonetheless, it is the reader's manner of using the text that ensures the transition from entertainment to subversion.

For some of Darrieussecq's novels this subversive potential is more readily noticeable in their public reception. For example, *Le Bébé* generated a substantial divide between the critics' reception and the public's reception: 'la plupart des critiques du côté de la gent masculine [...] ont eu des réactions très agressives [...]. On m'interdisait d'avoir un discours d'intellectuelle sur le bébé';<sup>241</sup> while publications dealing with issues of parenting and motherhood had a much more positive feedback.<sup>242</sup> The text challenges the invisibility of the baby from literature and socio-cultural discourses, and the received idea that motherhood and writing (or any type of creative and intellectual endeavour) are incompatible. The disagreements generated by the reception of the text only enhanced existing debates, questioning the restrictions imposed upon a field that should be promoting freedom of creation. At a more personal level, the text can also become 'a valuable oasis of self-identification'<sup>243</sup> for women readers. A similar divergence in reception was generated by *Clèves*, but this time, it saw groups of readers and critics on both sides of the argument: '*Clèves* a décidément bouleversé et choqué la rentrée littéraire 2011 [...]. [L]'on s'aperçoit que lecteurs et critiques se sont divisés nettement à son sujet: ceux qui ont crié au scandale et ceux qui, en revanche, ont vu dans ce roman une véritable "épopée de la puberté"'.<sup>244</sup> Approaching the theme of the sexual awakening of a teenage girl, in a period that tended to silence such issues, refusing girls the necessary language to talk about their bodies and desires, did not leave the audience indifferent. The text compelled the public to engage in a debate about taboo subjects such as paedophilia, and teenage sexual desires. The public's virulent reactions to such topics suggests a certain

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>241</sup> Barraband et Gassmann, 'Entretien avec Marie Darrieussecq', p. 14.

<sup>242</sup> Jordan, *Contemporary French Women's Writing*, p. 92.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>244</sup> Rolla, '*Clèves* de Marie Darrieussecq', p. 2.



unpreparedness to meaningfully tackle them. The public has not yet reached its *kairos* when it comes to these issues. However, they are not new topics (newness which would partly explain the public's lagging back), and therefore the audience might need an impetus to open up discussions; *Clèves* can act as such an impetus.

A similar lack of socio-cultural references is present in *Il faut...*, as Solange is unable to find a model for her relationship with Kouhouesso:

Elle ne se souvenait pas d'un film, américain ou autre, où un Noir et une Blanche – un Blanc et une Noire – couchent ensemble sans que ce soit le sujet même du *drame*. Quand un Blanc et une Noire – un Noir et une Blanche – se rapprochent un peu trop, il y a comme un signal d'alarme, le public se raidit, les producteurs ont dit stop, les scénaristes ont déjà réglé la question, l'acteur noir sait qu'il ne séduira pas l'actrice blanche: sinon on est dans un autre film, un tableau de mœurs, une affaire, un problème.<sup>245</sup>

A mixed-race relationship is difficult to picture even within a film, which makes it ever more problematic for Solange, when it comes to positioning herself in relation to Kouhouesso. The fact that not even fiction can offer Solange a non-stereotypical example of a mixed-race couple is suggestive of how much of a taboo this still remains. In contrast to the other protagonists (Tom's mother, the narrator of *Le Bébé*, or even the narrator of *Truismes*), the fictions Solange has access to do not allow her to carve out a space from where she can tell or write her own story. They only re-inforce the norms she is trying to disrupt. It seems like the outcome of the relationship has already been decided by forces outside the couple, and breaking away from the imposed scenario is fraught with difficulty. However, Solange's experience does not need to become the norm for the reader as well. Herein lies part of Darrieussecq's originality: tackling subjects that affect our daily lives, and at one point or another shape our existence, but remain largely undiscussed in society. Her texts can be seen to burst open societal silences. Thus, the readers cannot remain unresponsive; using their experience and personal intertextual library they need to provide a response to the text. This effect is obtained by the author's ability to dislocate the known and widely accepted point of view, as 'le monde ne se voit apparemment jamais aussi bien que lorsqu'on est à l'envers, que lorsqu'on le retourne "comme un gant", que lorsqu'aussi, autre fantôme, on le creuse à fond'.<sup>246</sup> The author sets the reader on this path of *creusement*, determining him/her to realise that even the known and the recognisable have unexplored corners. This *creusement* does not allow for any definitive answers, which further contributes to the subversive potential of fiction,

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<sup>245</sup> *Il faut...*, pp. 111–12.

<sup>246</sup> Simon, 'Déterritorisations de Marie Darrieussecq', p. 19.

never fully ending the (re-)reading process. Fiction itself becomes a *faille*, a fault-line inviting exploration and self-exploration (in a similar manner to how the other is portrayed, in Darrieussecq's fiction, as a *faille*).

## Conclusion

According to Roland Barthes a text is not isotropic: 'Si vous enfoncez un clou dans le bois, le bois résiste différemment selon l'endroit où vous l'attaquez: on dit que le bois n'est pas isotrope. Le texte non plus n'est pas isotrope: les bords, la faille sont imprévisibles'.<sup>247</sup> Each reading will reveal new edges and fault lines, depending on the reader's level of engagement, and personal library of intertexts and experiences. In the case of Darrieussecq's *œuvre*, four types of intertextuality were identified, allowing for a multitude of dialogues to develop (dialogues with popular culture, with other literary texts, with other Darrieussecq-ien texts, and dialogues with personal readerly intertexts). These intertextual links further emphasise the unpredictability of the *bords* or *failles*.

In Darrieussecq's fiction, the image of the *faille* also helps us articulate the image of the other: the other becomes the fault line needing exploration. In most texts, the other also undergoes a liminal experience, further enhancing their marginal position. One of the main aims of this chapter was to analyse the mechanisms through which the other is represented as a fault line, and to investigate their possible impact upon the reading process. One such mechanism was the use of language, since the image of the others is partly created by the language we use to talk about them. Through the analysis of stereotypes, clichés, and euphemisms, language was shown to be both obscuring and revealing. Moreover, language exposes its own shortcomings (as certain experiences cannot be conveyed in language), allowing the reader to use other tools — such as multisensorial readings — to relate to the characters' experiences. Language itself can become othering, as was the case with the mother tongue (be it the Basque language, or French), or with the language of the oppressor (in the colonial context). Our methods of using and misusing language directly impact on our relation to the other.

The argument moved from the linguistic level to the narrative one, introducing the concept of the fiction of honesty, a tool to help us understand how trust is built

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<sup>247</sup> Barthes, *Le Plaisir du texte*, p. 60.

between reader and narrator. Elements such as the first-person narrator, the *cahier* used for writing, the conversational manner, the verbal tics, and the occasional ambiguity of the narrative voices (especially in the case of *style indirect libre*) can all bring the reader closer to the narrative and the narrator, by creating effects of immediacy and honesty. This immediacy is directly linked to inscriptions of time, and the ways in which the text and the narrator can control the amount of time spent with and within the fiction. The narrator of *Truismes* needs to tell her entire story quickly, as the moments she is in human form are limited, therefore the text is presented as an uninterrupted flow, concentrating on the personal chronology (the text is punctuated by the narrator's bodily transformations, rather than by societal changes.). Similarly, the mother-narrator of *Le Bébé* can only write when her baby does not need her; paradoxically, the text about the baby can only take shape when the baby is absent. In *Tom est mort*, narrative time allows the reader to become part of a private reading group (containing only the mother-narrator and her husband, Stuart), as the mother is reluctant to make any alterations to her text.

The final part of the chapter took an extra-diegetic step, analysing the subversive potential of fiction. All narrators and protagonists need their stories to be received by an active and engaged audience. This process of story-telling can be replicated outside the text, in real life interactions with the other. The notion that reading itself becomes a heuristic process underpinned significant parts of this chapter, reflecting the way the experience of reading can help us carve out a space for the other. When reading Darrieussecq's fiction we are faced with marginal or liminal experiences, often recounted from the perspective of societal 'others'. An engaged reader learns during the reading process how to carve out a place (in both language and literature) for the other to tell his/her story. The others are not spoken for, but given the space to speak for themselves. Linguistic and narrative tools (the deconstruction of clichés, the interrogation of scientific lexicon, multisensorial reading or the fiction of honesty) can aid the reader in crafting this creative space. These tools need not remain the remit of fiction; they can be transferred to our everyday reality, enhancing the subversive potential of reading (and) fiction. The next chapter, examining Wittig's fiction, will add to this list of tools, further analysing their applicability, impact, and possible drawbacks.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Writing and Reading the Marginal in Wittig's Fiction

#### Introduction

Out of the three authors examined in this study, Monique Wittig is the one most unproblematically associated with (radical) feminism and with the women's movements of the 1960s and 1970s, in both France and the United States.<sup>1</sup> One of the most important tenets of (second-wave) feminism during that period was the breaking down of the private/ public dichotomy; one famous decree was that 'the personal is political'. When reading reception through the lens of gender in general, and that of feminism in particular, we discover that studying the reading process can make an invaluable contribution to bursting open this (constructed) separation between the private and public spheres. Despite being a private endeavour, reading surpasses the boundaries of the personal, affecting our interactions with the rest of the world. In her analysis of Simone de Beauvoir as literary theorist, Toril Moi sees reading other women's work as an opportunity to encounter experiences that would otherwise remain unknown:<sup>2</sup> 'readers of fiction have a larger world than non-readers of fiction'.<sup>3</sup> This view can be further enriched if considerations of language are brought into the equation: reading other women's fiction enlarges the vocabulary we have at our disposal. Thus, by bringing together reception and gender, we can articulate our own idiosyncratic experiences, and name other experiences we did not necessarily know we were having, because we did not have access to the appropriate vocabulary for designating them. Therefore, the category of women's writing does not fully follow Barthes's idea of the 'death of the author', as the latter would not take into account the gender of the author when interpreting the text. Nonetheless, as was highlighted by Nancy Miller, 'the death of the author' does not necessarily open women's interpretive horizons, because women's relation to identity, institutions, power, authority,

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<sup>1</sup> Kristeva is often associated with (French) feminism, in a list that usually comprises Cixous, Irigaray and Wittig, but she refused the feminist label on several occasions (in written and recorded interviews).

<sup>2</sup> Toril Moi, 'What Can Literature Do? Simone de Beauvoir as a Literary Theorist', *PMLA*, 1 (2009), 189–98 (p. 196).

<sup>3</sup> Moi, 'The Adventure of Reading', p. 133.

and the universal has been ‘structurally different’ from that of men.<sup>4</sup> Put simply, women cannot afford to speak from the position of the ‘death of the author’, because the woman author is not yet dead, having had a different existence from her male counterpart. Women authors are still trying to contribute to the creation of various traditions of women’s writing, bringing marginal experiences to the centre of the reading process, opening the latter to its wider social contexts. Therefore, women’s writing (and the reading of women’s work) crosses the private/ public dichotomy, by writing the private and relating it to the public.

Before analysing the way this crossing is visible in Wittig’s fiction, I will offer a brief context for her work, as a tool for anchoring some of her ideas and strategies. Her work is often analysed in comparison with other French ‘feminists’,<sup>5</sup> most notably Hélène Cixous.<sup>6</sup> In the innovative context of the 1960s, women were working on attempts to re-appropriate ‘the right to represent the nature of their own desire and the form of their own sexual pleasure’.<sup>7</sup> Both authors feature women’s desires in their fictional and theoretical works, approaching the topic from what seems to be opposite ends of the spectrum: Cixous with an emphasis on difference and *écriture féminine*, and Wittig with an attempt to universalise women’s position as subjects, insisting that they just *are*, rather than *being women*.<sup>8</sup> This opposition was further emphasised by schisms within the *Mouvement de Libération des Femmes*, and disagreements between *Psychanalyse et politique* (associated with Cixous, among others) and *Questions féministes* (a group to which Wittig belonged).<sup>9</sup> However, these divergences did not just affect the unity of the women’s movement at the time, but also the literary posterity of their most prominent representatives. Both Cixous’ and Wittig’s works have been labelled and categorised, diminishing the potential spread of their ideas and techniques. Despite Wittig’s attempts to universalise a ‘lesbian point of view’,<sup>10</sup> and to put forward a materialist feminist

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<sup>4</sup> Nancy K. Miller, *Subject to Change. Reading Feminist Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 106.

<sup>5</sup> The inverted commas were used for feminist because some of these authors refuse the label, whilst their work is studied in the context of feminist movements and developments.

<sup>6</sup> See for example: Hélène Vivienne Wenzel, ‘The Text as Body/Politics: An Appreciation of Monique Wittig’s Writings in Context’, *Feminist Studies*, 7.2 (1981), 264–87; Cecile Lindsay, ‘Body/Language: French Feminist Utopias’, *The French Review*, 60.1 (1986), 46–55; Diane Griffin Crowder, ‘Amazons and Mothers? Monique Wittig, Hélène Cixous and Theories of Women’s Writing’, *Contemporary Literature*, 24.2, *L’Écriture Féminine* (1983), 117–44.

<sup>7</sup> Jennifer Birkett, ‘Sophie Ménade: The Writing of Monique Wittig’, in *French Erotic Fiction. Women’s Desiring Writing, 1880–1990*, ed. by Alex Hughes and Kate Ince (Oxford and Washington D.C.: Berg, 1996), pp. 93–119, (p. 93).

<sup>8</sup> Linda Zerilli, ‘The Trojan Horse of Universalism: Language as a “War Machine” in the Writings of Monique Wittig’, *Social Text*, 25/26 (1990), 146–70 (p. 152), italics mine.

<sup>9</sup> Brad Epps and Jonathan Katz, ‘Monique Wittig’s Materialist Utopia and Radical Critique’, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 13.4 (2007), 423–54 (p. 438).

<sup>10</sup> Lesbian for Wittig was a category that transgressed the man/woman dichotomy.

perspective (according to which women are seen as an oppressed social class),<sup>11</sup> her work has been slotted into the niche categories of lesbian fiction and lesbian theory.<sup>12</sup> Even within this context, when analysing the citational history of *GLQ*,<sup>13</sup> Wiegman observes that Wittig ‘has been cited only five times’,<sup>14</sup> unlike authors like Foucault, Butler or Sedgwick who fare much better. This marginalising trend also defies the position that Wittig saw for her own work, the latter being in constant and ‘direct dialogue with French canonical literature’.<sup>15</sup> Politicising her work was a double-edged sword, bringing about a loss of literary appreciation,<sup>16</sup> and even mis-readings that undermined her universalising goals.<sup>17</sup> While the context of the 1960s and 70s was significant for Wittig’s theoretical and fictional works, using a strictly socio-political lens for their analysis reduces their impact. Wittig (like Beauvoir) is more than just an ‘auteur engagée’, as her literary work innovates both formally and thematically, creating textual gaps and lacunae for the reader to fill (making her a central case-study for this thesis, which looks primarily at the space carved out for the reader in fiction). Whilst her theoretical and literary works are linked, interpreting her fictional works only through the lens of feminist and lesbian theories diminishes their reach and aesthetic value. The premise of this chapter is that the feminist and/or lesbian theoretical framework can be built upon, and literary interpretations enriched by bringing back the reader, by dwelling on the reader’s challenges as co-creator and translator, challenges which can contribute to a better understanding of the self, and of the text.

This chapter will focus primarily on four of Wittig’s fictional works: *L’Opoanax* (1964), *Les Guérillères* (1969), *Le Corps lesbien* (1973), and *Virgile, Non* (1985). In terms of reception, her first novel, *L’Opoanax* was also her most successful, being awarded the Prix Médicis, and enjoying a wide geographical dissemination through numerous translations.<sup>18</sup> This entry onto the literary scene bears a resemblance to Darrieussecq’s debut with *Truismes* in 1996, both of them appearing to fit the social

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<sup>11</sup> Wenzel, ‘The Text as Body/Politics’, p. 273.

<sup>12</sup> Zerilli, ‘The Trojan Horse of Universalism’, p. 152.

<sup>13</sup> *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*

<sup>14</sup> Robyn Wiegman, ‘Un-remembering Monique Wittig’, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 13.4 (2007), 505–18 (p. 513).

<sup>15</sup> Seth Clark Silberman, “‘I have access to your glottis.’ The Fleishy Syntax, Ethical Irony, and Queer Intimacy of Monique Wittig’s *Le Corps lesbien*’, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 13.4 (2007), 467–87 (p. 477).

<sup>16</sup> Zerilli, ‘The Trojan Horse of Universalism’, p. 163.

<sup>17</sup> Leah D. Hewitt, *Autobiographical Tighotropes* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), p. 133.

<sup>18</sup> Jean Duffy, ‘Language and Childhood: *L’Opoanax* by Monique Wittig’, *Forum for Modern Languages Studies*, 19.4 (1983), 289–300 (p. 289).

construction of the precocious genius.<sup>19</sup> However, Wittig's subsequent work does not follow the same pattern, with *Les Guérillères* and *Le Corps lesbien* attracting widespread criticism for elements such as textual violence and eroticism. When relating this shift in critical reception to the labelling tendencies mentioned above, it is clear that categorising Wittig as a lesbian writer becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, affecting the reception of her works. Hélène Wenzel also distinguishes between the French and North American audiences, the latter being mostly familiar with Wittig's second novel (alongside her essays), insisting upon its status as a 'feminist manifesto'.<sup>20</sup> Wittig's move to the United States further precipitated rifts in reception, especially in the French context. My forthcoming analysis takes Wittig's novels out of this oppositional context, re-situating them within the reading process, and the text-reader dialogue and active exchange.

This exchange is not without its difficulties, as dialogue is rarely a completely smooth process. The extent to which the reader is able to find solutions to these difficulties ensures the success or the satisfaction of the reading process. If the difficulties remain unresolved, the reading process can lead to frustration, and even to the abandonment of the text. The tools for overcoming these challenges can be found in various readerly sites: in the same work (intra-textuality revealed at a later or earlier stage), in other works by the same author (intra-*œuvre* links), in works by other writers (intertextuality), in personal or collective experiences (for example in reading communities<sup>21</sup> or in social discourses, more generally). The use of these tools is not always simultaneous with the reading process, leading to re-reads and subsequent returns to the text(s). The reading process is not sealed or self-contained, but rather open and fluid, wherein lies its creativity. This chapter aims to look at Wittig's fiction from the standpoint of this creative reading process, identifying some of the most salient challenges, and pointing towards available ways of resolving them. Nonetheless, possible failures in reading will also be pointed out, as they provide new investigative routes for literary criticism. Whilst most critical work takes the socio-political as a starting point, this chapter returns to the text, positing the reader as the connecting chain between text and politics, between private and public. The first part focuses on language and writing, with an emphasis on the use of pronouns, and the creation of textual gaps and lacunae, which help render the marginal visible. The study of naming as a linguistic innovation will be followed by an analysis of the writing process, from the perspective of textual

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<sup>19</sup> Pinet-Fernandes, 'Les ressorts extra-textuels du jugement littéraire aujourd'hui', p. 100.

<sup>20</sup> Wenzel, 'The Text as Body/Politics', p. 265.

<sup>21</sup> This idea of reading communities can be related to Kristeva's 'reading *Carmel*' analysed in Chapter One, or to the more general reading groups discussed in the Introduction.

violence and the subversion of norms. The second part concentrates on myth and imagery, examining the re-interpretation of socially embedded myths and foundational stories. Wittig's sensual and erotic writing will also be tackled, when exploring the implications of multisensorial reading. The idea of the flowing text will be dealt with from a two-fold perspective: the fluid, flowing, shifting text, and the more conventional view of the narrative flow of a text (including, but not limited to chronology). The third part of the argument will turn towards the political, exploring the implications of Wittig's assertion that 'the lesbian is not a woman',<sup>22</sup> and considering the development of a lesbian geography in her works. The body politic<sup>23</sup> will open the way to analysing the echoes of reality evident in Wittig's fiction.

### **Language and Writing**

For Wittig, language becomes more than a tool for conveying meaning, it develops into a theme of its own. Jean Duffy identifies the acquisition of language throughout childhood as one of the main themes of *L'Opoponax*.<sup>24</sup> Language remains a focal point in both *Les Guérillères* and *Le Corps lesbien*, through its novel use by the narrators, and protagonists. If conventionally literary interpretation is considered to be a manner of finding meaning behind language, Wittig brings language centre stage, 'forc[ing] the reader to see "words" differently'.<sup>25</sup> As one of our most common and frequent modes of interactions with the social world, words leave an imprint upon it; an imprint which contributes to the construction and entrenching of social discourses and norms. This view is reflected early on in *Virgile, Non* — 'les mots même se font chair'<sup>26</sup> — through a phrase reminiscent of religious imagery (the word of the Father with its creative potential). If words can become flesh, if they have the potential to materialise, then their weight leaves its mark on the world. Whilst at this stage Manastabal (Wittig's guide through the underworld of *Virgile, Non*) is not convinced by Wittig's<sup>27</sup> optimism with regards to the transformative power of words, she does later on encourage her to use their healing potential: 'Mais Manastabal,

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<sup>22</sup> Monique Wittig, 'The Straight Mind' in *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), p. 32 (the essay was originally written in English by Wittig).

<sup>23</sup> Bordo defines the body politic as 'the direct grip that culture has on our bodies, through the practices and bodily habits of everyday life' (Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight. Feminism, Western Culture and the Body* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2003), p. 16).

<sup>24</sup> Duffy, 'Language and Childhood'.

<sup>25</sup> Zerilli, 'The Trojan Horse of Universalism', p. 164.

<sup>26</sup> *Virgile, Non*, p. 22.

<sup>27</sup> *Virgile, Non* is the only novel where the narrator shares her name with the author. Throughout the chapter Wittig refers to the author, with the exception of sections in which *Virgile, Non* is discussed. In the latter cases, Wittig refers to the narrator and Wittig (the author) will be used to designate the author.



mon guide [...] m'enjoint de les laisser parler car dit-elle: (Il est bon de mesurer par la parole l'étendue du tort qu'on vous a fait)<sup>28</sup> Words allow for oppression to become visible, carving out a space in the world for the victims. An even clearer relation between words and the reality they create is visible towards the end of *Les Guérillères*:

Elles disent qu'il n'y a pas de réalité avant que les mots les règles les règlements lui aient donné forme. Elles disent qu'en ce qui les concerne tout est à faire à partir d'éléments embryonnaires. Elles disent qu'en premier lieu le vocabulaire de toutes les langues est à examiner, à modifier, à bouleverser de fond en comble, que chaque mot doit être passé au crible.<sup>29</sup>

Words carry history and become the building blocks of social relations, hence they are major contributors to social oppression. Stripping words of their perceived neutrality is one of Wittig's goals; she aims to shed light on the invisibility of their bias, and on their normative charge. Whilst this effort can be interpreted as a linguistic utopia,<sup>30</sup> with little reach outside its textual confines, it opens up a space for literary innovation, strengthening the links between the formal and thematic elements of the text. Such innovations, comprising the use of pronouns, the insertion of gaps and lacunae, and the various strategies of naming will be analysed in the following sections.

Wittig's first three fictional texts re-work the use of pronouns which designate the speaking subjects. In French, pronouns carry a mark of gender: either in the distinction between il(s)/elle(s), or in the subsequent agreements required by grammatical rules. The dominant pronoun in *L'Opoponax* is 'on', which does not carry any mark of number or gender. It becomes an inclusive pronoun linking the children, the narrator, and the reader as members of the same group. 'On' is no longer an indeterminate pronoun, but rather an inclusive one. Whilst 'on', as a third-person pronoun, would usually mark a third-person omniscient narrator, the *style indirect libre* complicates the perception of the narrative voice, joining the reader with the children, without the intrusion of the narrator. For example, the repetition of 'tendues tendues' in 'on lui voit le chignon au sommet tout rond, dessus les cheveux sont tendues tendues on dirait qu'ils vont craquer'<sup>31</sup> strongly resembles child-speak, complicating the point of view of the text; the reader looks at the world from the children's perspective, rather than that of the narrator. Even though the reader is aware that this is a text with and about children, written by an adult, the children and the inclusive 'on' take control of the narrative voice to such an extent that the child-

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 122; this quotation raises questions with regards to the 'talking cure,' especially as Wittig was mostly opposed to psychoanalytical explanations (due to what she perceived to be their perpetuating of the male/female dichotomy).

<sup>29</sup> *Les Guérillères*, p. 192.

<sup>30</sup> Lindsay, 'Body/Language', p. 46.

<sup>31</sup> *L'Opoponax*, p. 45.

adult boundary is blurred. Wittig does not write a book *about* children (or childhood), on the contrary, she lets the children effectively write the book. The inclusive ‘on’ might also be marking a social and linguistic utopia, prior to gender differentiation, prior to ‘one becoming a (wo)man’.

While this utopia might be unachievable outside textual confines, it points to people’s differentiated way of socialising and educating young boys and girls. Sarah Cooper observes that the ‘on’ is not fully universal in all its instances, as ‘it can never quite be separated from Catherine Legrand’.<sup>32</sup> This is most evident in the second part of the novel, when Catherine Legrand introduces the opoponax, and uses the first-person pronoun ‘je’ at the end of the novel: ‘On dit tant je l’aimais qu’en elle encore je vis’.<sup>33</sup> Catherine Legrand is able to detach herself from the group, and establish herself as a speaking subject (*je l’aimais, je vis*). However, this assertion of the self is not effected to the detriment of the other, but rather in relation to it. It is by realising her feelings for (or attraction towards) Valerie Borge that Catherine Legrand finds her speaking position. Whereas the consequences of the use of ‘on’ are multiple, they are only visible to their full extent in French. The English translation of the text loses some of the linguistic effects, by having to alternate ‘one’ with ‘Catherine Legrand’, ‘they’, and ‘we’.<sup>34</sup> This leads us back to the observation in *Les Guérillères*, mentioned above: the linguistic work of sieving through the (gender) bias of words needs to be performed differently in different languages.

Wittig continues this work in her second novel, but to more provocative effect, as the choice of ‘elles’ does not carry the same universalising tendencies as ‘on’. Most often in French the masculine ‘ils’ is used as a generic, universal pronoun. By replacing ‘ils’ with ‘elles’, Wittig brings to the reader’s attention the fact that the general or the universal is not neutral and unmarked, but rather masculine.<sup>35</sup> ‘Elles’ becomes the new universalising vector. However, the reader cannot ignore the gender charge of ‘elles’,

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<sup>32</sup> Sarah Cooper, *Relating to Queer Theory. Rereading Sexual Self-Definition with Irigaray, Kristeva, Wittig and Cixous* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2000), p. 166.

<sup>33</sup> *L’Opoponax*, p. 281; this is a verse from Maurice Scève’s ‘Tant je l’aimais qu’en elle encor je vis’. However, in Wittig’s novel, the male voice and gaze are replaced by those of Catherine Legrand’s, whose beloved one is also a girl.

<sup>34</sup> Wenzel, ‘The Text as Body/Politics’, p. 276. As in Chapter One, the brief references to the English translations (especially the translation of the pronouns chosen by Wittig) aim to point towards the different reading scenarios entailed by the English text. This idea will be revisited in Chapter Four, when analysing the way Anglophone critics accounted, or rather failed to account, for Wittig’s innovative use of pronouns. This lacuna in Anglophone reviews is partly due to translation choices (as discussed in the final chapter). However, a study of the difference between Wittig’s original French and the subsequent English translations of her texts is beyond the scope of this thesis.

<sup>35</sup> Namascar Shaktini, ‘Displacing the phallic subject: Wittig’s lesbian writing’, in *The Thinking Muse. Feminism and Modern French Philosophy*, ed. by Jeffner Allen and Iris Marion Young (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), pp. 195–210 (p. 197).

especially in a world where, for most of the text, the masculine is absent, to the extent that even the insects are only feminine (for example ‘les guêpes’).<sup>36</sup> The text can then lead to at least two opposed readings: a questioning of (gender) exclusions that lie behind universalising language, and an interpretation of *Les Guérillères* as a purely feminist manifesto (as was shown by its North American reception). This latter view is encouraged by the novel’s English translation, in which ‘elles’ becomes ‘the women’.<sup>37</sup> Wittig’s choice to move from nouns to pronouns, to enlarge the number of subjects designated, is reversed by the translation, which weakens the universalising effect produced by the use of pronouns. If *L’Opoponax* follows a movement of narrowing from ‘on’ to ‘je’ (from the group of children to Catherine Legrand), *Les Guérillères* reverses this process, from ‘elles’ to ‘nous’: ‘mues par une impulsion commune, nous étions toutes debout [...]. Et lorsque ce fut fini et que nous restions là dans une sorte de silence embarrassé [...]. Et nous entonnâmes alors la Marche funèbre’.<sup>38</sup> While the ‘nous’ retains its feminine mark (visible in the agreements ‘mues’ and ‘toutes’), it enlarges the group of *guérillères* to include at least the narrator (‘dit à mes côtés une jeune ouvrière’),<sup>39</sup> if not also the reader.

The innovative use of pronouns is pushed even further in *Le Corps lesbien*, where the first-person pronoun (and its accompanying pronominal adjectives) is physically split on the page: ‘j/e’, ‘m/a’, ‘m/es’. Besides the fact that this split ‘I’ raises interpretive issues (which will be discussed below), it also challenges the reading process. Most often, the reader is not used to seeing a virgule on the page, breaking up one of the most stable grammatical forms — the pronoun.<sup>40</sup> Once the pronoun is broken up, it allows for numerous permutations, especially in its possessive forms: the split ‘m/a’ can easily become ‘t/a’ or ‘s/a’, by the replacement of consonants. As the ‘m/a’ is no longer held together by grammatical and spelling rules, the reader can translate the virgule (/the split/the gap) into an invitation to contribute to the text. The reader can (physically) change Wittig’s text, or use her innovation in his/her own speech. The virgule does not just tinker with form, but also with time: as numerous (infinite) permutations are possible, the reading process is never truly complete. The virgule acts like a metaphorical door stop, allowing for multiple (re-)entries to the text. Simultaneously, the virgule is de-familiarising: it requires a new reading practice, and it prevents links between pronouns

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<sup>36</sup> *Les Guérillères*, p. 13.

<sup>37</sup> Wenzel, ‘The Text as Body/Politics’, p. 277.

<sup>38</sup> *Les Guérillères*, pp. 207–208.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.

<sup>40</sup> I call the pronoun one of the most stable grammatical forms because it is neither declined like a noun, nor conjugated like a verb. The English term virgule should not be confused with the French *virgule*, the former designating a slash (/). The term virgule was preferred to slash, to avoid the possible informal connotations of the latter.

and real speaking subjects. Moreover, when it comes to translation into other languages, reflecting the split and the permutations depends extensively on the grammatical structure of each language: the English variant of a crossed out 'I' graphically marks the split self, but does not allow for the permutations (Romance languages, sharing pronominal structures with French, might be prone to a more accurate conveying of Wittig's innovation).

Additionally, critics are divided as to the positive implications of the split j/e. For example, Wenzel sees it as 'underlining the implicit schizophrenic or split nature of any female who attempts to constitute herself as the subject of her own discourse'.<sup>41</sup> Wenzel's reference to the schizophrenic nature of the female subject is reminiscent of psychoanalytical accounts, of which Wittig was disparaging, mostly in her theoretical work. Moreover, *Le Corps lesbien* does not follow the narrator's search for a unified speaking position, there is no evolution (or desire for an evolution) from a split self to a unified one; the j/e remains separated by the virgule all throughout the work. This consistency is suggestive of the fact that the narrator has chosen her speaking position from the very beginning of the text. Judith Butler casts a more positive light upon Wittig's choice: 'The j/e of the *Lesbian Body* is supposed to establish the lesbian not as a split subject, but as the sovereign subject who can wage war linguistically against a 'world' that has constituted a semantic and syntactic assault against the lesbian'.<sup>42</sup> Thus, the j/e is meant to point the exclusions effected by language and locutionary acts. The use of 'je' would not allow for the lesbian voice to be heard; therefore, the pronoun needs to be split, dis-membering and re-membering its components. The j/e allows the lesbian subject to take control of language. This view is supported by Sarah Cooper:

In *Le Corps lesbien*, the bar that splits the first-person pronoun 'j/e' marks the lesbian subject and enables her to enter a language in which traditionally she has been silenced. Wittig's war on personal pronouns in these texts places the lesbian subject everywhere rather than nowhere. Although this may seem like a simple reversal of the majority/minority dichotomy, her aim is, I would argue, to alert readers to the difference between the two positions in order to register the exclusions that are sanctioned by a grammatically correct use of language.<sup>43</sup>

The j/e is making the marginal highly visible; rather than acting like a new pronoun to name the lesbian subject, the j/e becomes a lens to highlight the inadequacy and reductive tendencies of language, alerting the reader to the fact that certain groups are excluded from locutionary acts by virtue of grammar. The j/e becomes a temporary stand-in for the

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<sup>41</sup> Wenzel, 'The Text as Body/Politics', p. 277.

<sup>42</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), p.163.

<sup>43</sup> Cooper, *Relating to Queer Theory*, p. 169.

lesbian subject (or for any other oppressed or marginal category). Thus, the theory of multiple (infinite) permutations outlined above is supported by this fluid, moving nature of the j/e. As underlined by Epps and Katz, ‘the split is not a figure of utopia [...] but of dystopia [...]. [T]he split [...] is the diacritical evidence of a viciously binary system’.<sup>44</sup> By graphically splitting the pronoun into two, Wittig physically represents existing gender dichotomies, bringing them to the fore. Zerilli goes back to Wittig’s theoretical work, to argue that the j/e becomes a powerful subject with universalising potential.<sup>45</sup>

However, some of the above explanations detach the j/e from the content of *Le Corps lesbien*, and the constant dis-membering and re-membering of the lovers’ bodies. When the two are connected, we observe that one possible reading outcome is to see the lesbian speaking subject j/e as constantly divided between the self and the other. The numerous scenes in which the narrator takes the lover’s body apart, incorporating its various fragments, might prevent the reader from seeing the split j/e as a universal subject (since the j/e is constantly absorbing parts of the other, it is rarely presented as a separate, stand-alone entity). This erotic bodily violence can be interpreted as a co-dependence between the self and the other. Neither co-dependence nor dichotomy contributes to the establishing of the self as an independent speaking subject: in the first case, the self relies heavily on the other; while in the second, the self is defined in opposition to the other. The theory of multiple permutations (permitting the m/a to be transformed into t/a or s/a, as outlined above) also has its drawbacks, as it does not always allow for the construction of a powerful, unified self completely in charge of his/her locutionary acts. If the virgule allows for the reader to bring in his/her own contribution (either via permutations, or by charging the speaking subject with the experiences of other marginal, oppressed groups), it also means that the reader can further split the ‘I’. There are no limits to the number of splits the reader can inflict upon the ‘I’: for example, one version of the text could replace the ‘m’ with an ‘s’, and therefore switch from first-person pronouns and pronominal adjectives to third-person ones; or the j/e could be used to highlight the ethnic marginalisation of subjects, rather than marginalisation based on sexual preference. Instead of enriching the experiences of the j/e, the reader can separate its constitutive elements to such an extent that universalising tendencies will instead become a cacophony of idiosyncrasies.

On a more positive note, we observe that Wittig even enlarges the idea of reading between the lines, to comprise the act of reading the lines. First of all, the virgule splitting

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<sup>44</sup> Epps and Katz, ‘Monique Wittig’s Materialist Utopia and Radical Critique’, p. 428.

<sup>45</sup> Zerilli, ‘The Trojan Horse of Universalism’, p. 161.

the j/e needs to be read and integrated into language. Secondly, the recurring circle in *Les Guérillères*<sup>46</sup> is another line that requires reading. Thus, Wittig draws attention to the visual or the physical elements that make up a text (i.e. the lines), even if there is no immediate meaning behind them (they do not form intelligible words). These visual elements physically carve out a space onto which the reader can lay claim. Moreover, from a historical point of view, pictures predate words. Therefore, Wittig is not just reinscribing marginal groups into language, but also into pre-existent pictorial symbols (the circle can remind readers of cave paintings, Wittig sending us back to some of the first moments of human expression). She is offering these marginal groups the opportunity to reclaim both language and wider cultural symbols. The circle is often used to visually represent frontiers and borders: the inside represents order, structure, the law; whereas the outside is marked by chaos and disorder. However, Wittig's circle is empty, separating one empty space from the other (the inside of the circle from the rest of the blank page) and inviting the reader to contribute to the writing of the text itself: inside, outside or across the circle.

The blankness of the page and the emptiness of the circle highlight absences and lacunae,<sup>47</sup> which are clearly articulated in the final poem of *Les Guérillères*:

LACUNES LACUNES LACUNES  
 CONTRE TEXTES  
 CONTRE SENS  
 CE QUI EST A ÉCRIRE VIOLENCE  
 HORS TEXTE  
 DANS UNE AUTRE ÉCRITURE  
 PRESSANT MENAÇANT  
 MARGES ESPACES INTERVALLES  
 SANS RELACHE  
 GESTE RENVERSEMENT.<sup>48</sup>

The lacunae act against the text, against the authority of the written word, and the prescribed meanings derived from these words. The task of the *guérillères* writers is to act *hors texte* (outside the text, outside the circle), *dans une autre écriture*. They need to find a new type of writing that would threaten the existent order. It is the spaces around the text that allow for the emergence of this writing — *marges, espaces, intervalles*. Known textual traditions are not suitable for this new writing; the new writing is new in both its content and its medium (the space it occupies). Moreover, finding this new type of writing is a never-ending task — *sans relâche* — as it presses at (*pressant*) the limits

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<sup>46</sup> The circle appears on pp. 8, 71, and 138 of *Les Guérillères*; its multiple symbolic interpretations will be analysed in the second part of the chapter.

<sup>47</sup> Griffin Crowder, 'Amazons and Mothers?', p. 128.

<sup>48</sup> *Les Guérillères*, p. 205 (the formatting is the one present in the text).

of accepted understanding. It forces the boundary of the circle to break or expand (hence why the *guérillères* realise that the image of the circle can only take them part of the way; towards the end of the text the circle is no longer a useful representation of their endeavours). Writing to fill these spatial, textual, linguistic or ideological lacunae has a twofold effect: it underlines the neglected or disregarded experiences, and it sets in motion a creative reclaiming of both space and language. However, this creative endeavour might not be as democratic as initially perceived since, according to Sarah Cooper, Wittig might be suggesting that only a lesbian identification can make full use of these lacunae.<sup>49</sup>

The extensive and inventive use of pronouns is coupled with naming, as techniques for drawing attention to subjects that are often denied a speaking position. All four works explore various methods of naming the self, the other, and the body. In *L'Opoponax* all children are known by their full name, in contrast with the universalising 'on' analysed above. Wenzel sees the children as 'genderless',<sup>50</sup> although their names clearly differentiate between boys and girls. Moreover, the use of their surnames helps the reader establish genealogies and create family links: for example, between Catherine and Véronique Legrand or Denise, Vincent and Janine Parme. The use of the full names resembles a roll-call (mapping onto the school environment where most parts of the narrative take place), and mirrors the children's tendency to refer to their classmates by their full names to avoid confusion, and to lend credibility to their stories. Therefore, naming becomes not just a method of asserting the self, but also a way of establishing a speaking position in relation to others.

However, this speaking position is not always one that is acknowledged by the others. For example, Catherine Legrand shouts both her own name and that of her friends over the hills, imagining that the mere sound of her voice would attract an army of followers.<sup>51</sup> When this army actually materialises as the group of students who go on strike (to obtain free time to visit the fun-fair), their speaking position is not taken into account, they are ignored and even punished by the nuns, their wishes never becoming reality.<sup>52</sup> Despite the fact that the children take hold of language and use their own names to mark their speaking positions — 'Valerie Borge Sophie Rieux Suzanne Prat Marie-José Broux disent tout fort que tout le monde devrait avoir vacances puisque c'est la

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<sup>49</sup> Cooper, *Relating to Queer Theory*, p. 172; lesbian identification refers to women's belonging to a lesbian community, or at least to a community similar to the one of the *guérillères*.

<sup>50</sup> Wenzel, 'The Text as Body/Politics', p. 279.

<sup>51</sup> *L'Opoponax*, p. 234

<sup>52</sup> Duffy, 'Language and Childhood', p. 298.

foire'<sup>53</sup> — the other (in this case the nuns) does not recognise them as a group worthy of being heard. Paradoxically, the nuns themselves do not have an individualised speaking position, as they are referred to by their religious names: 'ma mère de saint Jean-Baptiste ma mère de saint Bonaventure ma mère de saint Apollinaire [...] ma mère de l'enfant Jésus'.<sup>54</sup> These appellations are generic, not allowing for any distinctions between the nuns' personalities. Furthermore, their titles always carry the name of male saints next to the designation 'ma mère': any sexual identity is erased, the nuns being defined only in relation to a masculine other and to their responsibility as spiritual mothers.

A similar mix between a universalising pronoun ('elles'), and individual names is present in *Les Guérillères*, but used to a more striking effect, as neither the pronoun nor the names are (perceived to be) gender neutral. The 'elles' directly refers to *les guérillères*, the woman warriors who manage to organise themselves without the need for any masculine presence (establishing clear echoes with the mythical Amazons). However, this absence of the masculine is not as clear cut as initially suggested. On closer analysis, some of the names appearing in capitals on separate pages (most often every five pages) either bear or hide the masculine. For example, *Œdipa*<sup>55</sup> is a reworking of *Œdipus*, whereas *Baucis*<sup>56</sup> appears on her own, without her companion *Philemon*. Moreover, a significant number of the names have both masculine and feminine versions formed using the same root (ex. Maximilienne, Valentine, Gilberte, Gabrielle etc.). Wittig is creating a (fictional) space in history for these women not next to men, but next to each other, celebrating their achievements. If so far myths, stories, and historical accounts have presented women's perspective by proxy, Wittig is offering them the page: a speaking position, a place in history, and a community of women. Furthermore, this community of women is trying to move beyond separations, as various traditions and geographical backgrounds are represented next to each other: Old and New Testament, Greco-Roman myth, Nordic and Germanic tales, histories of Asia etc. Shaktini observes, moreover, that this re-working of names can be useful in overcoming reductive binaries: 'By introducing a female name into these male names, Wittig mixes gender signifiers, confounding the dichotomizing principle of gender. She positions herself, her text and her readers outside the system which makes female and male into polar opposites.'<sup>57</sup> Instead of replacing one sex with the other, Wittig blurs the binary system, placing the reader in a position that

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<sup>53</sup> *L'Opoponax*, p. 244.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192.

<sup>55</sup> *Les Guérillères*, p. 145.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>57</sup> Shaktini, 'Displacing the phallic subject', p. 205.



does not allow for easy labelling. The constantly shifting viewpoint (neither masculine nor feminine) prevents the reader from falling back into oppositional systems. Butler takes the idea even further, considering that this playful putting into question of gender dichotomies represents a constructive type of gay and lesbian practice, whose focus should be on the ‘subversive and parodic redeployment of power rather than the impossible fantasy of its full scale removal’.<sup>58</sup>

However, there are issues with the reading process involved in interacting with these names. As they are not fully integrated into the narrative, they might assume a decorative role, recurring every five pages without directly affecting the evolution of the *guérillères*. Moreover, their reading requires developed intertextual skills: each name carries with it historical, literary, or religious connotations. For example, on the same page we encounter: Draupadi (Sanskrit name, designating the first-born of Drupada, the king of Panchala), alongside references to Saint Zita (the patron saint of household tasks), to Robert Garnier’s play *Cornélie* or to Arsinoé, (queen of Egypt). Understanding the background of each of these women requires an ability to move between texts, becoming almost an archival search. Whilst this is an enriching experience, adding to the work of reading, it can also lead to the abandonment of the text, or the simple ignoring of these passages, in a similar manner to the workings of complex, encyclopaedic intertextualities in Kristeva’s *TMA*.

While similar mythological names reappear in *Le Corps lesbien*, the relation to naming is further complicated: the j/e is not allowed to name her lover, but she is nonetheless able to name her body, in all its minute component parts. The first paradox in naming is evident from the title: the adjective *lesbien*, most often associated with the feminine, is here used in the masculine form, needing to agree with *le corps*. The title is also a pairing of the universal with the particular: *le corps* can refer to any type of body, whereas *lesbien* transforms it into a very particular one. Associating the masculine and the feminine, the general and the particular is consistent with Wittig’s linguistic strategies, aimed at proving that even the most general terms can be biased (*le corps* would very rarely refer to the lesbian body, despite the fact that, as proven by the enumerations in the text, there is no difference between the individual parts of the lesbian body and those of any other body). This *corps* is simultaneously hidden and universal, as the j/e cannot name her lover:

j/e ne crie pas ton nom m/a plus interdite [...];<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 169.

<sup>59</sup> *Le Corps lesbien*, p. 95.

J/e suis celle qui a le secret de ton nom [...] J/e n'en peux plus d'avoir seule le poids d'un nom qui te désigne m/a très belle [...] seule porteuse du secret de ton nom seule avec toi m/a plus inconnue maintenant et à jamais, ainsi soit-il.<sup>60</sup>

The text does not give any explanations as to why the lover's name cannot be used; in contrast to *Les Guérillères*, where the mythical names coexist with more contemporary choices, in *Le Corps lesbien* most of the names are mythical or re-workings of mythical names (for example, Ganymede, Archimede).<sup>61</sup> The fact that the lover's name needs to remain secret suggests a new social order, in which mostly (deconstructed) pronouns are used to designate speaking subjects. It could also be a mark of intimacy, as only 'j/e' knows the lover's real name. The closeness of the lesbian couple contrasts with the openness of the (women's) community, in an echo of the play between the general and the particular comprised in the title.

A similar play is observed in the dis-membering of the lesbian body, scattered all throughout the text. Occupying pairs of pages at regular intervals, very specific parts of the human body are enumerated in capital letters and large font according to anatomical groups (fluids, bones, muscles, sexual apparatus etc.). The pages are related to each other, despite the text intervening in between. Therefore, these pages are both connected to, and detached from the 'main text'; they can be read as an ongoing list (standing on their own, with the reader skipping pages to reach only those with the enumeration), or as an interrupted one, the readers linking the enumerations to the rest of the text. While the protagonists regularly tear each other apart, only then to reassemble their bodies, their component parts still permeate the text. This 'list' section starts and ends with 'LE CORPS LESBIEN',<sup>62</sup> further suggesting a fragmentation followed by fusing. The enumerations serve at least two purposes: they prove that the lesbian body has no deviations from the heterosexual body, challenging ideas of what is deemed 'natural'; and they diffuse pleasure all throughout the body. In contrast to the heterosexual sexual act, which is considered to involve a limited number of erogenous zones, Wittig sees lesbian love-making as providing pleasure to the entire body.<sup>63</sup> As such, each bodily part is valorised individually, alongside the whole (the lesbian body). Yet again, the reader is faced with a reading situation of having to navigate the part and the whole, the universal,

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., pp. 147–49 (in both this example and in the one above, adjectives are used as nouns: *m/a plus interdite, m/a plus inconnue*)

<sup>61</sup> Both Ganymede and Archimede are more than a mere reworking of masculine names: while Ganymede could refer to unseen beauty (which was Ganymede's attribute), and Archimede to scientific knowledge (rarely seen as the remit of women), they both contain references to Medée/ Medea, and therefore to witchcraft, remaining threatening figures.

<sup>62</sup> *Le Corps lesbien*, pp. 22 and 175.

<sup>63</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 156; this point will be further developed in the third part, when analysing the body politic.

and the individual simultaneously. Rather than being able to plot a certain evolution in the use of pronouns and names in Wittig's works, we observe a tendency towards experimenting, reversal, and renewal, suggesting a constantly developing subject position.

At first glance, Wittig's last novel, *Virgile, Non* seems to stabilise these experimental tendencies, by reverting to conventional methods of naming the protagonists. For example, the narrator's guide is given a precise name, Manastabal, and whenever she is referred to, her name is accompanied by the epithet 'mon guide', following Classical tradition (with each main character having a set of epithets differentiating him/her from the others: grey-eyed Athena, Hector tamer of horses, swift-footed Achilles etc.). Manastabal was not the only option for the guide's name, Wittig having considered options such as Mandrocles, Mantua, Matha, Mentor, Minio, Vala, Satanas, Saturnia, Sopita, Xantho.<sup>64</sup> Some of the options can be associated with Ancient historical figures (Mandrocles, Minio, Xantho), Greco-Roman myth (Saturnia, Mentor), place names (Mantua, as the nearest town to Virgil's birthplace), or Norse mythology (Vala). However, five of the listed names — Manastabal, Mantua, Satanas, Saturnia, and Xantho — are also types of moths. As insects accustomed to darkness, moths can become an ideal candidate to guide travellers through the underworld, which is usually characterised by lack of light. The first-person narrator of the text is Wittig, mirroring the author's surname. While conflations between the author and the narrator are generally to be avoided, it is difficult not to highlight the resemblances between the two, especially when the text tackles the efficiency of women's movements (reminiscent of the conflicts in the MLF),<sup>65</sup> or when it posits the city of San Francisco as a character in its own right (echoing Wittig-the author's move to the US). In accordance with these elements, Hewitt 'suspects that the form of the personal quest is not totally devoid of experiential referents. Clearly, Wittig is playing upon the boundaries between parody, utopia, and

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<sup>64</sup> The handwritten document containing the various name choices for Manastabal is available in the Monique Wittig Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. As this is a hand written document, there is a possibility that for certain names (i.e. Sopita) the transcription contains errors.

<sup>65</sup> For example, on p. 31 the different manners of approaching the damned souls reflect different feminist methods: 'En effet pendant que j'ai été en proie à l'indignation et au désespoir, Manastabal, mon guide, a travaillé sous le manteau comme tout un chacun'. Similarly, on p. 53 the idea that one cannot impose feminist thought upon other groups of women comes to the fore: '(En tout cas on ne peut pas les en débarrasser de force.) Et elle me rappelle qu'on n'est pas en enfer pour donner tort aux âmes damnées mais pour leur indiquer si besoin est le passage pour en sortir.' Despite the existence of various types of feminisms, on p. 71 there is an acknowledgement that they ultimately share one common goal: '(A quoi bon se battre puisqu'on est dans le même camp? Vaincues ou non, votre ennemi est le mien. Il vaudrait donc mieux se liquer contre lui)'.

autobiographical realism'.<sup>66</sup> Despite the initial impression that the text might be following established conventions, the reader is still compelled to navigate shifting boundaries.

This blurring of genre conventions and the general challenging of reading and writing norms are even more evident when the narrators and characters directly tackle these issues within the narrative, offering a *mise-en-abyme* of the processes of reading and writing. As *L'Opopanax* is focused around children's experiences, the acquisition of reading and writing abilities becomes essential to their growing up (and eventually leaving childhood). The text hints at Catherine's Legrand's tendencies not to follow rules and norms, early on: 'Quand on sera grand on pourra lire sans la règle et sans ma sœur dans un livre tout seul sans répéter. On lira des tas de pages sans s'arrêter'.<sup>67</sup> There is an early realisation of the existence of multiple and personalised ways of reading — 'sans la règle', 'sans ma sœur', and 'sans répéter' —, alongside a voracious desire for books — 'des tas des pages sans s'arrêter'. This insatiable appetite for the yet unknown is later mirrored by Catherine Legrand's love for Valerie Borge. Rules and restrictions contain the grains of their defiance. For example, the lines on the notebook cannot restrain Catherine Legrand's writing: 'Avec le crayon noir elle appuie sur le papier. Elle fait des lettres qui dépasse de chaque côté les deux lignes à l'intérieur de quoi en doit écrire, ça dépassent en haut et en bas, ça touche les autres lignes, ce n'est pas droit'.<sup>68</sup> Resembling the *opopanax*, which is fluid, moving, and ignores boundaries, Catherine Legrand's writing cannot be contained. However, it does pose difficulties as

il faut appuyer l'index de toutes ses forces sur le bout du porte-plume bien serré dans les doigts dont on ne peut plus se servir après. On a même mal dans tout le bras. Il vaut mieux écrire au crayon et se débarrasser du porte-plume en le cassant sans faire exprès ou en le perdant.<sup>69</sup>

First of all, the switch from pencil to pen is a way of marking the passing of time and the growing up process, child-time being punctuated by the transition from pencil to ink. Secondly, writing with a pen becomes the representation of embodied writing as Catherine Legrand needs to use her entire arm to be able to control the writing instrument, 'on a même mal dans tout le bras'. The immense potential of writing is accompanied by pain and difficulty. This potential is unintentionally underlined by their teacher as well: 'Mademoiselle dit que l'encre c'est du poison'.<sup>70</sup> While this warning can be taken literally (the ingestion of ink would be dangerous for the pupils), it also reflects the potential and

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<sup>66</sup> Hewitt, *Autobiographical Tightropes*, p. 144.

<sup>67</sup> *L'Opopanax*, p. 23.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

power of writing in overturning rules, and affecting the status-quo. Writing with a pen also has a certain permanence that does not exist when writing in pencil. In the latter case, the writing can be changed, maintaining a certain flexibility and unpredictability (mirroring the *opoponax*). Catherine Legrand's suggestion that one should get rid of the pen reflects her preference for flexible, changeable, and moving writing. Catherine Legrand discovers early on that writing can act upon the self and the world, suggesting the possible impact the text we are reading can have on us as readers.

Catherine Legrand's awareness of the biases existent in reading and writing practices at school increases with the passing of time, and the ability to engage more deeply with texts:

Dans le livre de lecture il n'y a que des textes coupés, des morceaux choisis, on se demande par qui, en tout cas on aimerait savoir ce qu'il y a avant et après, on a l'impression au contraire qu'on ne le saura jamais. De toute façon dix lignes prises comme ça dans un livre ce n'est pas intéressant. C'est pour ça que Catherine Legrand préfère s'en tenir à un des textes en le répétant jusqu'à ce que ça lui dise quelque chose et ainsi quelque fois il y en a un qui lui plaît vraiment.<sup>71</sup>

Catherine Legrand becomes mindful of 'what is not there' (of the absent elements from the texts she has to read), and to a certain extent, conscious of the censorship, selection, and editing processes that precede publication. The texts available for reading only reveal their missing parts, the present is only there to highlight the absent. Not having access to the rest of the text, Catherine Legrand develops a personal way of reading, by engaging in repetitions: repeating the same text is a method of reaching its core, by stripping off any unnecessary additions, and keeping only the elements that satisfy the self. She finds a way of overcoming the rigour of the set text, and uses it to develop her own creative methods. In a similar manner, the enclosed environment of their religious retreat becomes an opportunity for freedom of expression: 'on a des carnets pour y écrire ce qu'on veut. Ma mère de l'enfant Jésus ne les regardera pas'.<sup>72</sup> The silence of the retreat ('on peut aller et venir dans la salle à condition que ce soit sans faire de bruit')<sup>73</sup> is counter-balanced by the inner creative richness. It is during this retreat that Catherine Legrand first starts referencing *l'opoponax*.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, despite rules, regulations, constraints, and limitations, reading and writing become subversive processes through which Catherine Legrand re-discovers herself, and the world around her. She also becomes aware that the connection between words and their meaning is an arbitrary one, and as such can be

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 178; ma mère de l'enfant Jésus being the Mother Superior.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 178.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 179.

tampered with, by changing their meaning or by introducing completely new words (such as the *opopanax*, a new word with a different meaning from *opopanax*): ‘the discovery of linguistic relativity is, of course, necessary to both the creative, self-expressive manipulation of language and the challenge to authority [...]’,<sup>75</sup> two processes in which Catherine Legrand engages fully (via her creative reading, and her feelings for Valerie Borge).

This manipulation of language is undertaken by Wittig (the author), and by her characters in the other texts studied, as well. For example, in *Les Guérillères*, ‘elles’ are given various tools, a great number of them being associated with writing: ‘les machines à écrire les rames de papier les blocs de sténographie les bouteilles d’encre’.<sup>76</sup> They are shown to engage in reading and writing early on in the text:

On voit qu’elles ont entre les mains des petits livres dont elles disent que ce sont des féminaires. Il s’agit de nombreux exemplaires du même modèle ou bien il en existe de plusieurs sortes. Quelqu’une a écrit sur l’un d’eux un exergue qu’elles se répètent à l’oreille et qui les faire rire à gorge déployée. Quand il est feuilleté, le féminin présente de nombreuses pages blanches sur lesquelles elles écrivent de temps à autre. Pour l’essentiel, il comprend des pages avec des mots imprimés en caractères majuscules dont le nombre est variable.<sup>77</sup>

The word *féminaire* can be related to a feminine *séminaire*, a place of learning exclusively for women. Reading and writing are presented as major learning tools in the *féminaire*. Even though the books used could be similar (‘exemplaires du même modèle’), they are changed by each woman’s contribution: no two readings are the same, and reading is seen to inspire further creativity and writing. The reading group becomes central to understanding, or, as mentioned in the Introduction, ‘the reading group [becomes] a search engine, a physical embodiment of intertextuality’.<sup>78</sup> The whispering of the *exergue* and the laughing that ensues is a way of reading and interpreting the text as a group. However, each member of the group can have different reasons for bursting into laughter, whilst there is no guarantee that all the whispers are the same; the text can be changed as it travels from one member to the other. The texts themselves are designed to allow for readers’ contribution (having ‘nombreuses pages blanches’), transforming the idea of reading between the lines into writing between the lines. Moreover, the mentioning of white spaces and capital letters (‘mots imprimés en caractères majuscules’) is reminiscent of *Les Guérillères* itself, raising the question of whether Wittig’s text is deemed to be part of the *féminaire* library.

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<sup>75</sup> Duffy, ‘Language and Childhood’, p. 294.

<sup>76</sup> *Les Guérillères*, p. 103.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17–18.

<sup>78</sup> Orr, *Intertextuality*, p. 56.

This question resurfaces at the end of the text, when the reader is presented with a list of works interacting with *Les Guérillères*. First of all, our reading process is disturbed, as we are not sure whether we should read these texts before or after reading *Les Guérillères*. Moreover, the ‘etc.’ at the end of the list mirrors the inexhaustibility of intertexts: other, unlisted works have influenced the author, while the reader can always add his/her own suggestions to the list. Intertexts take on a completely different dimension, when one of the members of the group is advised to invent, if she cannot remember previous times of freedom: ‘Mais souviens-toi. Fais un effort pour te souvenir. Ou à défaut invente’.<sup>79</sup> Fiction and creativity are endowed with the power of rebellion and survival: if one can invent a time of freedom, then one can find the tools to achieve it. Even if there is no previous example of (women’s) freedom, imagination can be a starting point for creating a precedent, in a similar manner in which *Les Guérillères* recalibrates the use of ‘universal’ pronouns (Wittig’s novel being also a fruit of the imagination, an invention). The invented text becomes a battleground, ‘an excellent site for female offense’.<sup>80</sup> The text allows women to articulate their ideas, and experiment with various methods of resistance. Moreover, entering the field of fiction, imagination, creativity, and the text allows women to lay claim to a field from which they have too often been excluded or dismissed by their fellow male writers. Rebellion in fiction is not an alternative reality, but rather a tool to achieve change in reality.

This textual female offense is also visible early on in *Virgile, Non*: ‘(Il faudra bien trouver les mots pour décrire ce lieu, sous peine de la disparition brutale de tout ce que tu vois).’<sup>81</sup> Words do not just invent memories (as outlined above), but they also allow them to find a more stable place in history. Manastabal’s remark can help us understand why Wittig was chosen for this katabatic journey: if we blur the boundaries between Wittig-the-narrator and Wittig-the-author, then the latter’s writing ability would be used to ensure that ‘les mots pour décrire ce lieu’ are found. This blurring is encouraged by certain references in the narrative, highlighting the fact that the narrator is aware of writing conventions: ‘j’aplatis tout ce qu’il y a d’adversaire en une minute ou deux,

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<sup>79</sup> *Les Guérillères*, p. 127.

<sup>80</sup> Jeffner Allen, ‘Poetic Politics: How the Amazons Took the Acropolis’, *Hypatia*, 3.2 (1988), 107–122 (p. 118). This offense does not need to be exclusively female, as is shown by Silberman, in his creative response to *Le Corps lesbien*: ‘I want to re-create, after a fashion, the novel’s sideways dialogue between lists and narratives by juxtaposing m/y writing like Wittig with m/y study of the novel’. Silberman uses Wittig’s invention as a precedent, juxtaposing his academic analysis of the novel with reflections on his mother’s illness, the latter in capital letters (Silberman, “‘I have access to your glottis’”, p. 471).

<sup>81</sup> *Virgile, Non*, p. 22.

battant ainsi un record de prouesse pour *ce genre de récit*'.<sup>82</sup> This narrative awareness<sup>83</sup> is absent in *L'Opopanax*, where the children are not conscious of the fact that certain events carry more weight than others: 'there are no hierarchies of significance: the death of a schoolmate or a teacher is at the same level as a fishing expedition with a friend'.<sup>84</sup> This narrative awareness also seems to transcend textual boundaries, as Manastabal tells Wittig: 'Parfois ta confusion des genres a véritablement quelque chose de barbare'.<sup>85</sup> While this remark can be taken literally (Wittig's decision to pick a horse prompts Manastabal to tell her they are not in a western), it also echoes Wittig's (the author) reworking of literary genres in her previous works:

[E]ach of her works rewrites a major genre, redefines and reinvents it. *The Opopanax* creates the female *Bildungsroman* [...]. *Les Guérillères* mocks the traditional epic poem [...]. In *The Lesbian Body*, the lovers reclaim the 'Song of Songs' from the Bible, as well as all of Western mythology. [...] And finally, the *Lesbian People: Material for a Dictionary* creates a tentative lexicon that redefines, but does not confine words and women to narrow meanings.<sup>86</sup>

*Virgile, Non* would also fit Wenzel's remark, as a reworking of katabasis (associated with male authors such as Homer, Virgil, or Dante).<sup>87</sup> Moreover, the double meaning of *genre* in French (as gender and genre), and its association by Manastabal with 'quelque chose de barbare' can refer to the undoing of gender, and the violent tearing up of the body in *Le Corps lesbien*. Thus, the reference to genre reaches outside the textual confines of *Virgile, Non*, pointing towards other Wittig works.

Other references point directly towards the intertexts: during their second visit to Paradise, Manastabal compares the opera they are hearing to 'le poème que Dante a appelé "comédie" parce qu'il finit bien'.<sup>88</sup> At this stage, the reader is already aware that Wittig's katabatic journey resembles Dante's,<sup>89</sup> prompting the question of whether her journey will also end well, just like Dante's. Hints towards a positive conclusion can ease the reader's journey through the underworld. However, these hints can also attenuate the shocks and horrors of the underworld, thus diminishing the subversive impact of the ensuing narrative. Focusing on the outcome removes the heuristic character of the journey. Regardless of what were to happen at the end, Wittig-the-narrator has

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 102; italics mine.

<sup>83</sup> Being aware of narrative conventions does not necessarily mean that the narrator (or author) has to (/chooses to) respect them.

<sup>84</sup> Hewitt, *Autobiographical Tightropes*, p. 136.

<sup>85</sup> *Virgile, Non*, p. 63.

<sup>86</sup> Wenzel, 'The Text as Body/Politics', pp. 284–285, and Lindsay, 'Body/Language', p. 54.

<sup>87</sup> Wittig's text has 42 chapters, 42 being the mirror of 24. 24 is the number of books in the *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, and *The Divine Comedy*.

<sup>88</sup> *Virgile, Non*, p. 47.

<sup>89</sup> On p. 34 of *Virgile, Non*, Wittig mentions 'le doux Virgile', who was Dante's guide in the 'comédie'.



rediscovered her own world, and understood the role she can play in it. Manastabal's remark can also be read ironically, insisting upon the lack of truthfulness of all the 'histoires qui ont un heureux déroulement'.<sup>90</sup> Thus, its implications regarding the end of the story we are reading are less certain than those suggested by the initial comparison to Dante.

## Myth and imagery

This second part will shift focus from reading, writing, and the use of language to the re-interpretation of myth, and the use of imagery, the latter requiring a multisensorial reading<sup>91</sup>. Myths and other foundational stories contribute to social discourses in a manner that makes the latter seem indisputable, unbiased or natural. Wittig reinterprets these myths, either by bringing the female figures back in, or by reclaiming their place from the confines of invisibility, 'forc[ing] the reader to reconsider the masculinist bias underlying our literary and cultural heritage'.<sup>92</sup> Susan Suleiman considers this to be critical or negative intertextuality consisting of 're-readings of major texts in our culture'.<sup>93</sup> However, the term 'negative' might not reflect the full creative effects of such textual re-interpretations, diminishing their subversive impact. In a context particular to Wittig,<sup>94</sup> Jeffner Allen refers to her work using the epithet amazon: 'if an amazon text is a text of female freedom, then the texts of lesbian and feminist writing constitute an amazon intertextuality'.<sup>95</sup> Whilst the use of 'amazon' reflects the focus on women's standpoint, it might also be restrictive in terms of replicating Wittig's techniques from the perspective of other 'invisible' groups that might not be best represented as 'Amazonians' (for example, diasporic communities, people with disabilities, children etc.).

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<sup>90</sup> *Virgile, Non*, p. 47.

<sup>91</sup> Here, multisensorial reading is understood as the reader's need to use his/her sensorial memory and experiences to better relate to the characters and/or the narrator. This represents the first understanding of multisensorial reading depicted in the Introduction (rather than the second, which refers to the use of the senses when dealing with the physicality of the book).

<sup>92</sup> Griffin Crowder, 'Amazons and Mothers?', p. 130.

<sup>93</sup> Susan Rubin Suleiman, '(Re)Writing the Body: the Politics and Poetics of Female Eroticism', in *The Female Body in Western Culture. Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. by Susan Rubin Suleiman (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 7–29 (p. 17).

<sup>94</sup> Suleiman's remark does not refer exclusively to Wittig's texts, but generally to texts that offer a critical re-interpretation of myths. The concept of amazon intertextuality can be applied to works belonging to other women writers, and even to intertextual links between works written by women (forming a writerly community of amazons).

<sup>95</sup> Allen, 'Poetic Politics', p. 118.

Nonetheless, the use of myths highlights our need to tell stories. This tendency is reflected in *L'Opoponax* through the example of the *Odyssey*: 'tout ce qu'on sait des personnages d'Ulysse de la guerre de Troie des périples des retours, c'est des gens assis devant des tables d'hôtes qui le racontent'.<sup>96</sup> Story-telling becomes the main action of the *Odyssey*, thus raising questions about the reliability and truthfulness of foundational stories in general, as 'the children discover that between themselves and fact lie layer upon layer of discourse and a multitude of temporally and physically relative perspectives'.<sup>97</sup> Even so, the therapeutic power of story-telling should not be underestimated, as shown in *Virgile, Non*, where Wittig regains her powers whilst listening to the stories of the *ulliphant*, a sort of modern, animal Scheherazade: 'A ces occasions l'ulliphant a généralement une histoire à raconter'.<sup>98</sup>

Because in *L'Opoponax* the children are only starting to get to terms with language, their relation to myths is not as developed as in the rest of Wittig's novels. However, in *Les Guérillères*, Wittig's syncretism challenges some of the most widely accepted foundational stories, re-writing Eve's pre- and post-lapsarian contexts:

Dans la légende de Sophie Ménade, il est question d'un verger planté d'arbres de toutes les couleurs. Une femme nue y marche. Son beau corps est noir et brillant. Ses cheveux sont des serpents fins et mobiles qui produisent une musique à chacun de ses mouvements. C'est la chevelure conseillère. [...] Orphée, le serpent préféré de la femme [...] sans cesse lui conseille de manger du fruit de l'arbre du milieu du jardin. [...] Sophie Ménade dit que la femme du verger aura la vraie connaissance du mythe solaire que tous les textes ont à dessein obscurci.<sup>99</sup>

Firstly, the woman's body is 'noir et brillant', challenging Western pictorial representations of Eve as white, and bringing this figure closer to what scientific research has named 'mitochondrial Eve' (originating in East Africa). Medusa and Eve merge into a new figure that no longer carries the stigma of sin: Medusa's hair of serpents is not seen to be a curse, while Eve's eating of the fruit becomes a generator of immense knowledge. Secondly, the woman is shown to be walking alone, the story removing 'the masculine desiring gaze'.<sup>100</sup> The woman is in control of both her body, and of its representations. The hair of snakes is no longer representative of the fear of castration, but becomes a source of knowledge and creativity, as each snake 'produi[t] une musique'. Orpheus is re-cast as Eve's advisor and favourite snake, encouraging her to acquire further knowledge. Eating the fruit does not bring about the fall, but rather an enlarging of Eve's

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<sup>96</sup> *L'Opoponax*, p. 265.

<sup>97</sup> Duffy, 'Language and Childhood', p. 299.

<sup>98</sup> *Virgile, Non*, p. 24

<sup>99</sup> *Les Guérillères*, pp. 72–73.

<sup>100</sup> Birkett, 'Sophie Ménade', p. 96.

universe, through the contributions of her body and mind: ‘sa taille se développera, elle grandira, ses pieds ne quitteront pas le sol tandis que son front touchera les étoiles’ and ‘elle aura la connaissance’.<sup>101</sup> Eve transcends the Cartesian mind-body duality, in an all-encompassing approach to knowledge acquisition. The story is recounted by Sophie Ménade, whose name is another *mise-en-abyme* of surpassing of mind-body dichotomies, as her surname reminds the reader of the maenads, Dionysius’s female followers<sup>102</sup>, while her first name is derived from the Greek for wisdom.

A similar reworking of myth appears in *Le Corps lesbien*, but this time it is from the perspective of the couple, rather than that of the individual (the Eve-Medusa figure). There is a reversal of the Orphic myth, as the lover manages to save the narrator, lead her out of hell, and use the gaze to bring her back to life: ‘C’est là seulement là au débouché vers les arbres et la forêt que d’un bond tu m/e fais face et c’est vrai qu’en regardant tes yeux, j/e ressuscite à une vitesse prodigieuse’.<sup>103</sup> The lover’s gaze is no longer a bearer of death, but of life and survival. Similarly, the narrator’s breath is carrier of life:

j/e mets m/on souffle dans ta bouche, j/e réchauffe tes oreilles tes mains tes seins,  
j//introduis tout m/on air dans tes poumons [...] m/oi Isis la très puissante j/e  
décrète que comme par le passé tu vis Osiris m/a très chérie m/a très affaiblie.<sup>104</sup>

The mythical couple is re-worked, so that both Isis and Osiris are women/lesbians. Firstly, the narrator as Isis uses language to prevent the lover’s death — ‘j/e prononce l’interdiction d’enregistrer ta mort’. Language acts directly onto the world, preventing death and giving the narrator the necessary time to locate and piece together the lover’s different body parts. The narrator then uses both her breath and her words to resurrect the lover Osiris. The narrator has an immense illocutionary power, as her words both avert death and enable life — ‘m/oi Isis la très puissante j/e décrète que comme par le passé tu vis Osiris m/a très chérie m/a très affaiblie’.<sup>105</sup> The Word is no longer ‘spermatic/ male-identified’,<sup>106</sup> Wittig aptly challenging phallogocentrism. Women’s words have the power to re-order the world. The couple continues their (pro)creative streak by establishing a female genealogy (contrary to views of the lesbian couple as barren): ‘nous pourrons faire ensemble les petites filles qui viendront après nous’.<sup>107</sup>

Wittig’s 1985 novel suggests such re-workings of myth from its very title, hinting at the ensuing katabatic journey. However, Virgil is replaced by Manastabal, and Wittig

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<sup>101</sup> *Les Guérillères*, p. 72–73.

<sup>102</sup> Birkett, ‘*Sophie Ménade*’, 97.

<sup>103</sup> *Le Corps lesbien*, p. 13.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>106</sup> Shaktini, ‘Displacing the phallic subject’, p. 201.

<sup>107</sup> *Le Corps lesbien*, p. 87.

(the narrator) observes that ‘je me serais contentée du doux Virgile dans cette aventure’.<sup>108</sup> Nonetheless, the change in guides might suggest that with the passing of time even hell worsened, thus Virgil would not have been able to face its current horrors. This becomes even more pertinent when Manastabal reveals that hell is in fact everyday reality: ‘(Il n’y a rien où on va, Wittig, du moins rien que tu ne connaisses déjà [...] Je t’emmène voir ce que partout on peut voir en plein jour)’.<sup>109</sup> Instead of showing her a new world, Manastabal aims to show Wittig her own world, but under a different light; she carries out a work of re-reading or re-interpretation. Despite the title, which clearly suggests a rewriting of mythological descents to the underworld, *Virgile, Non* interacts with post-World War Two events and discourses, more so than any of the previous novels. For example, the women attacking Wittig because she represents ‘la peste lesbienne’ refer to ‘une prophétesse inspirée [qui] a vitupéré contre vous et supplié, avec des larmes sur les joues, incessamment prostrée dans des prières ardentes, rampant sur les genoux, qu’on vous empêche de corrompre les enfants dans les écoles’.<sup>110</sup> This is a direct reference to Anita Bryant’s 1977–1978 *Save our Children* campaign, aimed at overturning a piece of Florida legislation which condemned discrimination based on sexual-orientation. The numerous religious references — ‘incessamment *prostrée* dans des *prières* ardentes, *rampant sur les genoux*’ — are a mocking of Bryant’s Christian fundamentalist discourse.

Although such textual re-workings of myths and discourses carry subversive potential, they are *re-workings*, which means they ‘have to drag along with [them] a problematic set of baggage donated by discourses – be they literary, philosophical or psychoanalytical – that are those of the perennial oppression’.<sup>111</sup> However, Wittig displays an awareness that social change can only be achieved if the tools of the oppressors are turned against them. A slightly more problematic consequence of the use of such pre-existent discourses is the reader’s ability to relate to the original, and to understand subsequently Wittig’s re-workings. As noted by Sarah Cooper, there is a ‘certain elitism attached’ to this process ‘since not every reader has access to the kind of knowledge this requires’.<sup>112</sup> Moreover, some of the references (like Anita Bryant’s campaign) might be more familiar to an American audience, rather than a French one. This idea of elitism is further enhanced if we look at the status of Latin in the French education system (many of the myths reworked by Wittig are Greco-Roman, and would

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<sup>108</sup> *Virgile, Non*, p. 34.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>111</sup> Lindsay, ‘Body/Language’, p. 54.

<sup>112</sup> Cooper, *Relating to Queer Theory*, p. 170.

be studied by pupils during Latin classes). Popular opinion tends to associate the study of Latin with liberal professions (for example, in the fields of law and politics), and school children see it as a way of demonstrating and enhancing their academic prowess. This popular view is supported by statistical evidence compiled by the French Ministry of Education.<sup>113</sup> This possible elitist bias comes as a surprise, given Wittig's background and subsequent political activism. Such limitations can be overcome by a focus on the senses, as Wittig's novels require the reader to interact with various images (visual, haptic, erotic, etc.), thus needing to develop a multisensorial method of engaging with the text.

This multisensorial reading, involving our intellect alongside our sensory receptors, opens up interpretation and understanding.<sup>114</sup> For example, the children of *L'Opoponax* make better sense of the world around them, if they can relate it to previously experienced or already known sensations: 'La dame a une drôle d'odeur. Comme quand les pommes pourrissent sous l'arbre'.<sup>115</sup> As the children have no other way of talking about old age, they need to connect it to their known environment. This writing of the senses significantly contributes to the reading process, as the reader can link the written wor(l)d to lived experiences that (s)he might have encountered. This link can also have negative repercussions, as detailed sensorial descriptions of common events might strain the reading process. For example, the scene where the children are blowing dandelion clocks reflects a common childhood episode,<sup>116</sup> but, even so, the text offers a detailed description of all its components:

On cueille des boutons d'or et des fleurs de pissenlit. Les tiges creuses sécrètent un liquide qui laisse des traces brunâtres sur les doigts en séchant. On cherche les fleurs fanées pour souffler dessus. Elles se défont en des mèches cotonneuses qui s'envolent quand il y a un déplacement d'air.<sup>117</sup>

The reference to 'mèches cotonneuses' and 'déplacement d'air' adds an almost scientific layer to an otherwise banal event. Nonetheless, the accurate description is consistent with the child's point of view; while the adult reader might be all too familiar with blowing dandelions, this could be a fairly new experience for the children. This communion between nature and the children is developed later in the novel, in a more complex process of sensorial writing and reading:

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<sup>113</sup> <<http://www.education.gouv.fr/cid94667/le-latin-au-college-un-choix-lie-a-l-origine-sociale-et-au-niveau-scolaire-des-eleves-en-fin-de-sixieme.html>> [accessed on 29 September 2016].

<sup>114</sup> Watt, *Reading in Proust*, p. 132.

<sup>115</sup> *L'Opoponax*, p. 28.

<sup>116</sup> Generalisations need to be avoided, as this is a common childhood episode for children growing up in a temperate climate.

<sup>117</sup> *L'Opoponax*, p. 30.

l'odeur est partout, on la sent dans les narines dans les oreilles on sent qu'elle se promène à l'intérieur du crâne, mais surtout on l'a dans la peau sur toute l'étendue du corps, les pores sont ouverts, ils se mettent à sécréter [sic] des odeurs d'herbe de pissenlit de bleuet de coquelicot d'avoine de vesce, on ne saurait pas dire d'ailleurs où est la dominante des herbes ou des fleurs, on ne sait plus où on en est [...].<sup>118</sup>

If in the previous scene the children were acting upon nature (the blowing of the dandelion clocks), in the above quotation, the process is reversed, and nature acts upon the body. Nature and the human body intertwine to such an extent that the pores emanate the smell of grass, and of various flowers. The smells are not just picked up by sensorial receptors, but they penetrate the body through to its deepest layers — 'à l'intérieur du crâne'. The boundary between body and mind is blurred, giving rise to an inebriating feeling, 'on ne sait plus où on en est'. While the reader might not have a similar sensorial experience to relate back to, the feeling of confusion and inebriation can be applied to a variety of events. The references to vegetation are clear and specific ('d'herbe de pissenlit de bleuet de coquelicot d'avoine de vesce'); the children are not just in contact with grass and flowers, but with very specific types of flowers.

This propensity towards specificity is present in Wittig's subsequent novels:

Il y dans des paniers des feuilles de châtaignier de charme d'érable de giroflier de gaïac de copayer de chêne de mandarinier de saule de hêtre rouge d'orme de platane de térébinthe de latanier de myrte.<sup>119</sup>

les mufliers rose parme blancs jaunes [...] des dahlias rouges feu orange jaunes [...] les lys les amaryllis les arums [...] les asters mauves les ancolies roses jaunes les soucis orange les reines-marguerites [...].<sup>120</sup>

If in *L'Opoanax* the plants described are the ones the children are said to come across, in *Les Guérillères* and *Le Corps lesbien* the listing of plants does not follow the same geographical accuracy (for example, trees and plants growing in temperate climates are found next to tropical ones). According to Jean Duffy, this compilation of species makes the reader aware of his or her ignorance, the enumerations highlight the gaps in the readers' knowledge.<sup>121</sup> The diverse nuances (rose parme, rouge feu, bleu outremer etc.) reflect the inadequacy of large, all-encompassing categories that do not necessarily account for variations within the same group. Similar enumerations appear in the final chapter of *Virgile, Non*, but they seem to generate a feeling of inclusiveness, rather than

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>119</sup> *Les Guérillères*, p. 81.

<sup>120</sup> *Le Corps lesbien*, p. 38.

<sup>121</sup> Jean Duffy, 'Monique Wittig', in *Beyond the Nouveau Roman. Essays on the Contemporary French Novel*, ed. by Michael Tilby (New York and Oxford: Berg, 1990), pp. 201–28 (p. 218).

inadequacy. The katabatic journey ends with a feast that welcomes the other in the sharing of music and food. It is not just the food that is shared with the other (as in traditional rites of hospitality), but the making of food as well. Hospitality is transformed into community. This community does not just include the angels (the chapter being entitled ‘La cuisine des anges’), but also the reader. The reader is included via the senses (‘l’aneth odorant’)<sup>122</sup>, and the familiarity with the food being cooked and consumed (‘Il y a des cerises, des fraises, des framboises [...]’).<sup>123</sup> Moreover, the availability of numerous cooking utensils (‘les casseroles, les seaux, les chaudrons [...]’),<sup>124</sup> cooking methods (‘les aliments sont à cuire, mettre au feu, bouillir, rôtir, griller’),<sup>125</sup> spices, and fruits means that (almost) everyone can find something they like; *la cuisine des anges* aims to cater to everyone’s tastes and preferences. Moreover, the battery of kitchen utensils is a modification of the armaments of war. There is a sense of plenitude that permeates the final chapter. The end of the journey is rewarded by the feast. This includes both Wittig’s (the character) journey and the reader’s journey.

The senses help Wittig’s characters both to know the world around them, and to relate to the other. Catherine Legrand’s feelings towards Valerie Borge are first reflected via the senses, especially via sight and hearing:

Valerie Borge est assise à côté d’elle maintenant *on entend* qu’elle déchiffre à voix haute ce qui est écrite dans la terre, *on voit* ce qui est écrit dans la terre, *on voit son oreille* derrière laquelle les cheveux sont maintenus, *on entend qu’elle dit*, ce n’est pas toi qui a inventé ces vers, *on ne l’entend pas dire* qu’elle les a trouvés écrits de la main de Catherine Legrand dans son bureau à l’étude.<sup>126</sup>

Despite the physical proximity between the two girls, this sensorial mediation enacts a certain distance: at this stage, Catherine Legrand sees and hears Valerie Borge, but she cannot yet touch her. There is an indication of sensuality, when ‘on voit son oreille derrière laquelle les cheveux sont maintenus’, suggesting that the visual can open the way to the haptic at a later stage. The sensorial is both presence and absence, as Catherine Legrand’s expectations are not entirely fulfilled: ‘on ne l’entend pas dire qu’elle les a trouvés écrits de la main de Catherine Legrand dans son bureau à l’étude’. Valerie Borge enters this incipient seduction game by not admitting that she had previously seen the same words in the same handwriting. The discrepancy between what was seen and what was said (and therefore heard) fuels Catherine Legrand’s subsequent attempts at

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<sup>122</sup> *Virgile, Non*, p. 138.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>126</sup> *L’Oponax*, p. 201, italics mine.

admitting her feelings to Valerie Borge (when there is a complete match between what she says and what Valerie Borge hears). This initial mismatch or discrepancy is even more evident in the scopic regime: ‘Catherine Legrand se déplace dans la cour de récréation et où qu’elle soit elle n’arrête pas de regarder Valerie Borge’;<sup>127</sup> ‘Catherine Legrand regarde Valerie Borge qui ne la regarde pas’.<sup>128</sup> At this stage, Catherine Legrand’s gaze dominates the narrative, following Valerie Borge. Towards the end, the gaze is shared, and the two girls look without being seen: ‘On dit que Valerie Borge et Catherine Legrand sont cachées derrière les aucubas [...] qu’on regarde sans être vu’.<sup>129</sup> If initially Catherine Legrand is confronted with a non-reciprocal scopic regime, by the end of the narrative, the girls share the same gaze, they look at the world as if they were one entity. The moment the scopic regime becomes reciprocal is associated with an in-between time of the day: ‘C’est à l’aube qu’on verra assise sur l’appui d’une fenêtre la forme de l’opoponax’.<sup>130</sup> The opoponax only becomes visible at dawn, a liminal time of day, often linked to magic. It is at this point that Catherine Legrand, as the opoponax, will become visible by revealing herself to Valerie Borge.

A similarly complex scopic regime appears in *Le Corps lesbien*, with the narrator noticing that ‘j/e ne peux pas échapper à la multiplicité de tes regards, où que j/e sois tu m/e regardes m/on ineffable de tes dix milles yeux’;<sup>131</sup> ‘m/a plus voyeuse tu m/e dissous brutalement tous tes yeux braqués sur m/oi’.<sup>132</sup> The ten thousand eyes of the loved one (reminiscent of Argus Panoptes) ensure a complete view of the narrator, there is no way for the latter to escape the gaze; she is engulfed, encompassed by her lover. This view is consistent with the numerous images of merging between the bodies of the two partners. The gaze brings the other closer, up to the point where the narrator dissolves (‘tu m/e dissous brutalement’). Despite the union between the two, there is a sense of discomfort with regards to the scopic regime, the narrator appears to be supervised, having little room for manifestation: ‘j/e ne peux pas échapper’, ‘où que j/e sois tu m/e regardes’, ‘tous tes yeux braqués sur m/oi’. A significant element of the scopic regime is the fact that both the onlooker and the person being looked at are women. This element is developed even further in *Virgile, Non*, displacing the male gaze theorised by Laura Mulvey.<sup>133</sup> In her first visit to *les limbes*, Wittig notices the other women in the bar: ‘Il est bon de porter un

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 228.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 230.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 266.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p. 240, italics mine.

<sup>131</sup> *Le Corps lesbien*, p. 10.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>133</sup> Laura Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, *Screen*, 16.3 (Autumn 1975), 6–18.



maillot de gymnastique pour pouvoir enlever sa chemise, soit parce qu'on a trop chaud, soit parce qu'on veut exhiber ses muscles de bras, avant-bras et épaules.<sup>134</sup> The reader is confronted with a point of view not often encountered in literary or cinematic fiction: a woman admiring another woman's body: 'Je m'émerveille à regarder celles qui en [des muscles] ont de compactes et lisses aux biceps.'<sup>135</sup>

While this new scopic regime can have destabilising effects, it also raises concerns regarding its effectiveness when the background of the viewer is taken into account. The image of the women encountered in *les limbes* serves at least two purposes: 'défense urbaine' and 'besoins esthétiques'.<sup>136</sup> The women can protect the city, without needing to appeal to men. Moreover, they aim to be admired by other women, rather than by men. However, their image can be reminiscent of a masculine model. Whereas a viewer such as Wittig can acknowledge that this juxtaposition (between the female body and a masculine sartorial appearance) further highlights the performativity of gender roles,<sup>137</sup> this subversive potential would go unnoticed if the viewers were the women in the *laverie automatique* on pages 13–19. They would most probably equate the juxtaposition with copying, seeing the women in charge of *défense urbaine* as a mere imitation of the 'masculine original'. Whereas such a narrative dislocation of the gaze can be efficient in underlining constructed gender roles and images, it is highly dependent on the position of the onlooker. Judith Butler argues that 'lesbian femmes may recall the heterosexual scene as it were, but also displace it at the same time. In both butch and femme identities, the very notion of an original or natural identity is put into question'.<sup>138</sup> However, for this tension (between perceived copies and originals) to have a social impact, it needs to be put into question by someone outside the lesbian couple. It is at this interpretive level that the questioning of heterosexual prescriptions can be probed further, depending on who the interpreter is. A self-questioning reader like Wittig or Manastabal is more likely to see the image of the femme-butch dyad as enriching, highlighting the performativity of gender; whereas for the homophobic women of the *laverie automatique* this image can be reductive, seeing the lesbian couple as a poor copy of the heterosexual one.

Another element linking *Virgile, Non* and *Le Corps lesbien* is the emphasis on the use of colours, especially purple (and its variations). In addition to the fact that 'Wittig's

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<sup>134</sup> *Virgile, Non*, p. 19.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20. Nonetheless, contemporary cinema and literature do focus more on women viewing other women (for example, *La vie d'Adèle: Chapitres 1 et 2*).

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>137</sup> As analysed by Butler, especially when discussing the subversive potential of drag (*Gender Trouble*, pp. 186–189).

<sup>138</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 168.

language is replete with colours, textures, odors, movement, and song’,<sup>139</sup> the colour purple is closely related to the lesbian body. Sappho seems to have marked the body of the loved one ‘d’un sceau violet’.<sup>140</sup> This purple sign further distinguishes the couple: ‘j/e reconnais ta barque à côté de la mienne [...] *le signe violet* indiscernable’,<sup>141</sup> ‘j/e ne reconnais pas parmi les épaves ta barque noire marquée du *signe violet* que tu affectionnes’,<sup>142</sup> ‘les deux barques noires s’approchent l’une de l’autre porteuses d’un *signe violet* identique’,<sup>143</sup> ‘ta peau est blanche dans la *lumière violette*, tes lèvres sont *mauves*, le marron de tes yeux est *mauve*, tes cheveux sont *châtain-mauve* [...] Sappho n’aurait pas fait mieux en te serrant contre ses *seins violets* [...] j/e te déchiffre m/a *plus mauve*’.<sup>144</sup> The purple sign becomes a banner marking the place occupied by the couple. The link to their boats further emphasises the connection to Sappho, Lesbos, Lemnos, and Cythera; the community of *Le Corps lesbien* inhabit an exclusively feminine/lesbian island. Purple is inextricably associated with Sappho,<sup>145</sup> whose body becomes a protective one — ‘te serrant contre ses seins violets’. The body of the loved one becomes a reflection of the poetess’s body, with most of its attributes being a variation on the colour purple. It is in *Virgile, Non* that purple is further linked to lesbianism, often in derogatory remarks: ‘le gai avertissement qu’on appelle le péril mauve en en parlant comme de la peste lesbienne’.<sup>146</sup> While it is difficult to find direct links between lesbianism and the colour purple (or its variations) in French, these links are more readily available in the Anglophone context:

The fairy Puck in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* gathers a magic purple flower to change sexual inclinations, and men and women in sixteenth-century England wore violets to indicate they had no intentions of marrying. As pansies came to signify love between men, violets (related to pansies in the Viola family) came to refer more directly to love between women.<sup>147</sup>

<sup>139</sup> Griffin Crowder, ‘Amazons and Mothers?’, p. 120.

<sup>140</sup> *Le Corps lesbien*, p. 58.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90, italics mine.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107, italics mine.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119, italics mine.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 131–132, italics mine. A similar dominance of the colour purple can be found in the section on pages 178–179.

<sup>145</sup> According to Andrea Weiss the association between the colour violet and lesbianism ‘goes back to 600 BC, to the poetry of Sappho who wrote of the violet tiaras she and her lovers wore in their hair’ (Andrea Weiss, *Vampires and Violets: lesbians in the cinema* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1992), p. 1). In André Lardinois’s new translation of Sappho, there are six references to the colour violet, and seven to the colour purple (most of them related to robes or headwear), (for the new translation see André Lardinois, ‘Sappho’, in *Sappho: A New Translation of the Complete Works*, ed. by Diane J. Rayor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 25–96).

<sup>146</sup> *Virgile, Non* p. 15.

<sup>147</sup> Weiss, *Vampires and Violets*, p. 1; in the wider European context, the German “Das lila Lied” (“The Lavender Song”) claimed to be the unofficial anthem of the gay rights movement in 1920s Berlin’ (Alan Lareau, ‘Lavender Songs: Undermining Gender in Weimar Cabaret and Beyond’, *Popular Music and Society*, 28.1 (2005), 15–33 (p. 16)).

Moreover, the expression lavender marriage does refer to a mixed-orientation marriage, being a variation of the marriage of convenience, often aimed at concealing homosexual orientations. In the case of Wittig's novels, the colour purple is revealing (rather than concealing), as it directly points towards lesbianism. The cover of the first edition of *Le Corps lesbien* had body parts written in purple capital letters, mirroring the same technique used inside the book (within the book, the words are written in black, rather than purple). The association between purple and *le péril* is reminiscent of the yellow peril, marking lesbians as a separate race. This association also points to the expression 'lavender menace' used by Betty Friedan when trying to exclude lesbian groups from the National Organisation for Women.<sup>148</sup> It is no coincidence that the references to *le péril mauve* and *la peste lesbienne* appear in chapter IV ('La laverie automatique'), next to the references to Anita Bryant's *Save our Children* campaign. In response to the latter's homophobic discourse, the film *Le Lézard du péril mauve* was released in June 1977, in France, presenting the response of the French public to Bryant's position.<sup>149</sup> Therefore, the colour purple weaves an intricate web of intertextual links between literature, cinema, and social discourses. However, these links may not be entirely available to readers who cannot access an Anglophone background. They do nonetheless attest to the existence of a global lesbian community, with shared codes and symbols (symbols which are not always fully readable outside the group, as shown by the multiple implications of the colour purple and its variants).

While we can point towards an 'emphasis on the visual [in Wittig's work] indicat[ing] the transformative potential of sight',<sup>150</sup> the differentiation between the senses is not always clear-cut. For example, in *Les Guérillères* the visual and the auditory are mixed in a recreation of the mythical O:

Il y a quelque part une sirène. Son corps vert est couvert d'écailles. Son visage est nu. Les dessous de ses bras sont couleur d'incarnat. Quelquefois elle se met à chanter. Elles disent que de son chant on n'entend qu'un O continu. C'est ce qui fait que ce chant évoque pour elles, comme tout ce qui rappelle le O, le zéro ou le cercle, l'anneau vulvaire.<sup>151</sup>

The siren's song is first heard, and then visualised. The sound, known for its seductive powers, is no longer related to attracting sailors, but it enacts a return to the body. The sound is seen and then embodied, rewriting the symbolism of the circle as feminine

<sup>148</sup> Terralee Bensinger, 'Lesbian Pornography: The Re/Making of (a) Community', *Discourse*, 15.1 (1992), 69–93 (p. 73); the expression was subsequently reclaimed by the lesbian groups themselves.

<sup>149</sup> <<http://elles.centrepompidou.fr/blog/?p=545>> note no. 6 [accessed on 10 February 2016] and <[http://www.autourdulermait.fr/bdf\\_fiche-film-2344.html](http://www.autourdulermait.fr/bdf_fiche-film-2344.html)> [accessed on 13 July 2017].

<sup>150</sup> Cooper, *Relating to Queer Theory*, p. 174.

<sup>151</sup> *Les Guérillères*, p. 16.

(‘l’anneau vulvaire’). This focus on the body is closely related to eroticism in the love-making scenes of *Le Corps lesbien*. While the negative reception of the text had been partly attributed to the images of violent lovemaking, focusing solely on these scenes obscures the moments of tenderness shared by the couple, and the ‘startlingly lyrical love poetry’.<sup>152</sup> For example, despite their temporary transformation into animals, the lovers share moments of affection: ‘seule ta figure est sèche et lisse, m/es lèvres et m/a langue la touchent tandis que j/e te prends entre m/es bras’.<sup>153</sup> Their communion is complete, and enviable by any couple: ‘le plus petit grain de sable entre ton ventre et le m/ien peut nous séparer une fois pour toutes’.<sup>154</sup> Wittig’s multiple ways of ‘perceiving the world in sensory terms’<sup>155</sup> serve a double purpose: they ‘create an effect of authenticity’,<sup>156</sup> helping readers to recognize parts of their own journeys, simultaneously complicating the scopic regime, dislocating the male gaze and combining the various senses in a constant return to the body. This leads to a possible rapprochement between Wittig’s texts and Barthes’s idea of *texte de jouissance*. Not only do Wittig’s novels represent female desire and *jouissance*, but they fit Barthes’s contention that a *texte de jouissance* is ‘celui qui met en état de perte, celui qui déconforte’.<sup>157</sup> In Wittig’s texts, the reader’s relation to language is constantly challenged, through formal innovations meant to highlight phallogocentrism. Moreover, foundational stories are undone to reflect their bias, while the writing of sensations is used to bring both comfort and discomfort. According to Barthes, ‘avec l’écrivain de jouissance (et son lecteur) commence le texte intenable’.<sup>158</sup> Wittig’s work can be seen to consist of such ‘textes intenable’, especially from the point of view of chronology, as her texts move beyond clearly defined temporalities, becoming similar to the *opoponax*: flowing, flexible, *intenable*.

At the formal level, Wittig’s manipulation of punctuation affects the reader’s journey through the text. The lack of commas does not allow for breaks, transforming enumerations into a constant flow. The texts themselves are not always divided into (traditional) chapters: *Virgile, Non* is the only text to have numbered chapters, indexed at the end; *L’Opoponax* is also divided into seven larger sections (similar to chapters), but they are not numbered, while *Les Guérillères* and *Le Corps lesbien* are formed by much shorter sections, separated by blank spaces. However, these blank spaces are not

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<sup>152</sup> Griffin Crowder, ‘Amazons and Mothers?’, p. 122.

<sup>153</sup> *Le Corps lesbien*, p. 136.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>155</sup> Judith Butler, ‘Wittig’s Material Practice’, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 13.4 (2007), 519–33 (p. 524).

<sup>156</sup> Birkett, ‘*Sophie Ménade*’, p. 100.

<sup>157</sup> Barthes, *Le Plaisir du texte*, p. 25.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

necessarily an opportunity for taking a break, rather, they invite the reader to contribute to the text through his/her own writing or experiences. In an analysis of Christine de Pisan's work, Susan Schibanoff argues that the oral tradition, through its fluidity and predisposition to variation, was more able to accommodate feminist interpretations and re-readings; written texts by comparison, being less variable, burdened women readers with their authoritative status.<sup>159</sup> While the position of women writers and readers has changed significantly since the medieval period, the mix between the oral and written traditions deserves further exploration in the context of women's writing, and specifically Wittig's work.

Texts such as Wittig's have a high degree of variability, especially through the use of gaps, allowing the reader to bring his/her own contribution to the narrative. The gaps and lacunae become the textual representation of the oral tradition, as they facilitate the existence of variations in interpretations and transmission. The text will be slightly different, depending on what the reader decides to introduce into these gaps (the initial text will develop multiple variations, resembling orally transmitted ballads or legends). This explanation becomes more pertinent when linked to the scene in *Les Guérillères* in which *elles* read texts out loud, and change them by writing in the white spaces on the pages.<sup>160</sup> It is suggested in this way that the text does not just flow within the confines of the book, but also outside it. Wittig sees the narrative voice of *Le Corps lesbien* as 'spread[ing] itself in the whole world of the book, like a lava flow that nothing can stop'.<sup>161</sup> However, this is not a new image, but one which is introduced as early as *L'Opoponax*:

On ne peut pas le [l'opoponax] décrire parce qu'il n'a jamais la même forme. Règne, ni animal, ni végétal, ni minéral, autrement dit *indéterminé*. *Humeur, instable*, il n'est pas recommandé de fréquenter l'opoponax.<sup>162</sup>  
Je suis l'opoponax. Il ne faut pas le contrarier tout le temps comme vous faites. Si vous avez du mal à vous peigner le matin il ne faut pas que vous vous étonniez. *Il est partout*. Il est dans vos cheveux.<sup>163</sup>

Catherine Legrand's creation, *l'opoponax*, is omnipresent, fluid, uncontrollable and embodied ('Il est dans vos cheveux'). While the advice is not to frequent it ('il n'est pas recommandé de fréquenter l'opoponax'), because of its omnipresence, *l'opoponax* is inescapable; it takes control of desire and of the text. The connection between

<sup>159</sup> Schibanoff, 'Taking the Gold out of Egypt', pp. 83–106.

<sup>160</sup> *Les Guérillères*, pp. 17–18.

<sup>161</sup> Wittig, 'The Mark of Gender' in *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*, pp. 76–89 (p. 87; originally published in English).

<sup>162</sup> *L'Opoponax*, p. 179, italics mine.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230, italics mine.

*L'Opopanax* and *Le Corps lesbien* is even marked textually: 'C'est le santal c'est l'ambre c'est le benjoun c'est le musc c'est l'opopanax.'<sup>164</sup> While in this enumeration of scented plants *l'opopanax* can be connected to the opopanax, for readers familiar with Wittig's work, the link to her first novel is unavoidable. In the same section, this extra-textual flow connects *Le Corps lesbien* to previous Wittigien works, and to other French texts: 'Heureuse si comme Ulyssea j/e pouvais revenir d'un long voyage'.<sup>165</sup> Ulyssea could easily be part of *Les Guérillères*, while the sentence clearly points to Joachim du Bellay's poem, 'Heureux qui comme Ulysse a fait un beau voyage'. *L'opopanax* does not just take hold of Catherine Legrand's story, but it flows outside textual confines, to take hold of Wittig's subsequent texts, often requiring 'sophisticated reading skills'<sup>166</sup> to be identified.

One other prominent intertextual reference connects Wittig's work to World War Two, and its place in collective memory. In *Virgile, Non* the topic of the Second World War is clearly tackled through references such as 'leur étoile jaune',<sup>167</sup> 'on est déporté'<sup>168</sup>, and extensively discussed in chapter X, 'La gare centrale' which focuses solely on the carnage characterising the conflict, and the ease with which it was erased from collective memory. The railway station is no longer the departure hall for hell, but part of hell itself; the carnage does not just occur when reaching the destination, but it starts from the very arrival of the train:

Quand le train entre en gare, les pauvres créatures se ruent hors des marchepieds, quelques-unes même vont la tête en première. Elles sont si nombreuses et elles se poussent si fort que quelques-unes, projetées en avant trop brusquement, tombent entre les roues du train, sont lentement écrasées et poussent des cris affreux tandis que la locomotive avance sur la fin de sa course.<sup>169</sup>

The slaughter is followed by immediate cleansing and sanitising, echoing the process of forgetting and 'cleaning of collective memory'; remembering the events becomes harder if proof of their happening has been eliminated:

L'entreprise de nettoyage affectée aux voies de chemin de fer envoie pour chaque train une équipe spéciale qui balaie les têtes, les membres arrachés, les troncs, et ce qui reste est ramassé par une machine qui suit à quelque distance. Nulle ne peut me dire comment on dispose de ces restes humains.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> *Le Corps lesbien*, p. 16.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>166</sup> Bassnett, 'Influence and intertextuality: A reappraisal', p. 135.

<sup>167</sup> *Virgile, Non*, p. 51.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 31–32.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

Despite the work of the ‘entreprise de nettoyage’ the events cannot be erased, which makes Wittig (the character) wonder about the memory, and posterity of the episode. In her frustration, she addresses both Manastabal and the damned souls. Her invective becomes a manner of questioning her compatriots about the ease with which they forgot the events, and returned to their previous routine: ‘(Comment fais-tu pour garder un visage serein et calme au milieu de tant d’infortune, Manastabal, mon guide?).’<sup>171</sup> For Wittig (the character) forgetting is not an option, but the following chapter — ‘Achéron I’ — nuances this view, as in order to deal with the episode of ‘la gare centrale’ she needs to swim in the Achéron, the river of forgetfulness.<sup>172</sup> This prompts Manastabal to observe: ‘Ah on peut dire que tu oublies vite.’<sup>173</sup> The criticism Wittig raises against her guide, and the rest of the damned souls in the previous chapter, is now raised against her, proving that divisions are not always clear-cut as grey areas characterise a variety of situations, making it difficult to take sides. After her swim in the Achéron, Wittig observes: ‘Mais la mémoire de l’épisode de la gare centrale en sort tout atténuée et en quelque sorte supportable, quoique l’incompréhensibilité demeure, ce qui est à mon sens un des pires tourments.’<sup>174</sup> This can be seen as a reflection on wider processes of healing, forgetting, and remembering; collective memory is as much created by what we remember, as by what we forget. In order to carry on, we need to find mechanisms of survival; in the case of terrible episodes, such as World War Two, attenuation, forgetting, and selective remembering seem to have been preferred. Wittig’s position, on both sides of the barricade, in two consecutive chapters, highlights the complexity of dealing with memory, and the need for questioning and self-reflexivity. It is this self-reflexivity that is constantly advocated by Manastabal, suggesting a possible authorial message.

References to World War Two mark some of the previous texts along the way. For example, in *L’Opoanax*, when Véronique and Catherine Legrand are asked by their mother to clear some of their toys away, ‘Véronique Legrand cache quelques objets derrière la chaudière du chauffage central pour leur permettre d’échapper à l’épuration.’<sup>175</sup> The need to separate and select the toys points towards the persecution and deportation of Jews during World War Two, while the references to *chauffage* and *épuration* direct the reader towards the image of death camps. Véronique Legrand’s act of hiding and protection reflects personal acts of heroism during the war, as people

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>172</sup> While the Acheron is the river of woe, in *Virgile, Non* it is conflated with Lethe, the river of forgetfulness.

<sup>173</sup> *Virgile, Non*, p. 40.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>175</sup> *L’Opoanax*, p. 60.

refused to collaborate with the Nazi authorities. In *Le Corps lesbien*, the reference to war is very subtle: ‘les taches sombres des coquelicots apparaissent en de nombreux endroits’.<sup>176</sup> However, the association between ‘coquelicots’, ‘taches sombres’, and ‘nombreux endroits’ is suggestive of the omnipresence of death. These previous allusions to war ensure that its aftermaths are not erased from collective memory, reinforcing Wittig’s (the character) plea in chapter X of *Virgile, Non*: ‘(Avouez au grand jour, misérables créatures, que pour mieux mener à bien vos corvées vous n’avez pas hésité à écraser, piétiner à mort, démanteler vos semblables, ni à transformer ce hall de gare en charnier).’<sup>177</sup> These intertextual connections between Wittig’s own texts support Wenzel’s and Lindsay’s undertakings of reading her *œuvre* in sequence, and highlighting the progressions and evolutions.<sup>178</sup> However, interpreting the texts from the point of view of progressions imposes a textual order that does not fully take into account the reader’s contribution to the *texte instable*. This intra-*œuvre* chronological order (or negentropy) can narrow the space the reader is allowed to occupy in the works, putting forward an interpretive framework focused on thematic similarities and continuity, development and evolution.

### **Politics and the text**

Very often, Wittig’s work has been read through the lens of her philosophical writings, with an emphasis on a few of her main ideas, such as her contention that the lesbian is not a woman: ‘it would be incorrect to say that lesbians associate, make love, live with women, for ‘woman’ has meaning only in heterosexual systems of thought and heterosexual economic systems. Lesbians are not women’.<sup>179</sup> In this view, the word ‘lesbian’ no longer defines a sexual orientation, but an exit from the heterosexual system, a way of living in which ‘*sexage*, [and] the oppression of women’<sup>180</sup> have been abolished. However, when the word ‘lesbian’ enters speech acts or written texts, it cannot fully escape the biases of the surrounding heterosexual structure. Wittig might not consider lesbians to be connected to women or men, but for various other audiences the word is still charged, often imbued with the idea of a simulacrum of heterosexuality. Within the framework of gender performativity, the lesbian heterosexual simulacrum can be read as

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<sup>176</sup> *Le Corps lesbien*, p. 47.

<sup>177</sup> *Virgile, Non*, p. 37.

<sup>178</sup> Wenzel, ‘The Text as Body/Politics’, p. 284, and Lindsay, ‘Body/Language’, p. 54.

<sup>179</sup> Wittig, ‘The Straight Mind’, p. 32.

<sup>180</sup> Griffin Crowder, ‘Amazons and Mothers?’, p. 119.



a parody of the heterosexual couple, challenging its 'natural' semblance. However, the parodic effect needs a receptive audience, a public already challenging accepted norms and understandings. Debates regarding the connotations of the word 'lesbian' have involved Wittig herself, in response to Cixous's remarks that 'while French women may love women, they don't use the word lesbian which has negative connotations in France'.<sup>181</sup> In reaction to this, 'Wittig cried out, 'What France? This is a scandal'.<sup>182</sup> Even within a highly creative, and philosophically aware environment, the word 'lesbian' caused debates, which raises questions about its uses and misuses in everyday speech acts. According to Epps and Katz, 'Wittig did not accommodate the discourse and conditions of womanhood but attempted to step out of the category altogether'.<sup>183</sup> However, this 'stepping out' arguably needs to happen at a larger scale for change to occur; it needs to engage lesbians, women, and men. Nonetheless, the contention that lesbians are not women can also be read as an exclusionary stance, distancing heterosexual women from Wittig's works. While this exclusionary stance is in opposition to 'Wittig's deployment of "lesbian" as a mode of disidentification and displacement',<sup>184</sup> it remains a possible interpretation. This displacement does not just occur at the interpretive level, but it is also hinted at physically in *Le Corps lesbien*, as the lesbian couple needs to relocate several times to find a safe place to live: 'tu m/e demandes combien de fois il faudra repartir encore voyager pour trouver une place où vivre'.<sup>185</sup> Despite their union, and the protection of their community, the lesbian partners are in constant drift, trying to find 'une place où vivre'. Their marginal status is reinforced; their disconnection from the heterosexual matrix does not necessarily entail a freedom from heterosexual dichotomies, but rather an exclusion from the system.

*Virgile, Non* seems to set forth a less divisive stance, with Manastabal highlighting the ineffectiveness of clear-cut divisions:

Mais cela ne te donne aucun droit d'écraser de ton jugement les âmes qu'on rencontre. [...] Moi-même je me félicite de chaque jour qui me voit libre. Tant qu'on a pareil privilège néanmoins, il sied peu de s'en servir pour enfoncer davantage les infortunées créatures qui en sont privées.<sup>186</sup>

Despite the fact that Wittig (the character) considers her status as a lesbian to be a facilitator of her freedom (as it escapes heterosexual binaries), this freedom cannot be

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<sup>181</sup> Wenzel, 'The Text as Body/Politics', p. 217.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., p. 271.

<sup>183</sup> Epps and Katz, 'Monique Wittig's Materialist Utopia and Radical Critique', p. 442.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., p. 441.

<sup>185</sup> *Le Corps lesbien*, p. 133.

<sup>186</sup> *Virgile, Non*, p. 38.

imposed upon others (in this case the other women, or the damned souls). As highlighted by Manastabal, imposing freedom denotes a re-articulation of a perceived superior position. When compared to *Les Guérillères* or *Le Corps lesbien*, *Virgile, Non* moves away from an exclusively lesbian point of view (where ‘lesbian’ is understood in the Wittigien sense of displacement of heterosexual categories of man and woman), the novel trying to find mechanisms for change within the system. This idea is further emphasised by Manastabal: ‘(En tout cas on ne peut les en débarrasser de force.) Et elle me rappelle qu’on n’est pas en enfer pour donner tort aux âmes damnées mais pour leur indiquer si besoin est le passage pour en sortir.’<sup>187</sup> Throughout the journey, Manastabal shows Wittig (the character) the inadequacy of dichotomies and of Manichean binary systems; reality can rarely be divided into clear and distinct black and white areas, grey areas of intersection and overlap being most often the norm. As a result, Wittig (the character) learns that feminism cannot be imposed upon women, it is something that needs to be discovered, and chosen as a path to follow.

Another element that sets the lesbian community apart, and might therefore impede its connection to the rest of the system, is the creation of particular lesbian geographies. Nonetheless, they do offer protection, permitting the development of the lesbian couple. It is this precarious edge, between protection and belonging, that marks the struggles of the lesbian couple. In *Le Corps lesbien*, the numerous references to Sappho and to the island inhabited by the community point towards a re-imagining of Lesbos, or any other island usually associated with an exclusively feminine presence (Lemnos or Cythera): ‘J/e suis à genoux au bord de la mer [...] m/a bouche s’ouvre pour prier la divine Sappho l’incomparable.’<sup>188</sup> These mythical places find an echo in *Virgile, Non* as well, since Wittig (the character) can only reveal her lesbian identity when visiting heaven or *les limbes*.<sup>189</sup> However, also in *Virgile, Non*, the underworld becomes anchored in reality, with clear references to San Francisco, and its neighbourhoods commonly associated with the LGBTQ community: ‘Va baiser où tu appartiens et ne quitte surtout pas *la rue Valencia* [...] Vole donc vers tes plaisirs, cours vers le coin de *la vingt-quatrième rue* pour retrouver tes pareils’;<sup>190</sup> ‘Tu viens du *Castro*, ça se voit à ta gueule’.<sup>191</sup> Valencia and 24<sup>th</sup> streets in San Francisco intersect, and are known for their bohemian

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>188</sup> *Le Corps lesbien*, p. 58.

<sup>189</sup> *Virgile, Non* does not follow the order of classical katabatic journeys; there are six visits to paradise before the end of the novel, and four visits to *les limbes* (a version of purgatory). Often, stops in *les limbes* and heaven are meant to help the protagonist regain her powers, enabling her to continue the journey through hell.

<sup>190</sup> *Virgile, Non*, p. 13, italics mine

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., p. 36, italics mine.

lifestyles, while the Castro district is closely linked to the gay community.<sup>192</sup> There is a certain discrepancy between the original language of the text (French), and the setting of the narrative in San Francisco. While the correspondence between language and *topos* is in no way a prerequisite of fiction, it can affect the reading experience of the French audience.

San Francisco is more than just a setting, as it becomes a character in its own right in chapter XII, '(Les chasses du comte Zaroff)': 'il ne s'agit plus du même San Francisco [...] Ce que la ville recouvre de son activité diurne, sort en relief au moment de ces chasses de nuit'.<sup>193</sup> The city is no longer referred to by its streets, but directly named by the narrator (easing the reader's research work). However, the city has a nocturnal double, as some of its traits only become visible during the night: 'les saillies du terrain dominant tout à coup, les formes des collines apparaissent avec leurs pleins, leurs déliés et leur succession, les masses d'arbre des jardins sont vues'.<sup>194</sup> These nocturnal features facilitate the men's chasing game, and the women's entrapment. At the end of this chapter, dealing with prostitution, there is a juxtaposition between San Francisco and Paris: 'Déjà les coups de feu retentissent comme on parcourt une fois de plus *les allées du parc de la Porte Dorée* en braquant des lampes de poche dans toutes les directions'.<sup>195</sup> La Porte Dorée could refer to the Golden Gate Bridge, as well as to a station on the eighth line of the Parisian metro, near Bois de Vincennes, an area commonly known for prostitution. Moreover, Bois de Vincennes is also associated with the Paris Colonial Exhibition, which is referred to later on in the text: 'A présent ce sont celles dont les bouches ont été déformées pour en faire des plateaux qui marchent en corps dans la revue. Elles sont immédiatement suivies d'âmes damnées dont le cou est étiré en hauteur par une série d'anneaux superposés [...]'.<sup>196</sup> The references to lip plates and neck rings are reminiscent of images of the exotic or the savage which dominated the discourses surrounding the colonial and world exhibitions of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The sounds accompanying this particular parade of the damned souls reinforce the exotic imagery: 'Néanmoins elles continuent de passer au son des *tambours*, des *grosses caisses* et des *tam-tams*'.<sup>197</sup>

Space is not the only element constraining women's free movement. The female body itself, or rather the social constructions of femininity attached to it can impose

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<sup>192</sup> <<http://www.sanfranciscodays.com/castro/>> [accessed 16 February 2016], and Hewitt, *Autobiographical Tighropes*, pp. 142–43.

<sup>193</sup> *Virgile, Non*, p. 43.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44, italics mine.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94, italics mine.

similar restrictions. In *L'Opoponax*, despite the children's freedom of movement, they get an early sense of different ways of silencing or censoring the body: 'on s'essuie avec les feuilles que d'ordinaire on met sur le devant des statues'.<sup>198</sup> This silencing is completely disregarded in *Les Guérillères*, as *elles* do away with any metaphor that reduces the body to its sexual organs:

Elles disent qu'elles ont trouvé des appellations en très grand nombre pour désigner les vulves. Elles disent qu'elles ont retenu quelques-unes pour leur amusement. La plupart ont perdu leur sens. Si elles se réfèrent à des objets, ce sont des objets à présent tombés en désuétude, ou bien il s'agit de noms symboliques, géographiques. Il ne s'en trouve pas une parmi elles pour les déchiffrer.<sup>199</sup>

Metaphors function in a similar way to the 'feuilles que d'ordinaire on met sur le devant des statues'; they try to hide sexuality by covering it, by associating it with a more familiar image. However, the covering only reinforces the presence of the sexual organs. A similar covering effect is obtained by associating women's sexual organs with geometrical shapes:

Les féminaires, outre les cercles, les anneaux donnent pour symboles des vulves les triangles coupés d'une bissectrice les ovales les ellipses. [...] D'après les féminaires les bagues sont contemporaines des expressions telles que les bijoux les trésors les pierres pour désigner les vulves.<sup>200</sup>

Women's sexuality is defined in terms of predetermined shapes ('cercles,' 'triangles,' 'ovales,' 'ellipses'), not allowing for anomalies or boundary crossings. The link between 'les bagues' and 'les vulves' can be related to marriage, the ring marking the possession of the feminine body. *Elles* do away with these reductive connections, and initially focus on the vulva, as an essential part of their body: 'elles disent qu'étant porteuses de vulves elles connaissent ce qui les caractérise'.<sup>201</sup> The vulva becomes the feminine organ *par excellence*, at least in the first half of the text. In contrast to the vagina, pleasure can be produced via the vulva without the contribution of a man; moreover, the vulva does not provide pleasure to the man either. The vulva thus becomes a marker of this feminine self-sufficient society. However, *elles* are also self-reflexive, moving beyond what might initially appear to be a form of feminine essentialism through an exclusive privileging and celebration of the vulva:

Elles disent qu'elles appréhendent leurs corps dans leur totalité. Elles disent qu'elles ne privilégient pas telle de ses parties sous prétexte qu'elle a été jadis l'objet d'un interdit. Elles disent qu'elles ne veulent pas être prisonnières de leur propre idéologie. Elles disent qu'elles n'ont pas recueilli et développé les

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<sup>198</sup> *L'Opoponax*, p. 142.

<sup>199</sup> *Les Guérillères*, p. 66.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

symboles qui dans les premiers temps leur ont été nécessaires pour rendre leur force évidente.<sup>202</sup>

Initially, *elles* needed to focus on their non-reproductive sexual organs, as a way of asserting their presence and power — ‘nécessaires pour rendre leur force évidente’. However, due to their self-reflexivity, they realise that such a focus can soon turn into another restrictive discourse. Therefore, they move away from a consideration of specific body parts, to concentrating on the body as a whole; they move away from what defines them as women, to what defines them simply as beings. This self-reflexivity mirrors the shifts in some strands of the women’s movement: from essentialism, and an emphasis on difference, to seeing women as part of a larger community (or social class, in line with Wittig’s materialist feminism).

Once the body is seen as a whole, it can then be subsequently dis-membered and re-membered, in accordance with the desires of the lesbian lovers, as shown in *Le Corps lesbien*. The first time the lesbian body is divided into its component parts, the focus is put on bodily fluids: ‘LA CYPRINE LA BAVE LA SALIVE LA MORVE LA SUEUR LES LARMES LE CERUMEN L’URINE [...] LES SUCS LES ACIDES LES FLUIDES LES JUS LES COULÉES’.<sup>203</sup> This becomes significant, as fluids underline porosity, permeability, and the futility of boundaries. According to Judith Butler, ‘if the body is synecdochal for the social system *per se* or a site in which open systems converge, then any kind of unregulated permeability constitutes a site of pollution and endangerment’.<sup>204</sup> Fluidity threatens the hegemonic system, and the porosity of bodily boundaries puts pressure on established heterosexual practices. This links back to the idea of the *texte instable*, highlighting the fact that ‘it is hard not to slip amid so many splits, so many ecstatically partitioned bodies’.<sup>205</sup> This fluidity threatens a linear, traditional reading of the text. Moreover, the fact that the enumeration starts with ‘la cyprine’ further stresses the element of desire, and the fact that for the lovers every part of the ‘lesbian body’ can become erogenous, ‘no part will be cast away, for all are desirable’.<sup>206</sup> Wittig writes, tears apart, and re-members a body of pleasure.<sup>207</sup> This dislocation of the body is represented formally in the text, as the words naming the body parts are constricted by the limits of the page: for example, the enumeration on pages 160–61 starts with ‘tion’, a syllable linking back to ‘la loco’ on page 145. The enumeration has a certain ludic, childish

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<sup>202</sup> *Les Guérillères*, pp. 80–81.

<sup>203</sup> *Le Corps lesbien*, pp. 20–21.

<sup>204</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 180.

<sup>205</sup> Silberman, “‘I have access to your glottis’”, p. 473.

<sup>206</sup> Hewitt, *Autobiographical Tightropes*, p. 141.

<sup>207</sup> Lindsay, ‘Body/Language’, p. 50.

element to it (contrasting in part with the violent love-making), as it resembles a child's conscientious recitation of all the body parts, as if prepared for an anatomy lesson.

This constant fragmentation (of text and body) does not allow for an easy, comfortable reading: '*Le Corps lesbien* constitutes a politicization of sex and sexuality which transcends "woman is wonderful" or "gay is good"; it is truly the subversive discourse of The Body Politic.'<sup>208</sup> The body becomes a site of power struggles: it can be silenced (the leaves covering the statues in *L'Opoponax*), it can be constrained through the use of reductive metaphors (as seen in *Les Guérillères*), or it can be understood in its complexity, through exploration and self-exploration (as seen in *Le Corps lesbien*). In *Virgile, Non* all three of these types of power struggle are textually represented. For example, we encounter censoring, reductive euphemisms, and even monstrosity in chapter 4, 'La laverie automatique', when Wittig (the character) tries to show the other women that her body is in no way different from theirs. Her attempt backfires, as she acquires animal features — fur and scales —, and even the copy of a penis — 'Regardez, il est long comme un long doigt. Coupez-le, coupez-le'.<sup>209</sup> A more positive image of the lesbian body appears in the chapters set in *les limbes* where Wittig can freely admire and desires other lesbians' bodies.

These power struggles cross textual boundaries, mirroring socio-historical realities. The success of *L'Opoponax* established the novel as an influential text, highlighting the universality of childhood experiences. However, the work goes beyond childhood experiences, pointing towards tools for liberation. In the *postface*, Marguerite Duras underlines the idea that rules carry within them the seeds of their own undoing:

Et passent les religieuses de la catholicité, témoins aveugles d'une béatitude autrement éblouissante que la leur. Elles sont utiles. Et on voit à quel point dans ce livre. En jalonnant le temps de l'enfance d'obligations vides de tout sens et non explicitées elles offrent à l'enfance la liberté d'y contrevenir.<sup>210</sup>

The Catholic nuns are the representatives of power in the novel, but their demands are void of meaning, as they often lack logical explanations. Therefore, the children become entitled to transgression, as the only way of escaping the illogical facets of power. The nuns, as representatives of power, act as a catalyst for the children's transgression. While the setting of the Catholic school is very particular, the methods used by the children (and particularly by Catherine Legrand) have a universal reach, they disturb the system from within, forcing the boundaries to break open.

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<sup>208</sup> Wenzel, 'The Text as Body/Politics', p. 282.

<sup>209</sup> *Virgile, Non*, p. 18.

<sup>210</sup> Marguerite Duras, 'Une œuvre éclatante', *France Observateur*, 5 November 1964, reprinted in *L'Opoponax*, pp. 283–87 (p. 287).

A similarly universal experience appears in *Les Guérillères*, when we are offered a stylised description of women's journey through life:

Il ne faut pas courir. Il faut marcher sans impatience en comptant le nombre de ses pas. Si on ne se trompe pas, si on tourne à gauche au moment voulu, on ne touchera pas de ses bras étendus l'arbre à miel et collant. Il faut à ce stade de la marche interrompre les calculs et repartir à zéro. Si on ne se trompe pas dans les calculs, si on saute à pieds joints au moment voulu, on ne tombera pas dans la fosse aux serpents. A ce stade de la marche il faut interrompre les calculs et repartir à zéro [...].<sup>211</sup>

Women are shown to have to face numerous obstacles ('l'arbre à miel et collant', 'fosse aux serpents'), which constantly send them back to their starting point — 'repartir à zéro'. The precautions they can take are of the most ridiculous kind, precluding logical explanations: 'marcher [...] en comptant le nombre des pas', 'si on tourne à gauche', 'si on saute à pieds joints' etc. Moreover, the 'moment voulu,' marking the potential success of their endeavours, is not a chronology they can control, it is timing imposed from the outside (the agent of *voulu* is not the women). Therefore, women's progress is hindered by elements beyond their control, and often lacking logic.

This tortuous journey can also be linked to women's invisibility as thematised in *Virgile, Non*:

Le monde dans lequel elles vivent est à deux dimensions [...] S'il vient à passer un individu de la troisième dimension, derechef elles s'écrasent contre le premier montant de porte venu, au besoin elles se jettent à plat ventre dans le caniveau *et l'individu empiète sur l'espace sans même se rendre compte qu'il leur marche dessus*.<sup>212</sup>

Women are only allowed two dimensions ('on va être sages comme des images'),<sup>213</sup> being refused entry into a three-dimensional world. As such, they become invisible and they can be trampled on by anyone who represents the third dimension 'sans même se rendre compte qu'il leur marche dessus'. However, there is a double invisibility that Wittig engages with in her last novel: women's invisibility, and the invisibility of the patriarchal norms that determine the former. When faced with the suicide of the damned souls (in chapter XXIII), Wittig (the character) notices that 'le plus pénible ici est qu'on ne soit pas directement confronté à l'ennemi parce qu'il n'est pas physiquement présent'.<sup>214</sup> The influence of patriarchy percolates all spheres, pushing women to extreme gestures. Nonetheless, it is impossible to point towards a culprit, as they are not present. Wittig (the author) aims to shed light on this situation through writing; the written word

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<sup>211</sup> *Les Guérillères*, p. 88 and p. 90 for the continuation of the paragraph in a similar vein.

<sup>212</sup> *Virgile, Non*, p. 58, italics mine.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 81–82.

becomes the first step towards counteracting the effects of this double invisibility. The transition from two to three dimensions is also present in *Les Guérillères*:

Le système est clos. Aucun rayon partant du centre ne permet de l'élargir ou de le faire éclater. Il est en même temps illimité, la juxtaposition des cercles qui vont s'élargissant figure toutes les révolutions possibles. C'est virtuellement la sphère infinie dont le centre est partout, la circonférence nulle part.<sup>215</sup>

The circle is no longer a symbol that accurately represents the world, and development cannot be achieved from within the closed circle ('Aucun rayon partant du centre ne permet de l'élargir ou de le faire éclater'). Thus, there is a three-dimensional juxtaposition of circles, which leads to them becoming a sphere. This infinite overlapping is suggestive of constant developments, as well as of constant marginalisation. Marginal groups cannot find a place within the established circle(s), and as such they need to add their own perspectives to the sphere.

The inventiveness and creative work of the marginal groups is observed by Manastabal:

Il est vrai que je suis convaincue et cela par expérience que les plus grandes intelligences humaines se trouvent chez les âmes damnées. La raison en est qu'une fois qu'elles ont l'intelligence de ce qui se passe elles sont mises au défi de l'exercer par toutes les lois qui régissent leur monde et du coup le développent dans beaucoup plus de directions que ce qui est requis dans le camp dominant.<sup>216</sup>

The damned souls need to develop tools to survive in their environment; they are not allowed to use their intelligence within the dominant environment, and as such they need to expand this environment into various unsanctioned directions. This resembles Russ's contention (mentioned in Chapter II, in relation to Darrieussecq's works) that 'as in cells and sprouts, growth occurs only at the edges of something. From the peripheries [...]'.<sup>217</sup> However, this idea of growth at the margins still raises problems in terms of the possible blind spots, as some groups can still be left out. Being on the margins does not necessarily mean that we have a full view of the world, as there could still be other marginalised and unrepresented groups we do not see (as observed by Gayatri Spivak, when analysing groups of Third World women unaccounted for by French or Anglo-American feminism).<sup>218</sup> *Virgile, Non* engages with these issues, through a constant 'self-questioning',<sup>219</sup> a dialogue with a variety of groups, precluding comfortable acquiescence or

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<sup>215</sup> *Les Guérillères*, p. 97.

<sup>216</sup> *Virgile, Non*, p. 87.

<sup>217</sup> Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writing*, p. 132.

<sup>218</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'French Feminism in an International Frame', *Yale French Studies*, 65 (1981), 154–84 (p. 179).

<sup>219</sup> Hewitt, *Autobiographical Tightropes*, p. 157.



acceptance. The constant exchanges between Wittig (the character) and Manastabal do not allow the reader to consent to facile answers. However, the blind spot effect can also work in reverse: by focusing exclusively on the experience of marginal groups, the heterogeneity of the centre is ignored. Sarah Cooper highlights this issue, when analysing Wittig's fictional and philosophical work (her analysis does not include references to *Virgile, Non*):

If it is only readers who are not straight who can see the subversions that Wittig performs both on the letter of her texts as well as their meaning, then her texts are addressed possibly to the only people who do not need to be convinced of the necessities of such transgressive activities.<sup>220</sup>

If Wittig's texts can only be fully understood from the stand-point of the 'lesbian' (who, as noted before, exists outside the man/woman binary), then they might not be able to reach their full subversive potential. Considering the straight-identified reader to be someone who 'will never see differently'<sup>221</sup> can become a reductive stance, limiting the impact Wittig's texts can have. This idea resonates with Robyn Wiegman, who states that 'it is not always possible to side with Wittig, no matter how much one wants to'.<sup>222</sup> Positioning the lesbian outside the heterosexual system can have the undesired effect of isolation, rather than liberation.

To avoid such narrow readings, Cooper shifts the attention back to the straight-identified readers, as they 'remain in the lacunae of her [Wittig's] thinking at this moment in time, but there is nothing to prevent these lacunae from becoming visible in (her) writing'.<sup>223</sup> *Virgile, Non* might help fill in some of these lacunae, and bridge the gap between reading and socio-political action, and between the various interpretive communities that are engaging with Wittig's texts (be they feminists, radical lesbians, straight-identified readers etc.) Wittig's fiction provides a starting point for questioning both the current state of affairs, and our contributions to changing it. Self-questioning can help identify the possible blind-spots, and the impact our actions have upon various peripheries. While (self-)questioning does not inherently provide solutions, it prevents acquiescence and acceptance. Wittig's work can thus become a tool for (self-)analysis and (self-)correction. When looking at the literary critic as reader, Toril Moi observes that 'there is self-exposure in aesthetic judgement', alongside a necessary 'degree of humility'.<sup>224</sup> This degree of humility is not just the remit of the critic as reader, it can also

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<sup>220</sup> Cooper, *Relating to Queer Theory*, p. 176 (see also the beginning of the 'Back to Politics' section above).

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184

<sup>222</sup> Wiegman, 'Un-remembering Monique Wittig', p. 510.

<sup>223</sup> Cooper, *Relating to Queer Theory*, p. 185.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

be a feeling experienced by the active reader, by the reader who allows the other in, or at least allows the other the space to manifest its own particularities. This humility can be the first step in understanding the fluidity of the text, and of its possible interpretations. It is this humility that Wittig (the character) learns throughout the katabatic journey of *Virgile, Non*. Sharing the journey with the reader transforms the narrator's humility into vulnerability (connected to the irresponsibility of letting the other in mentioned in the Introduction). It is this vulnerability that can trigger creative responses from others, in the form of reading, writing, or socio-political action.

## Conclusion

All three authors studied in this thesis bring new parameters to the analysis of readerly dialogues in fiction: Kristeva's theoretical and psychoanalytical work can shape the space the reader is allowed to occupy, while Darrieussecq's media success and visibility can significantly affect reception by putting forward reductive interpretive frameworks. Wittig's work sheds light upon the impact of another parameter: the socio-political activism of the author, and its links to fiction (affecting both its creation and its interpretation). Since Wittig's lesbian activism has often narrowed the available interpretations of her fiction, this chapter effected a return to the texts in order to identify the formal, linguistic, and literary innovations the reader needs to engage with.

Wittig reveals the manner in which language itself affects our speaking position, with grammatical rules being rarely unbiased and all-inclusive. This is especially the case with pronouns, which conceal phallogocentrism under the guise of grammatical neutrality. Therefore, the author opts for 'on', 'elles', or 'j/e' to highlight the existence of marginal groups excluded from discourse, and refused an autonomous speaking position. Wittig creates a space for these groups (i.e. children, women, or the lesbian couple) in fiction, where they are joined by the reader. The reader needs to fill in physical and metaphorical gaps and lacunae, adding to both the appearance and the understanding of the text (for example, by filling in the circles and blank spaces in *Les Guérillères*). Therefore, the reader's work of co-creation is both mental and material. This complementarity between mental processes and physical ones is mirrored in the multisensorial reading encouraged by Wittig's texts. The reader becomes a reflection of Sophie Ménade, transforming the reading process into a combination of intellectual work, pleasures, and desires.

Wittig does not just inscribe these marginal (excluded or even invisible) groups into language and literature, but also into wider foundational stories, which still inform the cultural heritage of contemporary Western civilisation. Eve and Medusa are merged into a feminine figure that is not denied knowledge, whereas Isis and Osiris are recast as a lesbian couple with illocutionary and reproductive powers.<sup>225</sup> Nonetheless, some of Wittig's references are more obscure than biblical stories, or Egyptian and Greco-Roman mythology. This sets the reader on a path of intertextual investigations resembling archival research; as was the case with Kristeva's web of complex intertextualities, this archival work can put significant pressures on the reader's involvement with the text. Moreover, these intertextual links carry with them the language and instruments of the oppressor, which can diminish their subversive impact. However, as was highlighted by Attridge,<sup>226</sup> for the self to be able to welcome the other there needs to be a space of intersection, a certain sharing of codes and frameworks.

It is this awareness of the fact that one needs to fight from within the system that Wittig (the character) gains throughout *Virgile, Non*. Binary systems of representation are shown to be inadequate, and violent. However, their complete erasure is not a viable option. Wittig (the character) discovers that one cannot simply impose liberation upon the damned souls; their oppression is a complex mixture of lack of resources (the example of the outdated computers taken by the *bicéphales*), additional responsibilities (i.e. motherhood), confinement by the physical environment (for example, the manner in which the hilly landscape of San Francisco facilitates women's entrapment, and the men's subsequent hunting game), societal forgetting (as was shown to be the case with the memory of the Second World War), and the violence of the oppressor (in its multiple articulations, for example the male or the colonial oppressor). Manastabal facilitates this process of understanding and self-questioning, which does not just involve Wittig (the character), but also the reader. The katabatic journey does not just reveal the invisibility of the lesbian community, but the various oppressions still existent in contemporary society. An analytical lens that focuses solely on Wittig's lesbian activism ignores all these multiple interpretive layers that shape the space the reader can carve out in fiction. This space can subsequently be re-created or re-cast in the real world. The next chapter will undertake this leap from fiction to the real world, focusing on the media reception of

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<sup>225</sup> The issue of the reproductive power of a lesbian couple becomes even more pertinent given the current legalisation of same-sex marriage and partnerships. Therefore, discourses (both legal and scientific) surrounding the family need to be re-evaluated.

<sup>226</sup> See Introduction for more references to Attridge's work on the encounter with the other, and the singularity of literature.

the three authors, and on the influence the media can have on the form of this readerly space.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Good, the Bad, and the Review: Media Reception and its Impact

#### Introduction

Despite the highly personal nature of reading, trends and preferences can still be observed at national levels, assisting the publishing and creative industries in establishing more targeted approaches towards their readers. As was shown by Dudovitz, in France, ‘what people read is newsworthy information’.<sup>1</sup> Understanding the readership and their habits becomes crucial, especially in an environment with high levels of choice in terms of both the material read, and the ways of reading it (hardbacks, paperbacks and pocket editions, e-books, audiobooks, cell phone novels etc.). A study commissioned by the *Syndicat National de l'Édition* and the *Centre National du Livre* in 2014 found that the majority of readers ‘au format papier’ in France are women (57%),<sup>2</sup> with their most preferred genres being ‘policiers, livres pratiques, autres romans contemporains, histoire, livres [pour] enfants’.<sup>3</sup> The top five in the case of men looks slightly different: ‘histoire, policiers, BD, livres scientifiques, livres pratiques’.<sup>4</sup> While a majority of women readers does not necessarily imply a preference for women authors, we cannot ignore the fact that a significant number of women authors choose women narrators to evoke their experiences (i.e. motherhood, feminine desire and pleasure, bodily transformations etc.), choice that can further connect their works to the experiences of women readers. Moreover, the significant interest in ‘romans policiers’ (on the part of both genders) could suggest that factors such as the involvement of the reader in answering the ‘whodunnit’ question, and in interpreting the available information play a significant part in the French public’s choice of reading. This reaffirms the act of reading as active, inclusive, collaborative, and

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<sup>1</sup> Dudovitz, *The Myth of the Superwoman*, p. 53

<sup>2</sup> Ipsos MediaCT, *Les Français et la lecture*, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

participatory. However, what the above-mentioned statistics cannot account for are the numerous actors involved in the journey from manuscript to book; actors whose contributions will subsequently affect reading choices and processes. For example, in the French context, the publication date of a literary text<sup>5</sup> can have significant repercussions upon the way it is received by the readership: *la rentrée littéraire* becomes an institution in itself, highlighting the editors' choices for forthcoming prizes. These choices are consequently picked up by the critics and the media, presenting the audience with what they deem to be the *crème de la crème* of literary production in any particular year. The phenomenon of the *rentrée littéraire* further underlines the fact that literary production, publishing, and consumption are highly structured, despite the very personal nature of the reading process itself.

In her analysis of the critical and media reception of literary works in 1996,<sup>6</sup> Catherine Pinet-Fernandes highlights three main extra-textual elements used by critics in assessing the quality of the texts analysed: 'la maison d'édition où l'ouvrage est publié, son nombre de pages, et, enfin, la biographie de l'auteur'.<sup>7</sup> These elements are disconnected from the aesthetic value of a text, and they all precede the actual reading process; however, they can influence the choice of reading. The focus on the biography of the authors will be one of the main threads running throughout this chapter. Given its importance in criticism and media reception, it raises the question of whether the 'death of the author' is not as widely taken into account as Barthes might have wished. If critics use author biographies to justify reading choices, and to put forward value judgements, then the author is still very much alive in the public psyche. This is further reinforced by paratextual elements, many of which are still related to the person(a) of the author (for example, choice of pen name, dedications, prefaces, interviews, correspondence etc.).

This chapter will focus on the media and critical reception of the three authors studied, highlighting common themes and trends, alongside geographical differences in reception (especially between France, and the Anglo-American world). The main aim of the chapter is to analyse the reading expectations set forth by the media, while comparing and contrasting them for Darrieussecq, Kristeva, and Wittig. Two main points of examination are common for all three authors: the importance of their biography, and the critics' need to categorise and find continuities between their texts. Connections will also

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<sup>5</sup> While the study quoted earlier looks at reading more widely, this chapter will focus mostly on literary texts, enhancing the analyses from previous chapters.

<sup>6</sup> A year which includes the publication of *Truismes*.

<sup>7</sup> Pinet-Fernandes, 'Les ressorts extra-textuels du jugement littéraire aujourd'hui', p. 88.

be established between pairs of authors, for example the image of the young prodigy for Darrieussecq and Wittig, or the importance of psychoanalysis for Darrieussecq and Kristeva. Newspaper and literary magazine articles represent the main primary source analysed in this chapter, as they are available for all three authors. While video interviews are currently available for both Darrieussecq and Kristeva, they are not widely available for Wittig, due both to her reluctance to be interviewed, and to technical unavailability (very few interviews have been digitised and adapted for public streaming). Moreover, the chapter will consider only the articles themselves, rather than the comments they generated in the virtual sphere, as clear parameters for comparison can only be established for the articles (for example, author, type of publication, use of text and visual elements etc.), but not for the comments and reactions (anonymous posts are often decontextualised). The focus on articles (most of them in print format, with the most recent ones usually having an (almost) identical on-line version) also corresponds to the return to the text advocated in previous chapters. While this choice of resources<sup>8</sup> can affect the conclusions of the analysis, it also allows for further developments, through the application of a similar analytical methodology to different types of materials (for instance, video interviews, blog posts, comments or television interventions). The analysis of newspaper and magazine articles will be complemented by insights derived from three original interviews: with Marie Darrieussecq,<sup>9</sup> Dominique Samson and Suzette Robichon.<sup>10</sup> Most of the articles used in the analysis of Wittig's reception come from personal press dossiers belonging to the latter two interviewees. As they span a period from 1964 to 2003, most of them are unavailable in digital format and searchable databases, and are thus often difficult to obtain, especially by an Anglophone audience; this adds a layer of originality to the analysis.

A point of intersection between all three authors is the fact that the critics seem to construct for them an image of 'corpus authors', requiring the readers to engage with significant parts of the writers' work, not just the text being analysed or reviewed. The need for categorisation and for continuity between different works is given precedence

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<sup>8</sup> Space and time constraints have also contributed to narrowing down the breadth of the corpus.

<sup>9</sup> Marie Darrieussecq kindly agreed to answer my research questions via e-mail (Interview, Spring 2016, Appendix 1, pp. 269–271).

<sup>10</sup> Dominique Samson is Monique Wittig's niece and *deuxième ayant droit* in the literary estate. Suzette Robichon was a close friend and collaborator of Wittig's, and is currently coordinating the *Les ami.e.s de Wittig* association. They both generously agreed to be interviewed in Paris, and provided further clarifications and comments on the interview transcripts. Each interview lasted more than one hour, which resulted in transcripts longer than 15,000 words each. For practical reasons (the length of the transcripts), the interview transcripts have not been included in the Appendix section. However, they were approved by the interviewees and are available on request. Sande Zeig, Wittig's partner and collaborator, and the *premier ayant droit* kindly facilitated my meeting the two interviewees.

over thematic changes and developments, with the critics reading the authors in a manner that fits their particular framework. While all three writers have their stylistic and thematic particularities, interpreting them as ‘corpus authors’ can affect their reception by first-time readers,<sup>11</sup> encouraging the development of a narrower reading community already familiar with previous work. The image of ‘corpus authors’ also affects the temporal consumption of literature, as it promotes a chronological approach towards the works, encouraging readers to read the texts in the order of publication, yet again, possibly not taking into account the pool of first-time readers.

The chapter follows a tripartite structure, with one part dedicated to each author. The study of Marie Darrieussecq’s reception looks at her media success, and her subsequent responses, suggesting the existence of a tension between visibility and vulnerability, especially in relation to the author’s biography. Further topics of analysis include the manner in which the author is seen to approach ‘dangerous topics’, and her relationship with her publishing house. The second part — the study of Monique Wittig’s reception — benefits from more primary resources, in an attempt to make previously unavailable resources more accessible.<sup>12</sup> Their analysis is divided into four main areas of exploration: time, space, themes and language, and political engagement. The final part of the chapter will draw on the multiple positions Kristeva is considered to occupy on the French cultural and literary scenes, focusing on the highly divided reception of her fiction (especially her detective novels), the contemporary relevance of her works, and her visible media and web presence.

### **Marie Darrieussecq — from prodigy to psychological plagiarism**

With the immense success of *Truismes* during the 1996 *rentrée littéraire*, Darrieussecq took the French literary scene by storm, prompting the media to construct her in the image

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<sup>11</sup> By first-time readers, I refer to readers who come in contact with a particular writer (/ a particular writer’s work) for the first time. The concept of ‘corpus authors’ stems from critics’ tendency to look at the entirety of an author’s work, rather than at the text being reviewed. The idea of ‘corpus author’ should not be confused with the intra-*œuvre* links analysed in previous chapters. When considering a particular writer to be a ‘corpus author’, critics focus almost exclusively on the similarities and continuities between their works. In this view, an understanding of one work cannot be achieved without knowledge of the other ones. Intra-*œuvre* links can add an extra interpretive layer to the works, but they are not a compulsory element of the reading process. They are an addition, rather than a necessary starting point. Moreover, intra-*œuvre* links do not necessarily need to refer to similarities and continuities.

<sup>12</sup> Due to the nature of the material analysed, page numbers are not available for all newspaper articles. When page numbers are unavailable, a scanned copy of the article is available in the Appendices section.



of the young genius,<sup>13</sup> or the literary prodigy, setting up a set of expectations for future publications. One of the characteristics of the literary genius, as put forward by the media of the time, is the speed of writing. Darrieussecq 'écrit [ce livre] en un mois et demi',<sup>14</sup> a fact that appears to distinguish her as a 'surdouée'.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, her young age and intellectual preoccupations contribute to strengthening this image further:

Marie Darrieussecq naît en 1969 à Bayonne. Dès l'âge de six ans, elle commence à écrire. Ancienne élève de l'École Normale Supérieure de la rue d'Ulm, agrégée de lettres, elle enseigne aujourd'hui à l'université de Lille, tout en préparant une thèse sur l'autobiographie contemporaine chez Perec et Leins.<sup>16</sup>

This image glosses over any difficulties arising during the publication process (for example, this was not Darrieussecq's first manuscript, and even *Truismes* was rejected by certain publishing houses),<sup>17</sup> keeping only the elements that suit the pre-set framework. However, this image influences subsequent reception, as it leads to comparisons between the success and style of *Truismes* and those of following works. When reviewing *My Phantom Husband*<sup>18</sup> for the *London Review of Books*, James Peach is critical of Darrieussecq's decision not to continue in the humorous and sarcastic vein of *Truismes*: 'one way or another, Darrieussecq's second novel suffers from a major "manque de fun" after the comedy of *Pig Tales*. [...] [I]t isn't clear that the reader will have enough interest in the narrator to want to keep up with her account as it slides between the real and the imagined'.<sup>19</sup> Despite the fact that she is 'tired and over-publicised by the success of the happy sow',<sup>20</sup> her thematic and stylistic change is still seen to go against her set, constructed, and to a certain extent failure-proof precedent. Her instant success with *Truismes* had another side-effect, affecting her reception within the intellectual and academic spheres, to which Darrieussecq belonged through her doctoral work: 'je viens de l'université et parfois la recherche me manque, l'enseignement aussi'.<sup>21</sup> Her success with the public was not mirrored by a similar reception from academics and intellectuals:

That took much longer, because it is forbidden in France to publish a bestseller and to be an intellectual. It's forbidden. You can't do that! They are very snobbish

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<sup>13</sup> In a similar way to Françoise Sagan, after the publication of her first novel, *Bonjour tristesse*.

<sup>14</sup> 'Goncourt des lycéens – Marie Darrieussecq', *Le Magazine littéraire*, No. 347, October 1996, p. 84.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>17</sup> Pinet-Fernandes, 'Les ressorts extra-textuels du jugement littéraire aujourd'hui', pp. 98–99.

<sup>18</sup> *My Phantom Husband* is the English translation of Darrieussecq's second novel, *Naissance des fantômes* (1998).

<sup>19</sup> James Peach, 'Letting out the Inner Pig', *London Review of Books*, Vol. 21, No. 18, 16 September 1999, p. 31 <<https://www.lrb.co.uk/v21/n18/james-peach/letting-out-the-inner-pig>> [accessed 19 April 2017].

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Marie Darrieussecq, Appendix 1, p. 271.

and if you publish something that is widely approved of, it can't be good. It's too consensual. It's despised. In France, only dead writers are good writers.<sup>22</sup>

Whilst this assertion might need nuancing, it enhances the view that critical reception is not always focused on the aesthetic value of a particular text, but rather uses shortcuts (like the relationship between the author and his/her public) to put forward its conclusions. These shortcuts are partly needed due to the immediate nature of media critique<sup>23</sup> as both specialist and generalist publications are expected to respond in a timely manner to the movements of the literary scene.

Darrieussecq's success triggered another phenomenon, through which she was encouraged to engage with the media, and articulate her responses in journalistic form (press and televised interviews, radio shows,<sup>24</sup> regular columns etc.). Most often this allowed her to expand on current topics of interest, for example the Charlie Hebdo attacks,<sup>25</sup> or the French school curriculum, and its exclusion of women writers.<sup>26</sup> However, it also had a negative impact, and generated tension between her refusal to be an *auteur(e) engagé(e)*, and the media's tendency to keep pushing her towards this position. In an interview with the author, she highlights her choice of distancing herself from this socially engaged position: 'Je n'ai pas d'avis sur la société contemporaine. J'évite seulement la dispersion sur les réseaux sociaux mais c'est très personnel. Je ne maîtrise pas cette écriture-là et cet usage-là du temps.'<sup>27</sup> This could partly be in response to her experience with *Elle* magazine, for which she interviewed Alain Juppé, but as she was unable to see the final draft, the interview seemed devoid of any probing questions on the French social context, despite the fact that they were present in the submitted copy. Her attempt at being an *auteur(e) engagé(e)* backfired, as the final interview did not mirror her incisive and informed questioning of Alain Juppé: 'L'expérience m'a servi de leçon. Il faut que j'écrive mes romans dans mon coin, que je ne me mêle plus d'autre chose...Je me méfie de la littérature engagée.'<sup>28</sup> This refusal of *littérature engagée* can

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<sup>22</sup> Marie Darrieussecq interviewed by Jasper Rees, 'A writer's life: Marie Darrieussecq', *Telegraph*, 30 May 2005 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/3642812/A-writers-life-Marie-Darrieussecq.html>> [accessed 19 April 2017].

<sup>23</sup> Ansel, *Socio-politique de la réception*, p. 103.

<sup>24</sup> Darrieussecq had a short *chronique* on *France Culture*, discussing current news topics <<http://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/les-idees-claires-de-marie-darrieussecq-11-12#>> [accessed 4 July 2016].

<sup>25</sup> <<http://www.pol-editeur.com/index.php?spec=editions-pol-actualites&numpage=2&numrub=2&numcateg=&numsscateg=&lg=fr&numpara=4008>> [accessed 4 July 2016].

<sup>26</sup> Marie Darrieussecq, 'Ringards sur le monde', *Libération*, 9 October 2015 <[http://www.liberation.fr/chroniques/2015/10/09/ringards-sur-le-monde\\_1400736](http://www.liberation.fr/chroniques/2015/10/09/ringards-sur-le-monde_1400736)> [accessed 19 April 2017].

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Marie Darrieussecq, see Appendix 1, p. 270.

<sup>28</sup> Peach, 'Letting out the Inner Pig'.

be questioned, if we take into account the fact that Darrieussecq dedicated the *Prix Médicis* for her 2013 novel, *Il faut...*, ‘à la ministre Christiane Taubira, victime d’insultes racistes en France’.<sup>29</sup> This development could mirror an increase in the author’s ability to deal with the media, using the visibility it offers to open up debates relevant to the social scene. In a 2007 review of *Tom est mort*, Aimé Ancia considered that ‘il est possible de mesurer le poids idéal d’un écrivain. Selon nos premiers calculs, Marie Darrieussecq a atteint le sien’.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, her media engagement could have reached ‘un poids idéal,’ a balance beneficial to both parties.

Nonetheless, this does not do away with the fact that, in terms of media reception, there still is a tension between visibility and vulnerability. This tension became extremely pertinent, after the publication of *Tom est mort*, an event that prompted Camille Laurens to accuse Darrieussecq of psychological plagiarism.<sup>31</sup> The debate was triggered by Laurens’ article ‘Marie Darrieussecq ou le syndrome du coucou’,<sup>32</sup> which raised questions about the writing of trauma, and the friction between autobiography and autofiction. The debate was highly visible and it put both authors in the vulnerable position of having to relive past traumas: Laurens referred back to her autobiographical account, *Philippe*, dealing with the loss of her new-born son; whereas Darrieussecq had to disclose the fact that her own family was affected by the death of a child (namely her brother). The debate was not carried out at the level of aesthetic choices and literary genres, but rather at the level of biography, clearly emphasising that the ‘death of the author’ remains a selective lens for analysis. In response to the debate, critics noted its lack of literary arguments: ‘It is depressing to read that Marie Darrieussecq has defended her work from accusations of “psychological plagiarism” by insisting on her real-life experience of dead babies.’<sup>33</sup> Biographical truth was transformed into an indispensable element for fiction, and even into a parameter of aesthetic value. This trend was observed by Elisabeth Fallaize in her analysis of Simone de Beauvoir’s work: after the publication of her autobiographical volumes, the reception of her fiction deteriorated significantly.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Chantal Guy, ‘Marie Darrieussecq: la couleur des sentiments’, *La Presse*, 30 November 2013 <<http://www.lapresse.ca/arts/livres/entrevues/201311/29/01-4716074-marie-darrieussecq-la-couleur-des-sentiments.php>> [accessed 19 April 2017]. On the same topic, see also Marie Darrieussecq, ‘Pour Christiane Taubira’, *Le Monde*, 17–18 November 2013.

<sup>30</sup> Aimé Ancia, ‘À la recherche du Tom perdu’, *Le Magazine littéraire*, No. 467, September 2007, p. 74.

<sup>31</sup> The tension between visibility and vulnerability affected both authors during the debate.

<sup>32</sup> Camille Laurens, ‘Marie Darrieussecq ou Le syndrome du coucou’, *La Revue Littéraire*, No. 32, Autumn 2007, 1–14.

<sup>33</sup> Flora Jeunet, ‘Dead Babies’, *London Review of Books*, Vol. 29, No. 18, 20 September 2007, p. 20 <<https://www.lrb.co.uk/v29/n18/elisabeth-ladenson/short-cuts>> [accessed 19 April 2017].

<sup>34</sup> Fallaize, ‘Reception problems for women writers’, pp. 55–56.

Critics wanted to discuss ‘the woman and not what she wrote’,<sup>35</sup> using personal accounts to reduce the value of literary texts.

While they bridge the gap between the author and his/her readers, biographical details can become detrimental to reception, affecting the privacy of the author, and even becoming synonymous with value judgements. In this context, it is difficult not to consider Ancia’s closing sentences as a contribution to the ‘psychological plagiarism’ debate: ‘la romancière *doit imaginer et fabriquer*. À l’abri du réel, elle peut se pencher sur le cadavre de Tom sans trembler. Et *choisir ses mots, en écrivain*’.<sup>36</sup> They also reveal another danger carried by the over-reliance on biographical details: they take away from the creative work of the author, to the extent that the *travail d’écrivain* can become secondary. This reduction of the writer’s imaginative work can have greater consequences for women’s writing, a field that until recently had to assert itself as significant on the wider literary scene. For example, in a review of Darrieussecq’s *Clèves*, the novel was subjected to such a reduction, even though the review was trying to be complimentary: ‘En exhumant ses confessions de teenager, la romancière a découvert les émois et les obsessions de ses 17 ans. Elle en a composé un beau roman féministe et cru, *Clèves*’.<sup>37</sup> Whilst recognising the significance of writing the pleasures and desires of a young woman’s body, the reviewer relates them to Darrieussecq’s own ‘confessions de teenager’. The feminist message is paired with the personal experience, a pairing that can limit the interpretive possibilities and the perceived aesthetic value of the work.

Biography thus becomes a double-edged sword: it can assist women writers in articulating experiences not yet told, but it can also diminish positive perceptions of their creative contributions to literature. A similar phenomenon occurs in Darrieussecq’s case with psychoanalysis, which becomes linked to her own biography, and to that of her patients. She credits psychoanalysis with taking the personal out of the fictional: ‘la psychanalyse a débarrassé mes manuscrits des scories personnelles, des règlements de compte familiaux’.<sup>38</sup> While the positions of analyst and analysand are distinct, Darrieussecq does not underscore this distinction enough, leading to possible misinterpretations (as will be shown below in relation to the Darrieussecq-Laurens debate):

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>36</sup> Ancia, ‘À la recherche du Tom perdu’, p. 74, italics mine.

<sup>37</sup> Anne Diatkine, ‘Marie Darrieussecq, Princesse au petit moi’, *Elle*, 2 September 2011 <<http://www.poledeiteur.com/index.php?spec=livre&ISBN=978-2-8180-1397-7>> [accessed 13 July 2017].

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Marie Darrieussecq, Appendix 1, p. 271.

Darrieussecq, who has just started with a new analyst, is saying that she'd like to take on some patients herself. 'One or two a day, because it's very coherent with the way I write. There is a phrase of Deleuze that I like very much. "Writing is not a way of speaking. *It's a way of listening.*" When I write I have to be in *a state of emptiness*. I have to forget my psychology. I have to forget my husband, my children, my friends, my worries. *And I have to become an empty place where the world can flow through. I have to become porous.*'<sup>39</sup>

Relating her own writing to her work with patients makes it unclear whether this 'state of emptiness' is filled by the stories of her patients, or by the stories she creates in her fictional universe; or whether the psychoanalytical methods used for reaching this 'state of emptiness' can also be applied to reaching the necessary stage for writing. This lack of clarity in Darrieussecq's description of the way psychoanalysis intersects with writing allows for allegations such as those put forward by Camille Laurens: 'un "écrivain et psychanalyste" peut-il garantir à ses analysants que ses romans n'encombreront jamais — jusqu'au tragique — leurs problèmes personnels?'<sup>40</sup> In Laurens's view, being a practising psychoanalyst takes away from Darrieussecq's creative and literary contributions. The fact that Darrieussecq herself remains vague about her psychoanalytic practice can fuel such apprehension and negative assessments. Darrieussecq later clarified such doubts, in a special *Magazine littéraire* dossier on the links between writers and psychoanalysis: 'Je n'ai jamais à proprement parler raconté mon analyse dans mon livre. C'est un territoire privé, de même que l'analyse de mes patients'.<sup>41</sup> While one does not need to be a psychoanalyst to have access to other people's stories, Laurens's intervention highlights the manner in which biographical details can render Darrieussecq more vulnerable.

However, Laurens's stance affects her own literary position as well (not just Darrieussecq's), as this constant pairing of fiction and biography turns the public's attention towards the personal disagreement, rather than the texts. Despite the fact that the starting point of the Darrieussecq–Laurens debate was the text, once it reached the public, the debate distanced itself from the text, involving mostly the biographies of the two authors (the lost children in their families, and Darrieussecq's access to her patients' stories), and their common publishing house.<sup>42</sup> The debate added very little to the literary field, but it did nonetheless highlight the need for contemporary authors to engage

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<sup>39</sup> Rees, 'A writer's life: Marie Darrieussecq', italics mine.

<sup>40</sup> Laurens, 'Marie Darrieussecq ou Le syndrome du coucou', p. 12.

<sup>41</sup> Marie Darrieussecq, '« Être libéré de soi »', *Le Magazine littéraire*, No. 473, March 2008, p. 58.

<sup>42</sup> See for example Elisabeth Ladenson's analysis of the debate ('Shortcuts') in the *London Review of Books*, Vol. 29, No. 18, September 2007, p. 20 <<https://www.lrb.co.uk/v29/n18/elisabeth-ladenson/short-cuts>> [accessed 19 April 2017].

effectively with the media (and thus, by proxy, with their readers), as the nature of this engagement can have a significant impact on their future publications and reception (for example, Laurens stopped her collaboration with P.O.L., while Darrieussecq subsequently published *Rapport de police*, outlining the manner in which plagiarism accusations have affected writers throughout history). Some critics highlight the impact of such debates on sales — ‘entre temps ses [de Marie Darrieussecq] ventes ont doublé. Est-ce l’effet de la polémique lancée par Camille Laurens ?’<sup>43</sup> — while also mentioning that this remains very much a Parisian affair: ‘en revanche, il semble que la polémique ait surtout touché les Parisiens’.<sup>44</sup>

The need for continuity is maintained less problematically when the reviewers turn towards the texts, than when they try to establish continuities between biography and fiction. As was highlighted in the second chapter of this study, certain thematic and stylistic elements recurrent in the novels point towards the emergence of a Darrieussecq-ien universe. When asked about these elements, the writer establishes a play between their conscious and unconscious use — ‘Je suis consciente de ces éléments mais je les laisse se déployer inconsciemment’<sup>45</sup> — suggesting they belong more to the nature of fiction, than to authorial intention. There are at least two ways reviewers approach these continuities: either comparing pairs of novels, or succinctly offering a panoramic view of Darrieussecq’s work. In the first category, we observe comparisons between *Le Bébé* and *Tom est mort*, or between *Truismes* and *Clèves*: ‘Tom est comme le double négatif du bébé — le récit se déroule d’ailleurs aux antipodes de la France, en Australie — mais sa lecture ne provoque pas un effet diamétralement opposé’;<sup>46</sup> ‘[Clèves] c’est la réécriture hyperréaliste, presque austère et émouvante, du premier livre de Marie Darrieussecq’;<sup>47</sup> or ‘quinze ans après *Truismes*, elle revient avec Solange, une adolescente, sur la métamorphose d’un corps, dans un rapport étroit aux mots à disposition pour penser et vivre ces changements’.<sup>48</sup> The panoramic reflections turn towards topics such as absence, ghosts, and Darrieussecq’s linguistic play on clichés and stereotypes:

<sup>43</sup> Mohammed Aïssaoui, ‘Darrieussecq: le bon côté de la polémique’, *Le Figaro*, 13 September 2007, p. 2.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.; a similar focus on the capital is highlighted in earlier articles dealing with Marie Ndiaye’s accusations: ‘une nouvelle polémique très parisienne relance le débat sur le plagiat’ (Patrick Kéchichian, ‘Marie Darrieussecq a-t-elle « singé » Marie Ndiaye ?’, *Le Monde*, 4 March 1998, np., italics mine).

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Marie Darrieussecq, Appendix 1, p. 271.

<sup>46</sup> Ancia, ‘À la recherche du Tom perdu’, p. 74.

<sup>47</sup> Grégoire Leménager, ‘La p... de Clèves’, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 6 October 2011 <<http://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/romans/20111005.OBS1769/la-p-de-cleves.html>> [accessed 19 April 2017].

<sup>48</sup> Sylvain Bourmeau, ‘La jeune fille et le sexe des magazines’, *Libération*, September 2011 <[http://next.liberation.fr/livres/2011/08/27/marie-darrieussecq\\_757249](http://next.liberation.fr/livres/2011/08/27/marie-darrieussecq_757249)> [accessed 19 April 2017].



au fil des années passées en compagnie des spectres et des fantômes qui peuplent son œuvre.<sup>49</sup>

voilà plusieurs années que l’imaginaire de Marie Darrieussecq ondule autour d’absences, d’auras, de vides.<sup>50</sup>

le sujet de Marie Darrieussecq depuis *Truismes* [...] est toujours le même: il s’agit d’examiner ce que le langage dit de l’expérience, la manière dont les mots, et notamment les lieux communs, énoncent la réalité et, en retour, la façonnent.<sup>51</sup>

it may sound improbable, but the novel belongs in a continuum.<sup>52</sup>

Most often these examples remain at the level of observation, with no further analysis of what this possible ‘continuum’ could mean for the reader. A few reviewers take a different stance, deciding to highlight the diversity of Darrieussecq’s work, but they remain a minority: ‘l’éclectisme de l’ancienne élève de la Rue d’Ulm, sautillant d’Ovide et Mme de La Fayette aux nymphettes d’aujourd’hui, ne cessera jamais de nous étonner’;<sup>53</sup> ‘Less readable and less attractive than *Pig Tales*, *My Phantom Husband* is nevertheless an achievement. The contrast with the predecessor can only be to Darrieussecq’s credit, as evidence of her determination not to be pigeonholed.’<sup>54</sup> While this focus on continuities and intra-*œuvre* links can encourage readers to engage with a multitude of Darrieussecq’s works, another possible reading scenario can involve (first-time) readers being deterred from entering the Darrieussecq-ien universe, if the keys for understanding and interpretation are seen to be spread out across multiple texts. On the other hand, these links can contribute to the formation of a community of readers, familiar with Darrieussecq’s texts, closely following her development, acquiring both depth and breadth in terms of interpretations. While assessing the impact of reviews on individual reading experiences is almost impossible, outlining the various reading journeys these reviews can encourage helps us understand the impact of media reception. The above-mentioned community of readers is not static, and its size and composition can vary, responding to both Darrieussecq’s and the media’s stimuli.

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<sup>49</sup> Ancia, ‘À la recherche du Tom perdu’, p. 74.

<sup>50</sup> Camille Thomine, ‘Avec *Clèves* Marie Darrieussecq raconte sans detours l’expérience de la puberté d’une jeune fille’, *Le Magazine littéraire*, August 2011 <<http://www.pol-editeur.com/index.php?spec=livre&ISBN=978-2-8180-1397-7>> [accessed 19 April 2017].

<sup>51</sup> Raphaëlle Leyris, ‘Une vraie jeune fille’, *Le Monde*, 21 October 2011 <[http://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2011/10/20/une-vraie-jeune-fille\\_1590709\\_3260.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2011/10/20/une-vraie-jeune-fille_1590709_3260.html)> [accessed 19 April 2017].

<sup>52</sup> Rees, ‘A writer’s life: Marie Darrieussecq’.

<sup>53</sup> Marianne Payot, ‘Marie Darrieussecq, nymphe de Clèves’, *L’Express*, August 2011 <[http://www.lexpress.fr/culture/livre/cleves\\_1022749.html](http://www.lexpress.fr/culture/livre/cleves_1022749.html)> [accessed 19 April 2017].

<sup>54</sup> Peach, ‘Letting out the Inner Pig’ (this is an early review, focusing on Darrieussecq’s first two novels, and as such it cannot offer an exhaustive account or comparison of Darrieussecq’s *œuvre*; it does nonetheless highlight Darrieussecq’s ability to distance herself from the novelistic style that guaranteed her initial success).

This variation is often accounted for in articles, by mentioning sales numbers, seen as another mark of success. *Truismes* remains by far Darrieussecq's most successful novel, with 400,000 copies sold in the first year after its publication, and an international reach of forty countries.<sup>55</sup> This renders Darrieussecq 'une référence obligée à l'occasion de la rentrée littéraire',<sup>56</sup> despite the fact that her subsequent novels did not match her debut success. Her second novel was able to capitalise on her initial visibility: '*My Phantom Husband* has sold more than 70,000 copies in France, which is a lot for a novel of crashing non-drama.'<sup>57</sup> Nonetheless, some of her following works significantly enlarged her usual community of readers: while one critic notes that, since the popular success of *Truismes* 'Darrieussecq has [...] placated the intellectuals by settling down with a more selective readership for her subsequent novels', the same critic also points out that 'in 2002 she nearly spoiled it with huge sales for *Le Bébé*, a non-fiction book about motherhood'.<sup>58</sup> Through the topic approached, *Le Bébé* appealed to a wide audience of parents in general, and mothers in particular, but it left a significant part of the critical *milieu* unimpressed. For example, Stéphane Denis insists on the financial gains brought about by the novel: 'mineur est le mot, mais quand on est romancière tout fait ventre'.<sup>59</sup> He also splits the text into two parts, a literary one, and baby-oriented one: 'C'est page 151 du *Bébé* et c'est pour le côté littéraire. En revanche, "*J'aime lui tapoter les fesses*", page 31, c'est pour le côté bébé.'<sup>60</sup> This split goes against Darrieussecq's project of bringing the baby into literature, as it confirms its status as a *sujet mineur*.

A similar critical rift was caused by the publication of *Clèves* in 2011: 'Ça fait une bonne dizaine d'années que ça se met en place: au pays des critiques, on n'est jamais assez prude, assez défiant de tout ce qui pourrait se jouer sous la ceinture — cette zone réputée infâme et dénuée d'intérêt.'<sup>61</sup> Unsurprisingly, the major changes in the make-up of Darrieussecq's community of readers (by way of an increase in the number of readers) were caused by the publication of novels considered to deal with taboos, such as the newborn baby as a compelling subject for literature (*Le Bébé*), or with dangerous topics, for example feminine experiences, pleasure, and desires (*Clèves*). Darrieussecq is known for

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<sup>55</sup> Lambeth, 'Entretien avec Marie Darrieussecq', pp. 806 and 813.

<sup>56</sup> Pinet-Fernandes, 'Les ressorts extra-textuels du jugement littéraire aujourd'hui', p. 99.

<sup>57</sup> Peach, 'Letting out the Inner Pig'.

<sup>58</sup> Rees, 'A writer's life: Marie Darrieussecq'.

<sup>59</sup> Stéphane Denis, 'Sept kilos à elle deux', *Le Figaro Magazine*, 6 April 2002, p. 75.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Virginie Despentes, 'Nous avons été cette gamine', *Le Monde*, 21 October 2011 <[http://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2011/10/20/nous-avons-ete-cette-gamine\\_1590708\\_3260.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2011/10/20/nous-avons-ete-cette-gamine_1590708_3260.html)> [accessed 19 April 2017].



unpacking ‘les lieux communs’ and ‘les clichés’,<sup>62</sup> destabilising the unquestioned status quo:

I need to explode clichés, to see how they work from the inside. Nothing in the world is more shrouded in clichés than babies. I was very confronted by the fact that from the moment I had a child I wasn’t allowed to write any more. You can’t be an intellectual and have a child.<sup>63</sup>

The reception of *Le Bébé* highlights the paradox of writing about taboo subjects: despite them being hidden or shrouded in clichés and ready-made phrases, they attract some of the largest audiences. The hidden becomes one of the most attractive topics for the readership.

With *Clèves*, she took this deconstructive endeavour even further, by looking into the transformations of a young girl’s body, the emergence and satisfaction of feminine desires, and even paedophilia. This decision raised the question of whether she might have gone too far, a doubt that is visible in the titles and subtitles of some of the reviews: ‘En relatant l’éveil à la sexualité d’une gamine des années 1980 Marie Darrieussecq *en a-t-elle trop fait?*’;<sup>64</sup> ‘La p... de Clèves’.<sup>65</sup> At the other end of the spectrum, some reviews insisted on the shared nature of Solange’s experiences: ‘*Clèves*, une épopée de la puberté signée Marie Darrieussecq’;<sup>66</sup> ‘L’initiation amoureuse’;<sup>67</sup> ‘une vraie jeune fille’;<sup>68</sup> ‘Nous avons été cette gamine’.<sup>69</sup> The sexual connotations of the novel are also revealed early on in the reviews by the use of expressions such as ‘nymphette de Clèves’<sup>70</sup> or ‘sexes des magazines’.<sup>71</sup> In a similar manner to Darrieussecq, the reviewers use the intertextual links to Madame de La Fayette’s novel as a known element to ease the entry into this taboo territory: ‘Plus dévergondée que la princesse de Clèves, moins garce que Lolita’;<sup>72</sup> ‘Au fond, on aurait tort de lire *Clèves* comme un vulgaire remake de chef-d’œuvre de Mme

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<sup>62</sup> Aliette Armel, ‘De Clèves au Congo’, *Le Magazine littéraire*, No. 535, September 2013, p. 36.

<sup>63</sup> Rees, ‘A writer’s life: Marie Darrieussecq’.

<sup>64</sup> Christine Ferniot and Delphine Peras, ‘Marie Darrieussecq a-t-elle versé dans le trash avec Clèves?’, *Lire*, August 2011 <[http://www.lexpress.fr/culture/livre/marie-darrieussecq-a-t-elle-verse-dans-le-trash-avec-cleves\\_1024339.html](http://www.lexpress.fr/culture/livre/marie-darrieussecq-a-t-elle-verse-dans-le-trash-avec-cleves_1024339.html)> [accessed 19 April 2017], italics mine.

<sup>65</sup> Leménager, ‘La p... de Clèves’.

<sup>66</sup> Emily Barnett, ‘Clèves, une épopée de la puberté signée Marie Darrieussecq’, *Les Inrockuptibles*, 27 August 2011 <<http://www.lesinrocks.com/2011/08/27/livres/cleves-une-epopee-de-la-pubertee-signee-marie-darrieussecq-1110605/>> [accessed 19 April 2017].

<sup>67</sup> Jean Sorrente, ‘L’initiation amoureuse’, *Tageblatt*, September-October 2011 <<http://www.politeur.com/index.php?spec=livre&ISBN=978-2-8180-1397-7>> [accessed 19 April 2017].

<sup>68</sup> Leyris, ‘Une vraie jeune fille’.

<sup>69</sup> Desportes, ‘Nous avons été cette gamine’.

<sup>70</sup> Payot, ‘Marie Darrieussecq, nymphette de Clèves’.

<sup>71</sup> Bourmeau, ‘La jeune fille et le sexe des magazines’.

<sup>72</sup> Barnett, ‘Clèves, une épopée de la puberté’.

de La Fayette’;<sup>73</sup> ‘les clins d’œil à la patrimoniale *Princesse de Clèves*’.<sup>74</sup> *La Princesse de Clèves* belongs to the French cultural heritage, a fact that increases the visibility of Darrieussecq’s novel.

However, the reversal operated by Darrieussecq, allowing Solange to experiment widely with her sexual desires, can set her in opposition to *la princesse de Clèves*, known for the refusal to act upon her feelings for *le duc de Nemours*. Darrieussecq is seen to play with some of the most well-established *topoi* of French culture; this play can have negative effects in terms of reception. Such a possibility is recognised even by her most complimentary reviewers:

Il [*Clèves*] a déclenché chez des critiques et des lecteurs des réactions violentes de rejet en raison de sa crudité [...] Reste à savoir si Marie Darrieussecq se tire bien de son sujet extraordinairement périlleux ; si, voulant dire ce que les jeunes filles vivent avec ce roman cru et cruel (drôle, aussi), elle ne verse pas dans le trivial, l’obscène et l’inapproprié, dans le pas grand-chose raconté en se gorgeant de gros mots pour sur-souligner sa hardiesse.<sup>75</sup>

The public’s ‘réactions violentes’ suggest that the readership is not yet ready to tackle such a complex and undiscussed subject, that there is a temporal dislocation between the time of publication, and the openness of the readership. The negative (and even violent) reactions to the choice of subject are exacerbated by Darrieussecq’s use of language, by ‘la crudité des mots’<sup>76</sup> seen as a challenge to norms of *bienséance*, and even to literary practice. Leyris’s article is part of a wider *Le Monde* opinion piece, which also takes in Virginie Despentes’s *adhésion* (analysed in the following section), and Jean-Philippe Domecq’s *objection*<sup>77</sup> to the novel. Domecq criticises the lack of integration of crude vocabulary into the wider narrative framework: ‘Le problème n’est pas que ce soit hard; mais que ce hard est triste quand il a si peu d’écho chez le personnage et dans le tempo d’écriture!’.<sup>78</sup> For him, there should be a difference between ‘les scènes de sexe sans désir et celles de rencontre amoureuse’;<sup>79</sup> he thus ignores the fact Solange is unequipped to discern between the two.

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<sup>73</sup> Leménager, ‘La p... de Clèves’.

<sup>74</sup> Leyris, ‘Une vraie jeune fille’.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.; the article this paragraph belongs to offers an overall positive and complementary reception of *Clèves*, while simultaneously acknowledging the range of reactions generated by the novel, and the possible causes leading to these reactions.

<sup>76</sup> Thomine, ‘Avec *Clèves*’.

<sup>77</sup> \*\*\* ‘Une vraie jeune fille’, *Le Monde*, 21 October 2011, p. 9.

<sup>78</sup> Jean Philippe Domecq, ‘Quand le sexe vire à la viande’, *Le Monde*, 21 October 2011, p. 9.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

While reviewers try to explain the reasons underlining these violent reading reactions, fellow writer Virginie Despentes continues Darrieussecq's project, bringing to light even further the gender biases present on the French literary scene:

À l'extrême limite, la brigade du bon goût littéraire tolère encore les bites qui peinent à jouir et sentent le pipi de vieux, Philippe Roth passe encore, on sent que c'est tout juste, sans trop déranger les estomacs délicats de la critique hexagonale. Mais la petite chatte affolée de la Solange de Clèves: un digne silence accueille son explosion hormonale. Trop de fluides, sans doute.<sup>80</sup>

Unlike the reviewers, Virginie Despentes is known for her subversive creative stance in both film and literature, and thus her use of words such as *bites*, or *chatte affolée* in *Le Monde* might not be perceived as too shocking. On the other hand, these linguistic choices, in the context of the renowned newspaper, can trigger the same reactions of repulsion some might have when reading *Clèves*. Despentes is not just reviewing the novel, but simultaneously forcing the reader to face his/her prejudices, mirroring Darrieussecq's strategy of naming some of the most widely known, and yet widely silenced feelings and desires. Despentes is also reviewing the social context in general, and the critics and readers in particular. The kairotic mismatch or temporal dislocation highlighted above is a product of the double-standards of literary reception, since the feminine voice of desire is not allowed to shout as loudly as its masculine counterpart. Despentes is carrying out a double- or a meta- reading: she is reading the novel, but also reading the reception (or reading the reading), simultaneously reversing the process of silencing surrounding the young female body: '*Clèves* fonctionne comme un remonteur de moments, ni oubliés, ni occultés, mais jamais consultés, jamais célébrés'.<sup>81</sup>

Virginie Despentes's review aptly raises the question of who writes about Darrieussecq in the French press. As analysed above, there are significant differences between responses to Darrieussecq on the part of critics and reviewers, on the one hand, and on the part of other writers, on the other; this distinction is visible in Laurens's article<sup>82</sup> as well. Both writers (Laurens and Despentes) set in motion a triangular relation between Darrieussecq, their own work, and the wider literary and critical scenes. However, the results are significantly dissimilar: Despentes's ideas converge with Darrieussecq's in a protest against the silencing of women's body, and against the literary establishment; whereas Laurens distances herself both from Darrieussecq, and the critical *milieu* which she considers to be supportive of her. Depending on the standpoint of the

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<sup>80</sup> Despentes, 'Nous avons été cette gamine'.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Laurens, 'Marie Darrieussecq ou Le syndrome du coucou'.

author-reviewer, Darrieussecq is seen to belong either to the periphery or to the centre of the literary establishment: in Desportes's view, Darrieussecq leans towards the subversive (the peripheral, the marginal); while from Laurens's perspective, she enjoys the approval of the literary environment (at the centre of the literary establishment).

This multiplicity of perspectives is further complicated if we consider reviews from outside France. First of all, they need to take into account the issue of translation, and the expectations of the (national) audiences. Regarding the latter, Sheena Joughin considers that 'the French love word-games [...], and they have always liked their dirty books spattered with earth and raw meat',<sup>83</sup> referring to authors such as De Sade, Bataille, Zyke or Reyes, and distinguishing what she considers to be the preferences of the French and British readers. The reading experience of the latter is not aided by the translation, as '*Pig Tales* would have had more of a chance [...] without Linda Coverdale, whose translation is disastrously flashy'.<sup>84</sup> Also commenting on translation, Peach favours Coverdale: '*My Phantom Husband* [...] has a different translator from *Pig Tales* — Helen Stevenson rather than Linda Coverdale — and suffers from uncomfortable moments'.<sup>85</sup> In a review of Darrieussecq's British media reception, Delphine Heitz compliments Coverdale's work and her understanding of the author's linguistic play: 'Un éloge donc unanime du roman dont la traductrice, Linda Coverdale, a "merveilleusement bien" su (*The Independent*) retranscrire le français "nerveux et direct" (*The Irish Times*) de Marie Darrieussecq'.<sup>86</sup> Subsequent translations of Darrieussecq's work seem to have favoured Coverdale, or Ian Monk (whose 'admirable efficiency'<sup>87</sup> is noted by Roz Kaveney). Darrieussecq's reception in the Anglophone academic sphere is overwhelmingly positive (for example, Darrieussecq's website is managed by the University of Arizona).<sup>88</sup> However, Anglophone academics tend to refer to the original French text (as they are most often specialists of French literature), whereas reviewers quote from the published

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<sup>83</sup> Sheena Joughin, 'The views from the pig-sty', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 4 July 1997, p. 24.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. While these remarks suggests the reviewer's understanding of Darrieussecq's linguistic work, they remain unclear as to Joughin's knowledge of French. Her title suggestion, 'hogwash' — '[which] would have better prepared us for the games *Truismes* plays with itself; games that are tiring enough without a competitive translator' — is equally ambiguous, as the derogatory meaning of *hogwash* could refer to the text, the translation, or both.

<sup>85</sup> Peach, 'Letting out the Inner Pig'.

<sup>86</sup> Delphine Heitz, 'Darrieussecq franchit la Manche', *Les Inrockuptibles*, 27 June 2001 <<http://www.lesinrocks.com/2001/06/27/musique/concerts/darrieussecq-franchit-la-manche-11223382/>> [accessed 15 May 2017].

<sup>87</sup> Roz Kaveney, 'A Brief Stay with the Living', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 20 June 2003, p. 26.

<sup>88</sup> <<http://darrieussecq.arizona.edu/en/about>> [accessed 5 July 2016].

translations. This opens a further avenue for research, by looking at the impact translations can have upon (international) reception.<sup>89</sup>

Another important actor in the reception of Darrieussecq's work is her publishing house, P.O.L., a medium-sized publishing house, known for 'le travail de qualité de Paul Otchakovsky-Laurens'.<sup>90</sup> The success of *Truismes* directed a lot of media attention to P.O.L., and to the way Darrieussecq came to work with them. Hers is a success story the media were keen to recount, as it corresponds to the image of the young prodigy: 'dès réception du manuscrit, plusieurs éditeurs se déclarent en effet intéressés',<sup>91</sup> 'elle a été publiée après avoir envoyé son manuscrit par la poste, ce qui n'arrive qu'à un manuscrit sur mille cinq cent envoyés'.<sup>92</sup> In Darrieussecq's words, P.O.L. maintains a close relationship with its writers, which she considers fruitful for the creative process: 'Je n'ai aucune raison de quitter P.O.L. On m'a parfois offert plus d'argent ou plus de surface publicitaire, mais je ne retrouverai pas, je crois, l'atmosphère singulière, très littéraire, un peu marginale, qui existe dans cette maison. C'est une amitié éditoriale.'<sup>93</sup> A specificity of P.O.L. is that it asks its authors to write the *4e de couverture*, which Darrieussecq considers to be 'difficile mais nécessaire. Tout ce qui est écrit dans et sur le livre fait partie du livre et doit donc être écrit'.<sup>94</sup> This suggests there is a certain understanding of the book as a whole, with all the paratextual elements dependent on the editor and the author working together in a coherent manner. 'L'atmosphère singulière, très littéraire, un peu marginale' also indicates that the text is given primacy, before other commercial considerations.

Additionally, this 'amitié éditoriale' becomes even more significant if we compare it to Wittig's case, where her relationship to Éditions de Minuit gradually deteriorated, finally resulting in their separation. The publishing house can be an important support mechanism, especially when dealing with media or other exterior pressures. Despite writing a few decades apart, there are some points of intersection between Wittig and Darrieussecq. For a brief period, they both shared the same editor, P.O.L., as the latter edited Wittig's *Paris-la-politique* (1999). Thus, Wittig came across

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<sup>89</sup> Due to time and space constraints, this avenue will not be pursued in this chapter, but could be a fruitful starting point for future projects.

<sup>90</sup> Pinet-Fernandes, 'Les ressorts extra-textuels du jugement littéraire aujourd'hui', p. 89.

<sup>91</sup> 'Goncourt des lycéens [...]', p. 84.

<sup>92</sup> Pinet-Fernandes, 'Les ressorts extra-textuels du jugement littéraire aujourd'hui', p. 98; the story of the publication of *Truismes* usually accompanies most of the reviews.

<sup>93</sup> Interview with Marie Darrieussecq, Appendix 1, p. 270

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

*Truismes*, which she then recommended to her niece.<sup>95</sup> More significantly, they both interacted with Jérôme Lindon, and their debuts in the literary world are strikingly similar, matching the young prodigy scenario, but also helping to confirm Lindon's image as a discoverer of literary talents. Darrieussecq recounts in numerous interviews that, before *Truismes*, there were other manuscripts she submitted, including to Éditions de Minuit. While Jérôme Lindon did not publish them, he did encourage Darrieussecq to continue writing and 'trouver sa voix'.<sup>96</sup> Wittig went through a similar experience with her first, unpublished manuscript for a novel entitled *La Mécanique*. Lindon also suggested carrying out some more writing, but agreed to publish it, to prevent Wittig from approaching other publishing houses. Unlike Darrieussecq, at this point in her career, Wittig was not based at a university, but rather in a publishing house (Éditions de Minuit), working as a re-writer and proof-reader.<sup>97</sup> Wittig also followed Lindon's advice, and worked on her debut novel, *L'Opoponax*. While this brief account might have been slightly mythologised by the press, and the passing of time, it does highlight the importance of the editor in honing a writer's efforts, especially at the beginning of their careers, allowing them the space to explore their creative voices, as a successful editor-author relationship is beneficial for both parties, and can ensure a positive reception. The editor can also assist with the managing of the *péritexte*,<sup>98</sup> as mentioned by Darrieussecq in one of her most recent interviews: 'Au départ le roman avait pour titre "L'Intensité". Mais, quand mon éditeur, Paul Otchakovsky-Laurens, a lu "Il faut beaucoup aimer les hommes" inscrit en tête d'un chapitre, il m'a dit que, pour lui, c'était le titre du livre.'<sup>99</sup>

### **Monique Wittig — time, space, and the politics of reception**

In a similar manner to Darrieussecq, Wittig stunned the *rentrée littéraire* in 1964 with her debut novel, *L'Opoponax*, awarded the *Prix Médicis*. Predictably, this early success generated significant media attention, constructing a set of expectations to which Wittig did not adhere throughout her literary career. As Wittig was mostly unknown in 1964,

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<sup>95</sup> In conversation with Dominique Samson.

<sup>96</sup> 'Goncourt des lycéens [...]', p. 84, and James Peach, *loc. cit.*

<sup>97</sup> In conversation with Dominique Samson.

<sup>98</sup> In Genette's definition, *péritexte* refers to paratextual elements belonging to the book itself (i.e. title, chapter titles, preface etc.).

<sup>99</sup> Hélène Villovitch, 'Marie Darrieussecq: « J'écris des romans pour vivre d'autres vies »', *Elle*, 4 September 2013 <<http://www.elle.fr/Societe/News/Marie-Darrieussecq-J-ecris-des-romans-pour-vivre-d-autres-vies-2574902>> [accessed 15 May 2017].

media attention was equally directed towards Jérôme Lindon and Éditions de Minuit. The publishing house and its general editor were considered a benchmark for literary innovation, and particularly for the *nouveau roman*. Furthermore, Lindon had the experience and access (that Wittig was lacking at this point) to coordinate the media campaign around Wittig's first novel. Having access to the *Opoponax* press dossier,<sup>100</sup> Wittig's niece believes that 'il y a vraiment une campagne orchestrée qui monte peu à peu et pas mal d'articles où on dit Monique Wittig aura sans difficulté le prix'.<sup>101</sup> A 1973 review of *Le Corps lesbien* captures the extent of Lindon's influence: Wittig becomes 'un pur-sang de l'écurie Lindon' and 'si la littérature déferle par vagues, Jérôme Lindon [...] joue le rôle de la Lune: il ordonne les marées'.<sup>102</sup> Lindon's influence goes beyond Minuit, leaving a long-lasting mark on the literary scene as a whole, over a longer period of time. He is not associated with short-lived success, but rather with an understanding of the mechanisms of literature in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The vote of confidence bestowed on Lindon, in the 1960s and 1970s, extends to his writers, guaranteeing visibility. Lindon himself offers Wittig his vote of confidence by including her, shortly after her debut, on the first pages of *Minuit's* catalogue.<sup>103</sup> Genette notes the weight carried by the publisher's catalogue, especially by fluctuations in inclusion:

un catalogue c'est un recueil de titres, attribué, comme il convient, non à un auteur, mais à un éditeur. Celui-ci, et non l'auteur, peut dire 'ce livre est', ou 'n'est pas', ou (terrible!) 'n'est plus à mon catalogue'.<sup>104</sup>

The connection between Minuit, Lindon, and Wittig becomes such an *allant de soi*, that when Wittig publishes with Grasset or P.O.L., the rupture with the initial editor is noticed: 'Les Éditions de Minuit ont publié tous vos livres de *L'Opoponax* à *Virgile*, *Non* excepté *Le Brouillon pour un dictionnaire des amantes*';<sup>105</sup> '*Paris-la-politique* [...] labellisé P.O.L., et non plus Minuit, l'éditeur de toujours'.<sup>106</sup> Despite the fact that 'les rapports avec Lindon sont devenus de plus en plus mauvais',<sup>107</sup> there still is a sense that Lindon supported Wittig's literary and linguistic innovations, if we consider the typographical novelties that had to be negotiated and approved, such as the circles from *Les Guérillères*,

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<sup>100</sup> This press dossier was most probably put together by Éditions de Minuit, and became part of the Wittig family papers (in conversation with Dominique Samson).

<sup>101</sup> In conversation with Dominique Samson.

<sup>102</sup> Jean François Josselin, 'Lettre à Sapho', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 8 October 1973, italics mine (Appendix 2a).

<sup>103</sup> In conversation with Dominique Samson.

<sup>104</sup> Genette, *Seuils*, p. 71.

<sup>105</sup> Catherine Rognon-Écarnot, 'Rencontre avec Monique Wittig', *Lesbia Magazine*, December 1996, pp. 28–30 (p. 28).

<sup>106</sup> Claire Devarrieux, 'Monique Wittig. *Paris-la-politique*', *Libération*, 17 June 1999 (Appendix 2b).

<sup>107</sup> In conversation with Dominique Samson.

the ‘j/e,’ the enumerations in capital letters, and the purple cover of *Le Corps lesbien*.<sup>108</sup>

The association between Lindon, *le nouveau roman* and Wittig is complemented by the connection between the latter and Marguerite Duras. Shortly after the publication of *L’Opoanax*, Duras wrote a highly admiring review, which was subsequently included as a *postface* to the novel, considering it to be ‘à peu près sûrement le premier livre moderne qui ait été fait sur l’enfance’.<sup>109</sup> Duras was also a member of the jury that awarded Wittig the *Prix Médicis*. Duras’s name, alongside the mention of the prize, has an almost constant presence in articles about Wittig; both her name and that of the prize become an indispensable touchstone regardless of whether the articles are reviews of *L’Opoanax*, or of subsequent novels: ‘en France, on a toujours préféré célébrer l’écrivain en misant sur le prix Médicis [...] boosté par Duras et Simon’.<sup>110</sup> Even 35 years after the award of the prize to Wittig, reviewers still referred back to these names: ‘soutenu par Marguerite Duras, a eu le prix Médicis en 1964, on y pense encore’,<sup>111</sup> ‘Rappelons que Monique Wittig a débuté sa carrière littéraire en 1964, avec un *roman-culte* sur l’enfance [...], salué par Marguerite Duras.’<sup>112</sup> The constant mentioning of Duras<sup>113</sup> has a double function: it posits Wittig in a genealogy of (women) writers, but it simultaneously justifies the reviewer’s endeavour; put simply, if Wittig was important enough for Duras, she is important enough for the media. This latter point becomes even more pertinent after Wittig’s exile, and her quasi-disappearance from the French cultural scene. Her return to media attention is justified by her association with Duras, underlined by expressions such as ‘on y pense encore’ or ‘rappelons que’. Established figures like Lindon and Duras act as an assurance of aesthetic value. They also establish a certain set of expectations: that Wittig would carry on with Lindon and Minuit, most probably in the vein of the *nouveau roman*, continuing the success of women writers like Duras. However, Wittig’s literary career would go against all these constructed views: her novels would innovate outside the framework of the *nouveau roman*, her disagreements with Lindon would determine her to search for other editors, and she would eventually distance herself from Duras — ‘son hostilité envers l’homosexualité est la raison pour laquelle je me suis brouillée avec elle’.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Duras, ‘Une œuvre éclatante’, p. 283.

<sup>110</sup> Marie Hélène Bourcier, ‘Le Repos de la Guérillière’, *Les Inrockuptibles*, No. 372, 15–21 January 2003, pp. 27–28 (p. 27).

<sup>111</sup> Devarrieux, ‘Monique Wittig. *Paris-la-politique*’.

<sup>112</sup> S.G., ‘Retour de la Wittig’, *Libération*, 8 July 1999, italics mine (Appendix 2c).

<sup>113</sup> Out of approximately 45 articles analysed, almost a quarter mention Duras. None of these 45 articles are directly linked to *L’Opoanax*.

<sup>114</sup> Claire Devarrieux, ‘« J’ai connu la guillotine »’, *Libération*, 17 June 1999 (Appendix 2d).



This set of expectations (related to Lindon, *le nouveau roman*, and women's writing) also corresponded to the media's attempts to construct around Wittig the image of the 'young genius or prodigy' (as in the case of Darrieussecq's initial reception). The speed of writing becomes important — 'Vous avez mis longtemps pour écrire *L'Opoponax*? — Six mois. — Ce n'est pas beaucoup'<sup>115</sup> — alongside Wittig's age and appearance — 'Elle ne paraît pas ses vingt-neuf ans. Elle a l'air d'une sage étudiante avec son visage sans fard, ses cheveux plats'.<sup>116</sup> Wittig thus becomes 'une jeune auteure extraordinaire' and 'un espoir pour la littérature française'.<sup>117</sup> Nonetheless, the insistence on her physical appearance and the need to enhance her feminine traits remain a concern of the media: 'Il y beaucoup de choses autour de la manière dont elle est habillée [...] [C]e qui m'a vraiment frappée c'est "sans maquillage, sans fard, les cheveux lisses", il y a quelque chose où j'ai l'impression qu'elle dérange un tout petit peu.'<sup>118</sup> Almost ten years after her initial success, her 'bottes cuissardes'<sup>119</sup> are still mentioned by the reviewers to stress the sense of shock or *bouleversement* of her works (when she accepted the Prix Médicis, she was photographed wearing these 'bottes cuissardes'). Her sartorial appearance is also used to enhance her marginal, *exilée* status: 'Avec son chapeau noir et ses costumes blue jeans, elle a un peu l'air d'un justicier de Western'.<sup>120</sup> She clearly appears as an outsider, with markedly North American characteristics suggested by the reference to Westerns. The difficulty in constructing a set image for Wittig stems from the fact that she was 'a very private writer who hated interviews and loathed television "chat shows"'.<sup>121</sup> Thus, the same limited number of traits (age, physical appearance, association with Minuit, and Duras) resurface in the majority of the articles.

Wittig's decision not to engage extensively with the media leaves the space for interpretation completely open, allowing the reviewers to focus on certain elements to the detriment of others. For example, when discussing the reception of *L'Opoponax*, Wittig highlights the media's penchant for the narrative form, ignoring the feminist message:

Quand j'ai écrit *L'Opoponax*, j'espérais que ce serait un peu comme un Cheval de Troie [...] [U]ne femme communiste qui écrivait dans *l'Humanité* [...] se demandait si Monique Wittig avait bien conscience d'être féministe! Alors je rigolais, je me disais: c'est tellement évident, je ne vois pas pourquoi on se pose

<sup>115</sup> Denise Bourdet, 'Monique Wittig', *Revue de Paris*, No. 71, 1964, pp. 115–19 (p. 116).

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>117</sup> In conversation with Suzette Robichon.

<sup>118</sup> In conversation with Dominique Samson.

<sup>119</sup> Josselin, 'Lettre à Sapho'.

<sup>120</sup> Catherine Deudon, 'Monique Wittig et les lesbiennes barbues', *Actuel*, No. 25, November 1977, pp. 12–14 (p. 12).

<sup>121</sup> James Kirkupp, 'Monique Wittig', *The Independent*, 9 January 2003

<<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/monique-wittig-123410.html>> [accessed 20 April 2017].

la question. Mais c'est la seule qui l'a dit, donc ça ne devait pas être tellement évident.<sup>122</sup>

Whilst the author's reticence to intervene in discussions about interpretation allows the work to have a life of its own, it can also cause certain elements to be obscured or underdeveloped. This possible bias in interpretation and reception can be closely linked to the media's need to label and categorise. The very nature of media publications demands accessibility and even simplicity: short- to medium-sized articles need to offer an overview of the work soon after publication (reducing the time reviewers can spend with the text), with titles that are both comprehensive and compelling. However, Wittig's work often precludes categorisation, rendering the media's task more difficult, as writing about Wittig's texts is at odds with the media's requirements for accessibility. In two of his reviews, Claude Michel Cluny considers Wittig's texts to be 'au-delà des catégories'<sup>123</sup> or 'inclassable',<sup>124</sup> a view that is re-iterated by Suzette Robichon in her interview, when she emphasises that a title like *Le Corps lesbien* had categorising tendencies that ran counter to the subversive thrust of Wittig's text.<sup>125</sup>

This resistance to categorisation can be linked to the fact that Wittig was often seen as ahead of her time, especially when one compares her reception in France to her critical treatment in the United States. The delay in translating *The Straight Mind* was seen by some critics as symptomatic of the inability of the French socio-cultural environment to deal with topics such as homosexuality and lesbianism:

Il aura fallu dix ans pour que soit traduit en français, *sa langue natale*, "la Pensée straight", un livre théorique fondamental qui influence le féminisme dans le monde entier. [...] Pourquoi cet ouvrage mythique, publié en anglais *par un auteur français*, a-t-il mis presque dix ans pour être traduit ? C'est aussi mystérieux que scandaleux. Il est toujours surprenant de constater à quel point la France se tient encore frileusement à l'écart de ce qui se passe dans la vie intellectuelle internationale.<sup>126</sup>

This collection of essays was first published in English, in 1992, while its French translation appeared in 2001, despite the fact that some of the essays were originally written in French, and despite the fact that most of them were already available in various magazines and journals (though, most of them in English). Her niece mentioned that this

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<sup>122</sup> Josy Thibaut, 'Entretien. Monique Wittig raconte...', *ProChoix. La revue de droit de choisir*, No. 46, December 2008, pp. 64–76 (p. 64).

<sup>123</sup> Claude Michel Cluny, 'La longue marche des jeunes filles en fleurs', *Les lettres françaises*, No. 130, 22 November 1969, pp. 5–6 (p. 5).

<sup>124</sup> Claude Michel Cluny, 'Les Sept Cercles de Monique Wittig', *Quotidien de Paris*, 18 June 1985 <[http://www.leseditionsdeminuit.fr/imprimer\\_livre-1896.html](http://www.leseditionsdeminuit.fr/imprimer_livre-1896.html)> [accessed 20 April 2017].

<sup>125</sup> In conversation with Suzette Robichon.

<sup>126</sup> Didier Eribon, 'Le retour de Monique Wittig. La femme marron', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 14–21 June 2001, p. 118, italics mine.

delay was due to the difficulty of finding a publisher.<sup>127</sup> The insistence in the above passage on Wittig's French origin — 'sa langue natale', 'un auteur français' — highlights the indignation at the rejection of her work by the literary establishment in France, almost going so far as to suggest the need for her exile. Positing *The Straight Mind* as 'un livre théorique fondamental qui influence le féminisme dans le monde entier' reverses the relation of isolation and marginalisation: if up to this point Wittig's work was considered peripheral, the delay in translation marks France's isolation in relation to the theoretical advances in the rest of the world. In her obituary, Anne Garréta tackles this kairotic mismatch, arguing that 'sa radicalité n'a pas encore pris effet'<sup>128</sup> in France. This can have significant effects on reception, as it suggests that there are new waves of readers to come, and a possible future resurgence of interest contributing to novel layers of interpretation.

Simonetta Spinelli's analysis of Wittig's reception in Italy mirrors exactly this type of resurgence, as *Les Guérillères* found a new audience in the 1990s through the circulation of a pirated translation: 'Ce livre [*Les Guérillères*] [...] est devenu l'objet d'une opération de piratage éditorial. Les filles ont traduit le texte, ont publié une édition non autorisée et l'ont fait circuler dans les lieux de rencontre lesbiens'.<sup>129</sup> The text needed to find its right context, at the right time. While this reception might be limited to a rather small readership, it marks the connection between Wittig's literary work, and wider political engagement, as *Les Guérillères* offered these young lesbian women the language to articulate and make sense of their particular experiences. This possibility is picked up by Tim Madesclaire, arguing that when dealing with 'les polémiques débiles qui ont accompagné le vote du PaCS, et maintenant la question de l'homoparentalité, [n]os armes, citoyens de la nation gay, sont celles forgées et léguées par la "*Guérillère*" en chef, Wittig'.<sup>130</sup> Wittig's legacy is seen to contain a methodology for counteracting homophobia, via the development of a language devoid of heterosexual bias. Other reviewers believe that this methodological transfer can further widen its scope, moving beyond the heterosexual/ homosexual dichotomy: 'il n'est pas interdit de transférer les réflexions de Monique Wittig sur le genre à d'autres figures d'oppression'.<sup>131</sup> Wittig's work provides a model for studying a variety of oppressions, and can therefore undergo

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<sup>127</sup> In conversation with Dominique Samson.

<sup>128</sup> Anne F. Garréta, 'Monique Wittig (1935-2003)', *Télu*, February 2003, p. 22.

<sup>129</sup> Simonetta Spinelli, 'L'espace du désir: la réception de l'œuvre de Wittig en Italie', Marie-Hélène Bourcier and Suzette Robichon (eds.), *Parce que les lesbiennes ne sont pas des femmes... Autour de l'œuvre politique, théorique et littéraire de Monique Wittig* (Paris: Éditions Gaies et Lesbiennes, 2002 [Conference papers from 16–17 June 2001, Columbia University, Paris]), pp. 83–96 (p. 95).

<sup>130</sup> Tim Madesclaire, 'Hommage à Monique Wittig, la guérillère', *Illico*, No. 70, 30 January 2003, pp. 12–13 (p. 12).

<sup>131</sup> Jérémie Majorel, 'Genre indéfini', *Le Magazine Littéraire*, No. 506, March 2011, p. 45.

intense posthumous reinterpretations and reception, depending on socio-political contexts.

The emergence of queer studies has allowed for a re-discovery of Wittig,<sup>132</sup> through the work of figures such as Judith Butler, Marie-Hélène Bourcier or Beatriz Preciado.<sup>133</sup> While this reception is mediated by other authors and theorists, it can generate a resurgence of interest in the original work. Since this resurgence has occurred via queer studies, and often in an academic environment, it has favoured a renewed interest in Wittig's theoretical work, rather than in her fiction. Moreover, there is a certain American bias, further strengthening the idea that there are significant geographical differences in reception (an idea which will be explored in more depth in the following section). In France, this resurgence in interest was mediated by critics initially working on Sarraute's texts.<sup>134</sup> Wittig herself was interested in Sarraute's work (besides also being a friend of Sarraute's)<sup>135</sup> — her *Chantier littéraire* (2010), which takes as its starting point her own doctoral thesis, has a chapter dedicated to Sarraute.<sup>136</sup> Contemporary reading tools, such as the newly developed *L'Opoponax* software application,<sup>137</sup> can supplement reading processes, particularly in relation to Wittigian fiction. Furthermore, recent commemorative events (in 2013 and 2014, marking respectively ten years since Wittig's death, and 50 years since the publication of her debut novel) focused mostly on readings from fictional works.<sup>138</sup>

The present analysis of geographical variations in Wittig's reception takes as its starting point Bourcier's remark that Wittig's work is caught in between 'deux hémisphères de la mémoire',<sup>139</sup> mainly represented by France and the United States. Both of these hemispheres are reductive in their interpretations, as they focus on particular sections of Wittig's work, rather than taking a more holistic approach: French criticism emphasizes her fictional work, whilst simultaneously relegating her to a lesbian niche, while the American reception quickly took hold of her theoretical work, using it in the

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<sup>132</sup> Marie Hélène Bourcier, 'Wittig-la-politique', *Regards*, No. 88, March 2003, pp. 6–7 (p. 7).

<sup>133</sup> Cyrille Poy, 'Sexe, mensonge et politique', *L'Humanité*, 5 February 2003, Appendix 2e, p. 276.

<sup>134</sup> Catherine Écarnot, 'Pourquoi j'ai écrit ma thèse sur les fictions de Monique Wittig', *Lesbia Magazine*, No. 222, March 2003, pp. 28–29 (p. 28).

<sup>135</sup> Sarraute is another point of intersection between Darrieussecq and Wittig, as Darrieussecq also mentions her friendship with Sarraute and the latter's impact on her literary career (Jordan and Darrieussecq, 'Entretien avec Marie Darrieussecq', p. 138).

<sup>136</sup> Catherine Écarnot, 'Monique Wittig: *Le Chantier littéraire* et le métier d'écrivain', *NQF*, 31.1 (2012), 141–44 (p. 143).

<sup>137</sup> <<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/opoponax/id950583962?mt=8>> [accessed 20 April 2017].

<sup>138</sup> Both events were discussed with Dominique Samson and Suzette Robichon, the latter having been the coordinator of some of them.

<sup>139</sup> Bourcier, 'Wittig-la-politique', p. 6.

fields of feminism, gender, and queer studies. These distinctions are visible from the very titles given to Wittig's obituaries in the two countries:

Mort de Monique Wittig. L'auteure du roman 'Opoanax', '*lesbienne radicale*', s'était exilée aux Etats-Unis.<sup>140</sup>

Sexe, mensonge et politique. Altérité. Disparue le 3 janvier, Monique Wittig, fondatrice du MLF, est une référence pour *le mouvement lesbien*.<sup>141</sup>

Monique Wittig. *L'Apologie du lesbianisme*.<sup>142</sup>

Monique Wittig, 67, *Feminist Writer*, Dies.<sup>143</sup>

UA professor's legacy includes the creation of *women's studies*.<sup>144</sup>

Monique Wittig, 67; *Leading French Feminist, Social Theorist and Novelist*.<sup>145</sup>

The French titles insist upon Wittig's work within the lesbian movement, at times excluding her work as an author of fiction (the second and third French examples). The American article titles focus mostly on the impact her theoretical works had within the wider feminist movement (rather than just the lesbian one), while yet again almost ignoring her literary career (the third example refers to her as a 'novelist,' but only after 'feminist [and] social theorist;' whereas 'feminist writer' in the first example remains ambiguous as to the nature of the writings). The obituary for *Le Monde* (third French example in the list above) was written by Suzette Robichon, who mentioned in our interview the difficulty she had in choosing a title, as she would have preferred to insist upon Wittig's career as a writer (with the issue of having to choose between *écrivain/écrivaine*). The change to 'l'apologie du lesbianisme' was carried out by the newspaper editors. The same obituary was re-published in *Lesbia Magazine*, but with an altered title, 'Monique Wittig, écrivain'.<sup>146</sup> While the readership of *Lesbia Magazine* is considerably smaller than that of *Le Monde*, with a more specialist approach, the change in title raises the issue of the labels used to categorise authors, and the manner in which their legacy is presented to the public at large. This reductive approach is also visible in

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<sup>140</sup> Claire Devarrieux, 'Mort de Monique Wittig', *Libération*, 7 January 2003 <[http://next.liberation.fr/culture/2003/01/07/mort-de-monique-wittig\\_426949](http://next.liberation.fr/culture/2003/01/07/mort-de-monique-wittig_426949)> [accessed 20 April 2017].

<sup>141</sup> Poy, 'Sexe, mensonge et politique', italics mine.

<sup>142</sup> Suzette Robichon, 'Monique Wittig. L'Apologie du lesbianisme', *Le Monde*, 11 January 2003, p. 12, italics mine.

<sup>143</sup> Douglas Martin, 'Monique Wittig, 67, Feminist Writer, Dies', *The New York Times*, 12 January 2003, italics mine <<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/01/12/nyregion/monique-wittig-67-feminist-writer-dies.html>> [accessed 20 April 2017].

<sup>144</sup> Ernesto Portillo Jr., 'UA professor's legacy includes the creation of women's studies', *Arizona Daily Star*, Tuesday, 7 January 2003, p. 7, italics mine.

<sup>145</sup> Elaine Woo, 'Monique Wittig, 67; Leading French Feminist, Social Theorist and Novelist', *LA Times*, 11 January 2003, italics mine <<http://articles.latimes.com/2003/jan/11/local/me-wittig11>> [accessed 20 April 2017].

<sup>146</sup> Suzette Robichon, 'Monique Wittig, écrivain', *Lesbia Magazine*, No. 222, March 2003, p. 21.

the body of the articles. For example, the *New York Times* obituary (second English example above) refers to Wittig's fiction in the following terms: 'In one of her novels, female warriors torture men before tanning and displaying their skin. In another, paradise is full of lesbians on motorcycles. [...] In "Across the Acheron" the evil Count Zaroff and his men hunt women as a game'.<sup>147</sup> All of these elements have episodic appearances in Wittig's novels, and they do not take centre stage (for example, Count Zaroff and the lesbians on motorcycles only appear in one chapter of *Across the Acheron*), but they are foregrounded in the obituary for sensationalist purposes.

When analysing Wittig's reception in an Anglophone context, we need to take into account issues of translation, which become even more pertinent given that Wittig innovated significantly at the level of vocabulary and grammar. Often, these innovations go unnoticed because their force is not rendered in English: 'she sometimes abandoned paragraphing and normal punctuation and developed a lyrical style that could be called neither prose nor poetry'.<sup>148</sup> These formal techniques highlighted by Martin are not unique to Wittig. However, Wittig's work on pronouns, which is one of her widely acknowledged linguistic innovations, is completely neglected by the same journalist. This journalistic inability to observe the manner in which form and content interact can affect reception. For example, Mary Holland's unfavourable review of *The Opoponax* hints at the possible shortcomings of the English rendition, but does not take the investigation any further:

I suspect that the style in English does not help. It is written like a television documentary with words imposed over disconnected still photographs, in the present tense, with no paragraphs and, *most clumsy of all, partly in the second, partly in the third person*. [...] "The Opoponax" must count me out.<sup>149</sup>

What Holland considers to be clumsiness (the switch between the third and the second person, absent in the French original), is a reflection of the difficulty in translating the French 'on', which accounts for the whole group of children. The switch between 'on' and 'je' at the end of the novel is lost, alongside Catherine Legrand's acquiring of her own (lesbian) voice. A similar disregard for the interaction between form and message is present in John Weightman's review, whose title, 'Prizewinners and their betters', suggests early on that the 1964 literary prize laureates could have been replaced by other authors. In his view, *The Opoponax* is 'non-structured and only a partial success' due to

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<sup>147</sup> Martin, 'Monique Wittig, 67, Feminist Writer, Dies'.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Mary Holland, 'Transplantations', *Observer*, 22 May 1966, p. 26, italics mine.

‘the rigid application of a single technical device’.<sup>150</sup> This judgement is closely connected to his viewing the *nouveau roman* as a passing literary trend, ‘which has still not caught on here [in the UK]’.<sup>151</sup> He fully integrates Wittig to the *nouveau roman* tradition, focusing on the techniques she uses, rather than on the purpose they serve within the text. *The Opoponax* is presented by him as a formal experiment, an exercise in writing the *nouveau roman*. Nonetheless, his remark that this trend ‘has still not caught on here’ highlights the importance of the national literary context: in 1960s France, the *nouveau roman* was still of great interest to critics, readers, and writers, while across the Channel it barely marked the literary scene.

Robert Nye partially redresses the balance, by debating the issue of pronouns in his review of *The Lesbian Body*, and by analysing the various possible translations of j/e. However, he quickly dismisses this as ‘nit-picking’, raising ‘new and I think irrelevant problems’.<sup>152</sup> The most curious feature of Nye’s reviews is the repetition of identical sections, 16 years apart, in his articles on *Les Guérillères* and *Across the Acheron*. Both novels are ‘sexual political propaganda’<sup>153</sup> and are represented as chilling:

If I say that Wittig writes like a glacier chewing and grinding its way across tracts of country not notably verdant in the first place, that is only a bit of an overstatement. I read this book in one sitting on a sticky summer night with thunder in the air and by the end of it I was convinced that the temperature had dropped 50 degrees and it was snowing in the living room.<sup>154</sup>

While shock and wariness can be among the reactions generated by Wittig’s fiction, the repetition of the same section (despite its poetic merit), in 1971 and 1987, raises doubts about the reviewer’s engagement with the text. This can come as a slight surprise, given that Nye’s reviews of Wittig’s work often enrich existing interpretations (for example, when he considers the pages with women’s names written in capital letters in *Les Guérillères* to be the heroines’ tombstones).<sup>155</sup>

If translation and knowledge of national literary traditions can affect reception abroad, in France, we can at times remark a certain non-reception, partly due to Wittig’s exile, to her non-presence on the French scene. Despite her annual visits to France, her sparser interventions are highlighted by reviewers: ‘Monique Wittig *s’était un peu effacée*

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<sup>150</sup> John Weightman, ‘Prizewinners and their betters’, *Observer*, 3 January 1965, p. 24.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> Robert Nye, ‘Sensual chauvinism’, *Guardian*, 12 June 1975, p. 9.

<sup>153</sup> Robert Nye, ‘Snowing in the living room’, *Guardian*, 8 July 1971, p. 7 and Robert Nye, ‘Pebble-heaps and glaciers’, *Guardian*, 24 July 1987, p. 14, emphasis mine.

<sup>154</sup> Nye, ‘Snowing in the living room’ and Nye, ‘Pebble-heaps and glaciers’.

<sup>155</sup> Nye, ‘Snowing in the living room’, p. 7; this interpretation is not very frequent in the critical corpus.

de la scène romanesque [...]. En 1975, *disparition*. Elle est dans la théorie, l'analyse littéraire, la nouvelle. Elle est aux États-Unis où elle enseigne toujours'.<sup>156</sup> Her shift of literary focus, and her exile to the US are seen as partial reasons for this non-reception. Paradoxically, the summer this particular review came out (1985), was the moment *Virgile, Non* was published, proving that Wittig had not fully left 'la scène romanesque'. Fourteen years later, when *Paris-la-politique* was published, reviews insisted even more on this disappearance: 'Célébrité du monde féministe aux États-Unis, la Française Monique Wittig *reste méconnue dans son pays d'origine*'.<sup>157</sup> This view is reiterated by Wittig herself, in an interview for *Libération*, also in 1999: 'Paul Otchakovsky-Laurens est encourageant, *il dit qu'on ne m'a pas oublié*'.<sup>158</sup> There is a strong sense that exile and physical non-presence have an impact on reception,<sup>159</sup> diminishing the mark authors can leave on the cultural environment. However, over-presence or over-visibility can have a similar effect, especially if it detracts attention from the literary work. In Wittig's case this over-visibility is closely related to conflicts and rifts within the women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s. Her interview with Josy Thibaut (published posthumously)<sup>160</sup> offers a panoramic view of the disagreements emerging as early as 1969.<sup>161</sup> Conflicts with figures such as Antoinette Fouque, Hélène Cixous or Christine Delphy overshadowed both Wittig's reception and the efforts of the women's movement in general, shifting attention towards the internal struggles centred on approaches to heterosexuality, homosexuality, and lesbianism.<sup>162</sup> Wittig's refusal to talk about the events might have further enhanced her marginality: 'interrogée sur ses souvenirs du féminisme, Monique Wittig préfère ne rien raconter. Elle n'est pas une rapporteuse'.<sup>163</sup> The choice of 'rapporteuse' hints towards a sense of betrayal within the movement, which is present in an earlier 1997 interview: 'En France, les féministes ne voulaient pas qu'on crée des groupes lesbiens, j'étais toujours *la tête de Turc*'.<sup>164</sup> Her subsequent exile suggests that she was unable to escape this marginalising image of 'tête de Turc', falling into an

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<sup>156</sup> A. H., '« Le Voyage sans fin »: Quichotte au féminin', *Le Quotidien de Paris*, 23 May 1985, p. 24, italics mine.

<sup>157</sup> S.G., 'Retour de la Wittig', italics mine.

<sup>158</sup> Devarrieux, '«J'ai connu la guillotine»'.

<sup>159</sup> This view was also supported by Suzette Robichon's remarks during our conversation.

<sup>160</sup> Thibaut, 'Entretien. Monique Wittig raconte...'.

<sup>161</sup> Wittig started taking part in the first women's reunions, which would subsequently pave the way towards the *Mouvement de Libération des Femmes* (MLF), in 1967.

<sup>162</sup> Debates around the topic of (radical) lesbianism led to the dissolution of *Questions féministes*, to lawsuits against *Nouvelles Questions Féministes*, and to the eventual regrouping of French radical lesbians around *Feminist Issues*.

<sup>163</sup> Devarrieux, 'Monique Wittig. *Paris-la-politique*'.

<sup>164</sup> Annette Levy-Willard, 'Monique Wittig, écrivain, vit en Arizona. Pionnière au Far West de la « culture lesbienne »', *Libération*, 23 June 1997, p. 18, italics mine.



increasingly negative reception, as ‘ses positions radicales et lesbiennes lui valurent une grande hostilité de la part de certaines autres théoriciennes et militantes’.<sup>165</sup>

The multiple schisms within the women’s movement, and Wittig’s subsequent marginalisation were reflected in her reception. Specialist, activist magazines like *Actuel* or *Lesbia Magazine*<sup>166</sup> were welcoming her ideas, but they were not always able to produce a comprehensive interpretation of her fiction. Moreover, lesbian groups were not developed, nor visible enough at the time to offer Wittig a springboard for her ideas. When *Le Corps lesbien* was published, Claudine Chonez remarked upon its potential impact and liberating force: ‘ce brutal chant des amours féminins, très neuf parce que tabou — jusqu’ici du moins — sous une forme aussi crue; et c’est la volonté de *le faire servir à la précieuse libération de la femme*. À côté de Monique Wittig, les homosexuels mâles semblent bien tendres et faibles’.<sup>167</sup> Despite the fact that Wittig’s text was more radical than anything produced up to that point by ‘les homosexuels mâles’, the latter had a more developed community that, for cultural and contextual reasons, would have been able to interpret, and distribute texts. Wittig comments on this double lack of both physical and ideational spaces for the lesbian community:

Sur le plan culturel, les homosexuels masculins peuvent se référer à un fonds théorique connu, cohérent, comme la philosophie antique par exemple. Rien de tout cela n’existe pour les lesbiennes qui évoluent dans l’ombre.<sup>168</sup>

Révoltant. Il n’y a pas de culture lesbienne, de lieux de drague lesbiens. Nous n’existons pas.<sup>169</sup>

Relegated by the mainstream media (and partially by the women’s movement) to the lesbian niche, Wittig observed that this ‘niche’ was not sufficiently equipped to welcome and develop her work (either fictional or theoretical). She was relegated to a quasi-invisible margin, despite the fact that her work was attempting to put forward a universal point of view. The lack of a lesbian reception further supports the above-analysed idea that Wittig was ahead of her time. However, such a community-specific reception can have negative repercussions on perceptions of Wittig’s work, as it can lead to the work being used to further certain militant causes. Such political appropriations become more

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<sup>165</sup> Eribon, ‘Le retour de Monique Wittig’.

<sup>166</sup> See for example *Actuel*, No. 25, November 1977, or *Lesbia Magazine*, December 1996 and March 2003.

<sup>167</sup> Claudine Chonez, ‘Romans. *Le Corps lesbien*’, *Le Magazine littéraire*, No. 82, November 1973, pp. 57–58 (p. 58), italics mine.

<sup>168</sup> Laurence Louppe, ‘Entretien avec Monique Wittig’, *L’art vivant*, No. 45, December 1973–January 1974, pp. 24–25 (p. 25).

<sup>169</sup> Deudon, ‘Monique Wittig et les lesbiennes barbues’, p. 13.

evident if we take a closer look at the link between Wittig's work, her activist and political engagement, and even her biography.

Wittig was a prominent figure of the *Mouvement de Libération des Femmes* (MLF), being part of the group that notoriously laid flowers 'pour la femme du soldat inconnu',<sup>170</sup> in August 1970. Her subsequent involvement with both feminist and gay and lesbian movements left an imprint on interpretations of her work. Wittig's literary and militant careers developed almost simultaneously, creating a constant dialogue between the literary and political spheres. This simultaneity caused certain intersections and overlaps that did not always have a positive impact upon Wittig's literary reception. Conflicts marking various feminist groups led to the marginalisation of radical lesbians, and implicitly to the marginalisation of Wittig's work. Nonetheless, Wittig contributed to this phenomenon through her overt radical, materialist feminist stance, and through her inability (or unwillingness) to use mainstream media to promote her ideas. Other MLF members were able to capitalise better on media channels. Her activism was, like her theoretical writings, ahead of its time:

Mais pour moi elle n'était pas vraiment une femme d'action. Elle semblait flotter dans son rêve, ne comprenant pas pourquoi les femmes n'étaient pas plus unies ni pourquoi la société était si lente à changer. Très tôt, elle s'inquiéta de ce que les lesbiennes ne soient pas plus visibles dans le MLF. [...] De toutes façons, il était difficile en écoutant Monique de dissocier la réalité du rêve utopique dans lequel elle me transportait.<sup>171</sup>

Her political ideas were not always anchored in the reality of her time, which complicates the notion of her engagement in strategically efficient activism. This inability to translate her 'rêve utopique' into reality can partly explain her exclusion from the mainstream activist movements. Moreover, in the context of a new movement (the MLF only dating back to 1970), her plans for development might not have been concurrent with the speed at which society at large was able to come to terms with the changes — 'ne comprenant pas pourquoi [...] la société était si lente à changer'. While one of the aims of activism is to increase the speed of societal change, this needs to be implemented in a manner that attracts as many adherents as possible, rather than further marginalising an already peripheral group (in Wittig's case, lesbians).

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<sup>170</sup> <<https://modernlanguages.sas.ac.uk/research-centres/centre-study-contemporary-womens-writing/languages/french/monique-wittig>> [accessed 13 July 2017].

<sup>171</sup> Marie-Jo Bonnet, 'Au commencement, s'il y eut jamais un commencement', *Lesbia Magazine*, No. 222, March 2003, pp. 25–27 (pp. 25–26), italics mine.

Linking political activism and literary creation to biography is not always a positive step, as the first two can be seen to derive from personal motivations, rather than a universal desire for change. Soon after the publication of *L'Opopanax*, critics suggested that the novel was autobiographically inspired, telling the story of 'comment à l'âge de 12 ans, elle était tombée amoureuse d'une petite fille'.<sup>172</sup> Whilst Wittig denied this several times in her interviews — 'Contrairement à ce que pensent certains critiques, *l'Opopanax* n'est pas un livre autobiographique'<sup>173</sup> — the idea gathered momentum, and remained present in the media. For example, Wittig's decision to define herself as a radical lesbian was connected to her choice of lesbian protagonists: "'Lesbienne radicale", formule qui désigne autant une préférence sexuelle qu'un choix politique, Monique Wittig ne mettra plus en scène que des femmes.'<sup>174</sup> While her political stance and literary work are connected, the above view needs nuancing: Wittig's characters are not exclusively female, and a direct correlation between lesbianism and female characters should not be established. Such a correlation can narrow the potential reading audience, creating an excessive demand on the reader for similar (lesbian) experiences. This tension between group-specific interpretations, and Wittig's universalising aims is fuelled by incongruities in Wittig's own interventions in the media:

Je suis une femme qui écrit des femmes et pour les femmes. C'est le même acte; je ne peux pas dissocier les deux termes. Il engage mon corps, mon désir, mes rêves et mon espoir.<sup>175</sup>

Il n'y a pas de littérature féminine pour moi, ça n'existe pas. En littérature, je ne sépare pas les femmes des hommes. On est écrivain, ou pas.<sup>176</sup>

These two responses were given more than twenty years apart, with the first one in 1977 and the second in 1999. The 1977 interview was published around the time of the dismantling of the MLF, thus Wittig's remark can be read in the context of a struggling women's movement. However, the connection between writing and women's desires and bodies dilutes Wittig's struggle for the universal, and brings her work closer to *écriture féminine*, which she criticised throughout her entire career. The second remark, from a 1999 interview is closer to her ideas from *La Pensée Straight*, and moves towards a position similar to that expressed in Barthes's 'La mort de l'auteur', position which does not take into account the gender of the author. In the case of Wittig's work, the richest interpretations are in between these two extremes, allowing for both the sharing of

<sup>172</sup> *Lesbia Magazine*, No. 222, March 2003, p. 23.

<sup>173</sup> Devarrieux, '« J'ai connu la guillotine »'.

<sup>174</sup> Devarrieux, 'Mort de Monique Wittig'.

<sup>175</sup> Deudon, 'Monique Wittig et les lesbiennes barbues', p. 12.

<sup>176</sup> Devarrieux, '« J'ai connu la guillotine »'.

experience, and the enlargement of existing frameworks. This view is effectively captured by Jacqueline Piatier, who evokes the difficulty of labelling Wittig: ‘féministe agressive, lesbienne proclamée, Monique Wittig est, mieux encore, un écrivain des plus doués. Je m’excuse auprès d’elle de ce masculine impavide, mais je souris d’avoir à m’en excuser’.<sup>177</sup> She is thus placed beyond gender agreements, her name accompanied by an impressive list of epithets (‘féministe agressive, lesbienne proclamée, écrivain des plus doués’). As this position (beyond gendered labels) is transgressive, it does need a particular reading practice: the reader needs to learn how to read Wittig, by reading her.

### **Julia Kristeva — constant étrangère?**

Since her arrival in France, Kristeva has become a cultural touchstone, occupying multiple positions of influence in the fields of literature, criticism, and psychoanalysis. This constant presence facilitates access to media articles examining her work, but it simultaneously complicates any analysis of her fictional work exclusively. Like Wittig, Kristeva’s various fields of activity overlap, which is further reflected in reviews of her work. She is not just a writer, but ‘psychanalyste, linguiste, sémiologue, auteure de romans et d’essais [...] elle dirige l’École doctorale Langue, littérature, image: civilisations et sciences humaines, à Paris, tout en enseignant à Toronto et à New York’.<sup>178</sup> Some reviewers go as far as considering that ‘Julia Kristeva has inherited the intellectual throne left vacant by the death of Simone de Beauvoir’.<sup>179</sup> This array of attributes makes it difficult to criticise her work, as it would mean going against a quasi-institution; Kristeva’s position has almost become an *allant de soi*.

Despite this integration into the cultural scene, ‘she posits herself repeatedly as an outsider, projecting her status as immigrant-exilé in her theoretical and fictional work’.<sup>180</sup> In a 2004 interview, almost 40 years after her arrival in Paris, Kristeva still insists on her status as *étrangère*, as someone who does not entirely belong: ‘C’est mon destin de vivre mon errance sur place.’<sup>181</sup> Despite this view, in the US she is considered to be the

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<sup>177</sup> Jacqueline Piatier, ‘Monique Wittig. Sapho d’aujourd’hui’, *Le Monde*, 15 November 1973, pp. 17–18 (p. 18).

<sup>178</sup> Navarro, ‘Féminin Singulier’, p. 33.

<sup>179</sup> Elaine Showalter, ‘A paragon and her position’, *The Times Literary Supplement*, Issue 4565, 28 September 1990, p. 1038.

<sup>180</sup> Ingrid Wassenaar, ‘Rilsky in love’, *The Times Literary Supplement*, Issue 5278, 28 May 2004, p. 21.

<sup>181</sup> Thomas Renou, ‘Julia Kristeva. Handicap Rive gauche’, *Paris Obs.*, No. 11, 17 March 2004, p. 4.

embodiment of the French cultural *milieu*: ‘Aux États-Unis, d’où je reviens, les gens me considèrent comme l’incarnation de l’intellectuel français.’<sup>182</sup> Moreover, Josyane Savigneau highlights that the reception of her theoretical work is more consistent abroad than in France, where for example her works on depression and Proust ‘ne sont mis à leur juste place’.<sup>183</sup> This detached attitude exhibited by the French media (partly resembling Wittig’s French reception analysed in the previous section) significantly improves when Kristeva deals with social issues, for example with provisions for people with disabilities. She has often used the national media as a platform to highlight the lack of such provisions, and as a means of lobbying the relevant political authorities, both at the national and European levels.<sup>184</sup> Nonetheless, when it comes to her fiction (as will be shown in subsequent sections), the media opinions are much more divided.

In her fictional work, Kristeva can capitalise on her areas of expertise, and find points of intersection still unexplored: ‘Kristeva’s consistent drive to make connections between domains of inquiry that might have remained distinct implies an integrating as well as a revolutionary mind.’<sup>185</sup> The dangers of combining multiple subjects of inquiry is the distancing of the reader, who might not be familiar with all of them. Nonetheless, some reviews suggest that Kristeva is able to avoid such pitfalls: for example, ‘En Thérèse d’Ávila se mêlent l’invention d’une jouissance spécifiquement féminine et l’expérience d’une pensée remontant à sa source indicible. Pressentiment de la psychanalyse ? De la littérature, tout simplement’.<sup>186</sup> By uniting various topics under the aegis of literature, she opens up a space for analysing previously incompatible areas — ‘comment une intellectuelle d’aujourd’hui, athée, psychanalyste, peut-elle se retrouver dans une telle proximité, une complicité inouïe, avec une mystique du XVIIe siècle?’<sup>187</sup> Literature allows for these multiple positions and identities to meet. Their availability is further enhanced by adapting Thérèse’s story into a ‘pièce de théâtre radiophonique pensée pour

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<sup>182</sup> Thierry Bayle, ‘Julia Kristeva’, *Page des Libraires*, February–March, 1997, p. 26.

<sup>183</sup> Josyane Savigneau, ‘Julia Kristeva et ses mystères’, *Le Monde des livres*, 31 May 1996, p. IX.

<sup>184</sup> When gathering resources for this chapter, I came across numerous articles written by Kristeva, in the French press, in relation to this subject. While these articles fall outside the scope of the current chapter, they can represent a fruitful avenue for future research. They can also link Kristeva’s journalistic work to Darrieussecq’s similar endeavours, as the latter also has regular columns on social issues.

<sup>185</sup> Wassenaar, ‘Rilsky in love’.

<sup>186</sup> *Le Magazine littéraire*, No. 481, December 2008, pp. 68–71 (p. 68), (the article is part of a special ‘Dossier’ on the mystics; these particular pages (pp. 68–71) reproduce a section from Kristeva’s *TMA*, with a subtitle added anonymously).

<sup>187</sup> Josyane Savigneau, ‘La passion Thérèse’, *Le Monde des Livres*, 24 April 2008

<[http://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2008/04/24/la-passion-therese\\_1037829\\_3260.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2008/04/24/la-passion-therese_1037829_3260.html)> [accessed 2 August 2016].

Isabelle Huppert [...] avec la complicité de Laure Adler'.<sup>188</sup> The presence of both Isabelle Huppert and Laure Adler can be seen to increase the accessibility of the work.

However, when linked to genre fiction (i.e. detective fiction) the encyclopaedic character of Kristeva's work is often challenged, and considered to be detrimental to genre expectations and frameworks. For example, Lepape believes that, in an attempt 'to put everything in', Kristeva writes detective fiction for the 'happy few' who can understand the multitude of references:

Passons vite sur l'évidence qu'aucun lecteur ordinaire de polar ne dépasserait le premier chapitre perdu qu'il sera [...] par les zigzags d'un récit piégé de digressions, de réflexions, de commentaires sur la peinture et d'épithètes incongrues. Admettons donc que Julia Kristeva, intellectuelle brillante [...] ne cherche que la complicité de ses pairs [...]. Mais pourquoi, dès lors, avoir choisi de raconter une histoire criminelle?<sup>189</sup>

The choice of genre is seen to be incongruous with the encyclopaedic character of the works, affecting the reading process, as highlighted by Grisolia in his short piece on *MàB*: 'Julia Kristeva met entre l'ouvrage et son lecteur la distance hautaine et autosatisfaite de l'Université.'<sup>190</sup> For him, Kristeva's genre subversion is unsuccessful and does not set her in the genealogy of women crime writers 'citées en exemple ou en exergue dans le roman'<sup>191</sup> (i.e. Agatha Christie, Patricia Highsmith, Patricia Cornwell, and Mary Higgins Clark). The richness of references becomes a reading deterrent. While Grisolia does not recommend the novel (the title of his piece, 'Non', being indicative of this), other reviewers are much more acerbic in their evaluations, going as far as to suggest that 'c'est le plaisir de lire qu'elle assassine'.<sup>192</sup> The reasons for this assessment are connected to Kristeva's deployment of too many genre clichés ('brouillon bâclé à peine digne du plus laborieux épisode d'une série Z américaine, *Meurtre à Byzance* joue sur tous les clichés de l'époque')<sup>193</sup> and of obscure language ('l'obscurantisme de la langue ici semble remplir du vide').<sup>194</sup> Most of these negative reviews take as a starting point the idea that *MàB* is a detective novel, highlighting the manner in which Kristeva's novel disregards

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<sup>188</sup> <<http://www.theatre-odeon.eu/en/2013-2014/evenements/julia-kristeva-isabelle-huppert>> [accessed 24 April 2017].

<sup>189</sup> Pierre Lepape, 'Le polar et les intellos', *Le Monde des livres*, 31 May 1996, p. II (this review deals with Kristeva's 1996 detective novel, *Possessions*, but similar comments have also been made in relation to *MàB*, as will be shown in subsequent examples).

<sup>190</sup> Michel Grisolia, 'Non', *L'Express*, 23 February 2004 (Appendix 2f).

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> T.G., 'Dame tartine', *Le Matricule des Anges*, No. 52, April 2004, p. 30.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

genre expectations. This disregard is partly linked to Kristeva's vast knowledge, and references from multiple and diverse cultural fields.

Nonetheless, the articles that offer a positive review of *MàB* highlight its status as a 'roman total' or 'polar métaphysique', considering Kristeva's project to be lying somewhere else than in the continuation of the crime fiction tradition. For example, Bernard-Henry Lévy considers *MàB* to be 'un roman dont on n'a pas lu l'équivalent depuis "Le nom de la rose", d'Umberto Eco',<sup>195</sup> underlining its various thematic strands and 'virtuosité narrative'.<sup>196</sup> The same elements that were seen to distance the reader and negatively affect the detective plot, are in Lévy's view part and parcel of the 'roman total' and of 'une lecture passionnante'.<sup>197</sup> Similarly, for Christine Rousseau the novel is 'une réussite', 'à la fois polar, récit historique et autobiographique, "Meurtre à Byzance" embrasse tous les genres, tous les savoirs et les thèmes chers à l'écrivain. Un roman palpitant et une réflexion très actuelle sur l'état du monde'.<sup>198</sup> The eclectic character of the novel is seen to work in its favour, linking it to previous themes explored by Kristeva, and to her own biography. *MàB* is also considered 'son roman le plus autobiographique' working through 'le deuil de sa mère'.<sup>199</sup> One of the main differences between these reviews and the negative ones analysed above is that the former situate the novel within Kristeva's larger *œuvre*, identifying the manners in which *MàB* contributes to her large intellectual project (i.e. articulating our relation to the other, alternative discourses of motherhood etc.). As such, the detective plot no longer takes centre stage, but rather becomes the backdrop against which other themes can be explored. Catherine Clément goes as far as comparing the novel to the talking cure, considering that Kristeva 'laiss[e] entendre qu'il y a de l'inconnu, mais que cet inconnu est pensable. CQFD: comme dans une cure de psychanalyse'.<sup>200</sup> The comparison to the talking cure allows for a high participation on the part of the reader, an involvement which is dismissed by critics who focus extensively or exclusively on the detective framework.

These completely opposite assessments are a result of Kristeva's unclear fictional project(s), underlined by Antoine de Gaudemar as early as the publication of *Les Samourais*: 'Mais qu'a donc voulu faire Julia Kristeva, se demande le lecteur déconcerté.

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<sup>195</sup> Bernard-Henry Lévy, 'Le bloc-notes de Bernard-Henry Lévy', *Le Point*, 19 February 2004 <<http://www.lepoint.fr/actualites-chroniques/2004-02-19/le-bloc-notes-de-bernard-henri-levy/989/0/117553#>> [accessed 16 May 2017].

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Rousseau, 'Julia Kristeva, la Byzantine'.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Catherine Clément, 'Écrire l'invivable', *Le Magazine littéraire*, No. 474, March 2008, p. 50.

Le faux journal d'une analyste? Une autobiographie déguisée? Un roman populaire pour intellos?'<sup>201</sup> The rich, eclectic nature of her works does not allow for the articulation of a clear readerly (or writerly) project. Therefore, the writing of fiction resembles risk-taking, a stance acknowledged by both Kristeva and her supporters:

Intellectuelle reconnue, enseignante en France et à l'étranger, auteur d'une vingtaine d'essais, elle semblait n'avoir plus rien à prouver. Or, en 1990, elle a choisi de prendre le risque du roman. Le premier, *Les Samourais*, traçant le parcours de "la génération Tel Quel", a été bien reçu; les deux autres *Le Vieil Homme et les loups* et *Possessions* ont été l'objet de critiques assez rudes, blessantes parfois.<sup>202</sup>

The writing of fiction went against expectations associated with Kristeva's work, leaving her in a vulnerable position: while her status as an intellectual was set in stone, she still needed to prove herself as a fiction writer. Even though fiction (and detective fiction in particular) remains a minor part of Kristeva's *œuvre* to date, it represents the ultimate boundary she needed to cross in her relationship with the French language:

Ma langue, mon imaginaire ne sont pas coulés au moule de Versailles, Sévigné, Voltaire. On accepte que j'écrive de la théorie, mais toucher au roman, quelle audace! [...] Le français est désormais mon seul territoire et je revendique le droit de pouvoir dire des choses plus charnelles, plus intimes dans cette langue qui est mon abri d'exilée.<sup>203</sup>

Therefore, fiction writing becomes part of a wider project of exploring one's relation to language, a project in which previous theoretical concepts are realised in the fictional worlds created. This is most clearly reflected in the reception of *Possessions*. Both *Possessions* and *Sens et non-sens de la révolte* appeared in 1996, and reviewers tended to link the two, unearthing the theoretical implications of the detective novel.<sup>204</sup> When the two elements (fiction and theory) are separated, and the focus is turned exclusively towards the detective plot the reviews become more critical. Even the most complimentary articles acknowledge that the strength of the novels does not necessarily reside in the detective story: 'Ces deux textes [*Le Vieil homme et les loups* et *Possessions*] suivent une trame policière qu'on peut ne pas trouver absolument convaincante.'<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Antoine de Gaudemar, 'La guirlande de Julia', *Libération*, 15 March 1990 (Appendix 2g).

<sup>202</sup> Rousseau, 'Julia Kristeva, la Byzantine'.

<sup>203</sup> Julia Kristeva, 'Français dans le texte', *Télérama*, no. 2454, 22 January 1997, p. 40.

<sup>204</sup> For such comparisons, see for example Catherine Clément, 'Qu'est-ce que la femme? Kristeva contre Santa Barbara', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 27 June–3 July 1996, No. 1651, p. 92; Claude Jannoud, 'Julia Kristeva: la révolte de l'imaginaire', *Le Figaro*, 30 May 1996, p. 44; Bernard Fauconnier, 'Julia Kristeva. L'urgence de la révolte', *Le Magazine littéraire*, No. 344, June 1996, pp. 104–10.

<sup>205</sup> Savigneau, 'Julia Kristeva et ses mystères', p. IX.



If in the case of Darrieussecq and Wittig, the autobiographical lens was extensively used for interpretation by critics and reviewers, in Kristeva's case, this projection of biography into fiction is also openly undertaken by the author herself (as was shown in Chapter One). These autobiographical *clins d'œil* are quickly picked up by the critics: 'It is hard not to read them, together with much of Kristeva's recent writing, as partial autobiography.'<sup>206</sup> The tension that could arise from these *clins d'œil* is represented by the fact that the more autobiographical projection there is in a text, the narrower the space for interpretation becomes, as the place of the reader is constricted. A difficulty in Kristevan autobiographical projection relates back to the idea presented at the start of this section: because of Kristeva's wide area of expertise, her literary alter egos also know too much, which can provoke a distancing of the reader from them:

Kristeva seems to pounce on her own writing, closing down any readerly intervention. The explanatory dimension of her writing floods the field of interpretation. It is frustrating to discover that Kristeva's novels are leadenly written. Perhaps it is because she is a brilliant textual theorist that she cannot write fiction without attempting a simultaneous translation into the metanarrative.<sup>207</sup>

The self-reflexivity and self-analysis of Kristeva's characters frame the reader's possibilities for interpretation; the writer's autobiographical projection can prevent the reader's projection into the work.

The autobiographical dimension of Kristeva's fictions is reinforced by visual elements, as review articles and interviews about *TMA* are accompanied by photographs of Kristeva, alongside images depicting Thérèse.<sup>208</sup> These visual elements bridge the distance between the reader and the author, giving body to the latter, but also allow the presence (and possibly even control) of the author to be physically marked. From a marketing point of view, the conjunction of photographs of the author, of *TMA*'s cover, and of Thérèse herself impresses the book upon the reader's memory. However, there is at least another layer of meaning to these elements, related to the image of the woman writer. Even though the text opens with a focus on Bernini's work (*The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*), the book cover itself depicts the saint writing (rather than experiencing divine pleasure), with a divine dove hovering above her. The image is credited as 'peinture anonyme, souvent attribué à Vélazquez'. According to Paul Julian Smith, this image

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<sup>206</sup> Jacqueline Rose, 'Fleshy memories', *The Times Literary Supplement*, Issue 4726, 29 October 1993, p. 6.

<sup>207</sup> Wassenaar, 'Rilsky in love'.

<sup>208</sup> This choice echoes the incipit of *Thérèse mon amour*, with its description of Bernini's statue of Thérèse, and the two photographs of the statue. Moreover, the mixture of *ekphrasis* and photographs resurfaces at several points throughout the text.

resembles ‘the frontispiece to a seventeenth-century edition of the *Obras* (Lisbon, 1654)’.<sup>209</sup> Bernini’s work is used on the cover of Lacan’s seminar on female sexuality, *Encore*. Kristeva credits this work as one of her first encounters with the saint, while Sylvia herself references this cover in *TMA*. For Lacan, Thérèse becomes the symbol of feminine (orgasmic) pleasure. However, in Kristeva’s case, Thérèse is presented first and foremost as a writer — she is not praying, or reading scriptures, but rather responding to them through her own writing. Furthermore, she is channelling her desires and pleasures (ecstasy) into writing. This places her within a genealogy of women writers and creators (for example, next to Anne Comnène, or the women explored in Kristeva’s *génie féminin* collection), among whom Kristeva clearly counts herself. Review articles that juxtapose images of Kristeva and of Thérèse<sup>210</sup> (and especially of Thérèse as a writer, through reproductions of the cover of *TMA*) visually reinforce the existence of this female genealogy of writing. While reproductions of the book cover might seem as the norm in articles relating to *TMA*, this is not always the case. For example, in a special dossier on *les mystiques*, put together by *Le Magazine littéraire*, extracts from *TMA* are accompanied by a reproduction of Guido Cagnacci’s *Ecstasy of St. Teresa*, rather than an image of the book.<sup>211</sup> The painting reinforces Thérèse’s position as a Catholic mystic (with great emphasis on her bodily reactions), rather than as a woman author.

Out of all the three authors studied, Kristeva stands out when it comes to the effective management of her media presence. Her personal website contains a section dedicated entirely to press articles,<sup>212</sup> while the rest of the website is constantly updated with news of her publications, talks, interviews, and prizes. By contrast, the most recent news-item on Darrieussecq’s website dates to 2013.<sup>213</sup> Similarly, the most recent updates on the Monique Wittig website date back to 2015.<sup>214</sup> While Kristeva’s website can represent an important research tool, it has also attracted ironic comments from the media, relating to the way Kristeva manages her self-promotion. In a short piece for *Le Nouvel Obs*, Grégoire Leménager comments on the fact that ‘un groupe de garage rock psyche-

<sup>209</sup> Smith, *Representing the Other*, p. 118.

<sup>210</sup> See for example, Navarro, ‘Féminin Singulier’ and Patricia Boyer de Latour, ‘On peut jouer avec Dieu, il n’est pas qu’un arbitre sévère’, *Madame Figaro*, 5 April 2008, pp. 116–18.

<sup>211</sup> Julia Kristeva, ‘Je vous salue Thérèse’, *Le Magazine littéraire*, No. 481, December 2008, pp. 68–71.

<sup>212</sup> <<http://www.kristeva.fr/presse.html>> [accessed 16 May 2017].

<sup>213</sup> <<http://darrieussecq.arizona.edu/en/welcome>> [accessed 16 May 2017]. It must be noted that Darrieussecq’s website is managed by academics at the University of Arizona. Her author pages on the P.O.L. website are much more up-to-date.

<sup>214</sup> During my e-mail exchange with Sande Zeig, she mentioned the need and desire to work on the website. Moreover, the *Oponax* application is an element that none of the other two authors have.

poststructuraliste norvégien' released a song entitled "Your name is Julia Kristeva".<sup>215</sup> Although this might not necessarily be newsworthy information, the fact that a link to the song has been made available on Kristeva's personal website opens the way to the journalist's ironic comments:

"Your name is Julia Kristeva" ferait donc un assez joli tube de saison sur le campus de Paris 7, les divans de la Société Psychanalytique de Paris, les bancs du Conseil économique et social et les lèvres de Philippe Sollers. [...]

L'égérie des "Kulta Beats" publie précisément ces jours-ci un imposant "Thérèse mon amour", consacré à Sainte Thérèse d'Avila et à son "corps physique érotique hystérique épileptique". On ne sait pas encore si, en cas de retraitage, les éditions Fayard envisagent de joindre un CD au livre; ça pourrait être une idée.<sup>216</sup>

Leménager does not necessarily take the song as a serious tribute to Kristeva's work, but rather finds a place for it in the marketing machine powered by the author's efforts and those of the publishing house. The above analysis of the authors' web presence can lead to a discussion of multimediality. While such a discussion is outside the scope of this chapter, a few pointers will be given to enrich the previous analysis relating to photos of Thérèse and Kristeva. One element pertinent to such a discussion is the use of caricatural sketches. For example, two of the negative reviews of Kristeva's fiction have highly satirical caricatures accompanying them: the review of *Les Samouraïs* published in *Le Canard enchaîné* is accompanied by a caricature clearly depicting Kristeva looking with admiration in a mirror and drawing hearts on the papers in front of her.<sup>217</sup> This image complements the remarks made in the review about the narcissistic nature of the novel. Similarly, the review of *MàB* in *Le Matricule des Anges* is accompanied by an unflattering caricature of Kristeva pointing a gun in the air, possibly linking it to 'le plaisir de lire qu'elle assassine'.<sup>218</sup>

Despite Kristeva's position as a cultural touchstone, *TMA* (like other works of Kristevan fiction) has not attracted much critical attention.<sup>219</sup> As was shown in Chapter One, the text is a rich account, requiring a lengthy time commitment from the reader. This is highlighted in available reviews, alongside Kristeva's mix of genres: 'un pavé de 750 pages [...] tantôt roman historique, tantôt essai psychanalytique, tantôt dialogué comme

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<sup>215</sup> Grégoire Leménager, 'Tribute to Ju-li-à Kris-te-vå' *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 7 January 2013 <<http://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/essais/20080519.BIB1334/tribute-to-ju-li-a-kris-te-va.html>> [accessed 17 May 2017].

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Dominique Durand, 'Un Écureuil casse-noisettes', *Le Canard enchaîné*, 7 March 1990 (Appendix 2h).

<sup>218</sup> T.G., 'Dame tartine'.

<sup>219</sup> *TMA* is a recent work (published in 2008), with its English translation published only in 2014. Moreover, due to its mix of genres and themes, it is difficult to categorise it within the Kristevan *œuvre*.

du théâtre, tantôt écrit sous forme de lettres’;<sup>220</sup> ‘Julia Kristeva multiplie les registres de son écriture et excelle dans le brouillage des genres littéraires’.<sup>221</sup> Nonetheless, the length and mix of genres are not always seen as a possible frustrating element for readers; instead, reviewers underline the text’s baroque qualities:

*Baroque* le nouveau livre de Julia Kristeva [...] par sa forme, il a toute l’apparence d’une *perle si singulière* qu’on ne saurait la confondre avec aucune autre [...] L’ouvrage passera vraisemblablement pour un *essai* alors qu’il se présente explicitement comme un  *récit*, et qu’il demande très certainement à être lu comme un *roman*.<sup>222</sup>

In a comparable way to Kristeva’s position on the cultural scene (both inside and outside), her work is unstable and unique, transgressing generic boundaries. Despite this uniqueness, it is still seen as part of a continuum, constructing for Kristeva the image of a corpus author: ‘Car ce nouveau livre rassemble tous ceux qui ont fait l’œuvre de Julia Kristeva, et c’est précisément pourquoi il ne ressemble à aucun d’eux’;<sup>223</sup> ‘Avec ce livre sur Thérèse d’Avila, Julia Kristeva continue à tracer des portraits de femmes d’exception’.<sup>224</sup> *TMA* is considered to continue Kristeva’s trilogy on *le génie féminin*, and to link religion and psychoanalysis in a novel manner. Out of all the three authors studied, the label of ‘corpus author’ suits Kristeva best, due to her large *œuvre*, and the intertextual links established between her works. However, *TMA* is her only text dealing explicitly and uniquely with a religious figure, which could attract a new audience, so far unfamiliar with her texts, but knowledgeable about Thérèse. In the case of such readers, we can speculate that the baroque characteristics of her work might lead to frustration, rather than an appreciation of the possibilities of intertextuality. As was shown above, reviews of *MàB* also situate the novel in a continuum, either linking it to previous detective novels, or to Kristeva’s wider work. When reviews emphasise the detective genre they tend to be negative; whereas, when they offer links to previous theoretical works they present a positive assessment of *MàB*.

If the length and multitude of genres might not be seen in a positive light by all communities of readers, reviewers also insist upon the relevance of *TMA* to contemporary times, despite its 16<sup>th</sup>-century eponymous character: ‘Kristeva y disserte en toute liberté (et en psychanalyste) sur la religion et la spiritualité, mais également sur la philosophie,

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<sup>220</sup> Nerson, ‘Une somme de Julia Kristeva’, p. 112.

<sup>221</sup> Rocco Zacheo, ‘Thérèse qui adore ce qui la brûle’, *Le Temps*, 21 June 2008 <<https://www.letemps.ch/culture/2008/06/21/roman-therese-adore-brule>> [accessed 24 April 2017].

<sup>222</sup> Philippe Forest, ‘Julia Kristeva. *Thérèse mon amour*’, *Art press*, No. 347, July 2008, p. 67, italics mine.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> Navarro, ‘Féminin Singulier’, p. 35.

la guerre, l'amour, bref, *sur des sujets qui intéressent le grand public*.<sup>225</sup> This perceived relevance can counterbalance the difficulty in dealing with the work's encyclopaedic character. Despite its historic nature, the work is considered to speak to current audiences. One such contemporary topic is the need to create new discourses on maternity. Thérèse's biography allows Kristeva to formulate a view according to which maternity is closer to creation than to the act of giving birth: 'La maternité n'est pas forcément génétique, c'est aussi la possibilité de créer pour le monde et d'éveiller la créativité des autres, une véritable vocation.'<sup>226</sup> While maternity is not the central theme of *TMA*, it marks the text through the meditations by both Thérèse and Sylvia on their relationships with their own mothers. In addition, Catherine Clément highlights the contemporaneity of *MàB*: 'Ce qui charme surtout, c'est que l'autportrait d'une Byzantine d'aujourd'hui soit également le nôtre à tous. Prenez le tout, laissez-vous remuer, ouvrez tous grands les yeux, regardez les images, savourez.'<sup>227</sup> Motherhood is also a recurrent theme in *MàB*, where Stéphanie's mother could represent a model of alternative maternity, answering the calls for such models made since 'Stabat Mater'. While some reviewers mention the fact that the novel is a response to 'le deuil de la mère' (i.e. Kristeva mourning the loss of her own mother), they do not push this analysis further, omitting the links to previous theoretical works. This is a case in which the label of 'corpus author' would help deepen the analysis and highlight the contemporary relevance of the text, but reviewers seem to build this corpus using broad strokes and highly general themes.

Some reviewers of Kristeva's work try to make the text more accessible by offering scientific explanations for the saint's ecstasies: 'qu'elle soit affligée par les rafles d'une épilepsie temporelle ou par un dérèglement électrique et hormonal du cerveau; qu'elle incarne le triomphe narcissique sur la dépression, cela ne fait aucun doute'.<sup>228</sup> Epilepsy and hormonal imbalances replace divine inspiration, and become more plausible explanations for Thérèse's experiences. Kristeva carries out a similar translation of symptoms, but by means of psychoanalysis: 'le lieu propice à cette permanence de la narration c'est l'expérience analytique. C'est ce que Freud nous a légué [...] il a fait de chaque analysant un écrivain sans religion esthétique'.<sup>229</sup> The text thus becomes a psychoanalytical encounter between Thérèse and the Other (God and the Son), between

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid., p. 34, italics mine.

<sup>226</sup> Boyer de Latour, 'On peut jouer avec Dieu', p. 118.

<sup>227</sup> Catherine Clément, 'Kristeva la Byzantine', *Le Magazine littéraire*, No. 430, April 2004, pp. 76–77 (p. 77).

<sup>228</sup> Zacheo, 'Thérèse qui adore ce qui la brûle'.

<sup>229</sup> Jean Birnbaum, 'Julia Kristeva: « Faire de chaque patient un écrivain »', *Le Monde*, 21 March 2014 (Appendix 2i).

Sylvia and Thérèse, and between Kristeva and the reader. The issue that remains unexplored by either Kristeva or her reviewers is the reader's potential refusal to enter the psychoanalytic encounter.

## Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was not to offer an exhaustive view of the media reception of the three authors, but rather to identify various trends, and compare their deployment in the case of the three authors. Media reception is an integral part of the literary institution, with the ability to influence the reading process. From the lists of the *rentrée littéraire* and the literary prize nominations, to interviews and reviews, media reception becomes a significant *épitexte* over which the authors and publishing houses have various degrees of control. Despite the differences between the three authors, at least two features are shared by all of them: the tendency to be presented as corpus authors, and the importance of their biography in reception.

The issue of early success is shared by Darrieussecq and Wittig,<sup>230</sup> but with divergent outcomes. While Darrieussecq was able to capitalise on her early success, and become a constant of the *rentrée littéraire*, Wittig's work was relegated to the margins. Several factors contributed to this relegation, such as Wittig's political activism, the conflicts within the women's movement, Wittig's absence from the media (and at times, her unwillingness to engage with it), and the temporal and spatial dislocations affecting the reception of her works (for example, the insistence on theory in the United States, and the delay in translating it in France). Darrieussecq also saw fluctuations in her reception: when she tackled dangerous or taboo topics, the size of her reading community increased, attracting conflicting criticism, as was the case with the publication of *Le Bébé* or *Clèves*. Kristeva's high visibility on the French cultural scene facilitates her being regarded as a corpus author, with reviewers often linking her fictional work to her theoretical work. When these links are established, reviews tend to be positive, whereas when reviews concentrate on the fictional works (particularly detective fiction), they focus on the shortcomings of the works. One issue that can arise from establishing links between Kristeva's diverse types of work is the engagement level of first-time readers, who might

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<sup>230</sup> Kristeva was also hailed as a young prodigy after her arrival in Paris in 1965, but this was mostly related to her theoretical work. For both Darrieussecq and Wittig, the image of the young prodigy is related to their fictional work.

be dissuaded by these extensive intertextual links. The situation is further complicated by the fact that reviews dealing exclusively with the fictional texts are not complimentary, so first-time readers are faced with tensions when deciding to enter the Kristevan universe.

In the case of all three authors, biographical details permeate interpretations of their work. Fallaize observed this tendency in the case of Simone de Beauvoir's reception, as biographical details often replace aesthetic value in the passing of judgements. Similarly, Toril Moi notes the overlap between subjectivity (the perceived person of the author) and textuality (the work of the author) in Beauvoir's reception.<sup>231</sup> Both Darrieussecq and Wittig tried to distance their work from their biography, but their various media interventions have not always corresponded to this intention: following Camille Laurens's psychological plagiarism accusation, Darrieussecq had to rely on a family incident to justify her choice of writing about the death of a young child; while Wittig was not always able to distinguish between the label of radical lesbian and writer. Kristeva's relation to biography is slightly different, as very often her works contain direct autobiographical projections. Despite bringing the reader closer to the writer, these projections can limit readers' interpretive possibilities.

The format of most of the articles studied — short- to medium-sized pieces, appearing often in widely circulated national newspapers, intending to provide a quick overview of the works presented — requires reviewers to use shortcuts, such as labels and categorisations, which preclude more developed interpretations. These types of texts can have a two-fold effect upon the reading process: they can bridge the distance between the text and the reader, and ease the latter's entry into fiction. As they often provide links to various intertexts (for example, via the construction of the corpus author image), they can facilitate the reader's initial research work. However, this work of labelling and categorisation also pre-sets interpretive frameworks, significantly diminishing the independence and creativity of the readerly tasks. Nonetheless, we need to bear in mind that the *épitexte* is still a text, and thus we can engage with it in a similar way to the way we engage with the fictional texts it presents. Conversely, contemporary media *épitextes* present a mix of textual and visual elements (for example, photographs, caricatures, and even videos for web editions), alongside a diversification of methods for their consumption (the permanence of the printed newspaper reviews is challenged by the fast changing pace of on-line newspapers, blogposts, social media interactions etc.). These

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<sup>231</sup> Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir. The Making of an Intellectual Woman*, p. 5.

developments mirror the changes in reading practices (e-books, audiobooks, interactive books etc.), affecting the materiality of the book and opening new opportunities for readerly dialogues.



## CONCLUSION

### Burn after Reading?

According to Laure Adler and Stefan Bollman, ‘les femmes qui lisent sont dangereuses’,<sup>1</sup> as reading offers them the opportunity to explore their ‘liberté créatrice’.<sup>2</sup> This readerly creative freedom has been at the heart of this entire thesis, a study that has attempted to carve out an active and engaged role for the reader. The previous four chapters analysed the way this space comes into being in the fictional works of Kristeva, Darrieussecq, and Wittig, examining the textual, paratextual, intertextual, and extra-textual elements that contribute to its formation. Three theoretical starting points formed the initial basis of the enquiry: the need to read reception studies alongside women’s writing (a need highlighted by Fallaize), with the various articulations of intertextuality, and with the potential for change carried by reading (especially, change in our interactions with the other). The analysis of the three authors’ fictional works revealed at least two other elements that can enhance this initial theoretical basis: the importance of multisensorial reading, and the articulation of reading as a heuristic process. Other analytical tools — such as the reading *Carmel*, the hospitable text, the text as Trojan Horse, and the fiction of honesty — could be transferred to other texts and authors, to highlight the phenomenon of readerly participation.

As most of the texts analysed challenge dichotomies and binary systems of representation, notions of questioning, self-questioning, and subversion have permeated the argument. While most often subversion is associated with a challenge to authority, and ensuing (positive) change, this view needs nuancing, as subversion is not homogenous nor irrevocably linked to (positive) action and change. Much contemporary literary criticism sets up subversion as an aesthetic value, significantly affecting assessments of literary works; put simply, works deemed subversive rank higher in literary hierarchies than those that are not subversive, or not subversive enough. However, subversion is not a set quality, but rather a process, and as such it needs someone at the

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<sup>1</sup> Adler and Bollmann, *Les femmes qui lisent sont dangereuses* (They have also written other works, in a similar vein, entitled *Les femmes qui écrivent vivent dangereusement* (Paris: Flammarion, 2007), and *Les femmes qui lisent sont de plus en plus dangereuses* (Paris: Flammarion, 2011)).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

receiving end who can shape it to fit changing circumstances. This shaping is not a smooth, homogeneous process, with permanent, conclusive results. In her analysis of gender subversion, Viviane Albenga notes that ‘la subversion du genre n’est pas un processus homogène, et des pratiques itératives peuvent déstabiliser le genre, fissurer l’apparente cohérence du masculin et du féminin, sans pour autant mener le processus de subversion à terme’.<sup>3</sup> These observations can be extrapolated to subversion in general, not just gender subversion. Subversion implies notions of overthrowing and transformation, whereas not every text deemed subversive has actualised this potential to the fullest, by enacting (societal) transformation. Albenga’s turn towards notions of destabilisation, iterative practices, and cracks can become fruitful when considering the subversive potential of literature and reading. Reading itself is an iterative practice, it is its repetition that contributes to the development of our readerly skills. It is also a cumulative practice, as multiple readings (and re-readings) influence the creation and enlargement of our personal library of intertexts, or reading autobiography.

The iterative nature of reading does not necessarily imply a return of the same, but rather repetitions that highlight the existence of differences and divergences (or the existence of the other). These repetitions enable the appearance of cracks, which can in turn lead to destabilisation, and possible subversion. For example, as was shown in Chapter One, Kristeva’s ‘repetition’ of the detective framework has a meta-narrative function, rather than a narrative one. It is in the space between these two layers (the narrative and the meta-narrative) that the cracks emerge in Kristeva’s fiction. Hutcheon bestows a great subversive potential on this meta-narrative level, considering that ‘if self-reflecting texts can actually lure the reader into participating in the creation of the novelistic universe, perhaps he [sic] can also be seduced into action – even direct political action’.<sup>4</sup> According to Hutcheon, the reader’s co-creation task can be replicated outside textual confines, as the mental mechanisms used to make sense of fiction are similar to the mechanisms used to interpret one’s reality. However, mental mechanisms are not always enough for effecting change in the real-world. This is evidenced when looking at the narrator of *Truismes* from the perspective of Asibong’s *mulier sacra*: while the narrator’s position outside social norms can be replicated by the reader, the fantastic character of her transformation can affect the narrative’s subversive potential. Some of the other works studied offer more easily transferable tools, which can complement these subversive mental mechanisms: for example, the linguistic work undertaken by both

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<sup>3</sup> Albenga, ‘Stabiliser ou subvertir le genre?’, p. 34.

<sup>4</sup> Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 155.

Darriussecq and Wittig, or the re-writing of foundational stories to reveal their blind spots. Nonetheless, even in the absence of subversion, the immense potential of the cracks created by reading should not be understated. Mirroring James Scott's belief that infrapolitics (or resistance below the line) can bring about visible political change,<sup>5</sup> readerly cracks can contribute to future changes or subversion. Even if the changes are not immediately visible in the real world, these cracks allow for the creation of readerly spaces and the emergence of readerly dialogues, transforming reading into an active and engaged process.

Examining the reaches and limits of subversion can open a similar discussion about the other. Most of the theoretical work underpinning this thesis suggests that the encounter with the other is ultimately a positive experience, despite the dangers it carries. If the encounter is not positive, then it has not truly been an encounter with the other, according to Attridge:

What is the ethical ground for attention to and affirmation of otherness, when the result of this effort may be without any humanly recognizable merit, or indeed – since the other that is brought into being may, as I have suggested, turn out to be a monstrosity – may serve quite inhuman ends?<sup>6</sup>

Such an outcome would be likely to lead to the retrospective reinterpretation of the event as uninventive, since it would not give rise to further invention, but rather to a closing down of possibilities.<sup>7</sup>

Attridge recognises that the other can bring about monstrosity, but clarifies that hindsight reveals this not to be a true encounter with the other (or an encounter with the true other that would lead to inventiveness and openness). However, as was highlighted in the Introduction, meeting the other is an act of both responsibility (towards the other), and irresponsibility (towards the self), therefore the self cannot assume that the encounter with the other will be positive. Such an assumption would take away any danger from meeting the other, and possibly any inventiveness that might ensue (therefore the other would no longer be other). In Attridge's view, hindsight can reveal whether the other was truly other. However, he does not develop the notion that this other might preclude hindsight, that the monstrosity of the other can affect chronologies, and close off interpretive avenues. Reading can occupy a distinct place in these articulations of the other, as reading

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<sup>5</sup> James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 198. The term infrapolitics refers to acts of resistance that are not identified as such, but rather happen below the line, or below the radar; they are disguised, undisclosed and low profile (for example, poaching, carnival symbolism, myths of social banditry). Despite their lack of visibility, their iterative and cumulative nature can have significant political impact in the longer run.

<sup>6</sup> Attridge, *Singularity of Literature*, p. 126.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160 (Chapter 9, note 4).

does not need to follow linear chronologies. Moreover, during reading, the self has more control over the encounter with the other than in real life (the materiality of the book allows the reader to navigate at will through the codex, and to stop the reading process at any moment).

While textual, intertextual, and paratextual evidence helps us articulate a multitude of possible readerly spaces and dialogues, what remains un(der)theorised is the readerly position after reading. What happens after the encounter with the other, after the self-questioning, and the experience of the *texte de jouissance*? On the one hand, this is a highly personal experience, and can therefore become un-theorisable due to its idiosyncrasy. Moreover, it does not necessarily follow traditional chronologies; the impact of a particular text can emerge a long time after (re-)reading, or other texts need to be read before the *jouissance* of a previous one can be felt. While this thesis does not intend to damage the underlying optimism of various theories of the other,<sup>8</sup> it does aim to highlight the multiple configurations of the other. As was shown in the studied texts, reading and writing can positively contribute to negotiating our encounters with the other or with othering experiences (i.e. the narrators of *Truismes*, *Le Bébé*, and *Tom est mort* resort to writing to come to terms with the othering transformations they go through; both Sylvia and Stéphanie use writing to understand the other emerging from their readings of Thérèse and Anne, respectively; writing helps both *les guérillères* and Wittig (the character) understand and contribute to the construction of the new worlds they inhabit).

The following sections will give a few tentative suggestions as to what could happen ‘after reading’, as suggested by the title of this Conclusion. The question mark present in the title is an acknowledgement of the diversity of reading scenarios, while the ‘burning’ is linked to consumption and transformation, via the image of the phoenix. In his analysis of the myth of Superman, Eco notes that ‘to act, then, for Superman, as for any other character (or for each of us), means to consume himself’.<sup>9</sup> As was observed in the Introduction, reading is an *act*, an event, an experience that does not leave the reader unmoved. By linking this observation to Eco’s assertion that ‘to act is to consume [one]self’, we can infer that reading entails self-consumption. However, this self-consumption does not lead to the fading away of the self (as its name might suggest, especially when linked to the medical use of ‘consumption’). As advocated throughout the thesis, the reading process involves learning, change, and even development.

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<sup>8</sup> See for example, Attridge, *Singularity of Literature*; Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*; Rye, *Reading for Change*.

<sup>9</sup> Eco, *The Role of the Reader*, p. 111.

Therefore, this self-consumption is transformative, rather than akin to deterioration. The image of the mythical phoenix can be helpful in understanding this self-consumption as transformation and regeneration. For the phoenix, self-combustion is not an end, but rather an opportunity for regeneration and rebirth; the ashes represent the source of new life, rather than a mere ending. In a similar manner, the end of the reading process is not synonymous with completion, but rather a step towards transformation and reconstruction.

Throughout the analyses of the previous four chapters, further avenues for research have emerged that were beyond the scope of the current thesis. Nonetheless, the tools introduced, and the wider scenarios of reading (which cast the reader as an active and engaged actor, having the opportunity and the ability to carve out new imaginative spaces in fiction) can be applied as an opening for these future studies. In Debord's analysis, 'le spectacle est le mauvais rêve de la société moderne enchaînée, qui n'exprime finalement que son désir de dormir. Le spectacle est le gardien de ce sommeil'.<sup>10</sup> Reading goes against this feeling of passivity and non-action ('sommeil'). Reading could replace the *sommeil* with a *rêve*, since both reading and dreaming involve the construction of (fictional) worlds. While this construction does not automatically entail change, it does nonetheless counteract passivity. Kristeva's work can provide the first stepping stone in analysing this relationship between reading and *la société du spectacle*, as she references the impact of reading on societal passivity in both *TMA* and *MàB*.

A line of enquiry emerging in relation to all three authors is related to translations of their works, and their subsequent international receptions. As was briefly shown in relation to *MàB* and to Wittig's linguistic innovations, translations can significantly impact the connections available to the readers (for example, Stéphanie's affections for Rilsky are not presented with the same intensity, as her appropriation of Rilsky's verbal tic is not rendered in English; while most of Wittig's pronominal innovations are diluted or even lost in English). Similarly, national receptions vary significantly (for example, Darrieussecq's Anglophone reception was much more welcoming than her French one; Wittig's reception in the USA focused mostly on her work on lesbianism, while her French reception was trailing behind), pointing towards possible national literary trends and preferences. The way translations and the author's media interventions can influence these trends becomes significant for the creation of readerly spaces. Moreover, contemporary means of communication allow for these spaces to transcend national

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<sup>10</sup> Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*, p. 15.

borders; the traditional reading group is no longer confined to the living room of its members, current reading groups can be international and virtual (i.e. web-based).

This consideration of contemporary technological developments leads us to mention the variations in reading practices. In recent years, the codex format, and the materiality of the book in general, have had to face challenges from audio- and e-formats. While at the moment most readers still read in paper format,<sup>11</sup> e-formats can affect the chronology of the reading process, and some of its multisensorial elements: e-formats encourage a linear reading, following the order imposed by the page numbers (i.e. flicking through a book is more difficult in e-format than paper format); while some of the sensorial reactions associated with the handling of the physical book are lost.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, e-formats can facilitate the interaction with intertexts, as various search functions allow the reader to look up words, names and notions whilst reading. The centrifugal and centripetal intertextual moves analysed in the Introduction are much closer to each other, as the move away from, and back to the text are almost simultaneous (or rather, a few clicks/ taps away). Similarly, the notes on the text advocated by Mounin take a different shape as they become electronic highlights. These electronic highlights can further contribute to the creation of a virtual reading community, as certain devices allow readers to see what others have underlined.

As was mentioned in Chapter Four, the virtual space carved out by the internet, and by the multiple web-interactions it facilitates, has led to the creation of a new type of reception. Nonetheless, it has also allowed the authors to gain more visibility, not just in terms of promoting their own works, but also in terms of championing certain social causes: for example, Darrieussecq's journalistic work has tackled racism, or the lack of women authors in the school curriculum; while Kristeva has worked extensively on European issues, and support for people with disabilities. Their journalistic interventions add an extra layer to their literary personae, offering new articulations of the *auteurs engagé(e)s* image. Moreover, it links their work to possible policy changes. Reading itself is connected to policy and charity initiatives aimed at promoting reading in general, or more specific readerly issues (i.e. women's writing or reading in translation). For

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<sup>11</sup> According to the most recent IPSOS survey — *Les Français et la lecture 2017* — there is an increase in the percentage of readers using electronic formats compared to 2015, but the percentage remains just below one quarter ('24 % de lecteurs de livres numériques en 2017 vs 19 % en 2015', IPSOS, *Les Français et la lecture 2017. Pour le CNL*, p. 22 <[http://www.centrenationaldulivre.fr/fichier/p\\_ressource/12841/ressource\\_fichier\\_fr\\_les.frana.ais.et.la.lecture.2017.03.20.ok.pdf](http://www.centrenationaldulivre.fr/fichier/p_ressource/12841/ressource_fichier_fr_les.frana.ais.et.la.lecture.2017.03.20.ok.pdf)> [accessed 17 July 2017]).

<sup>12</sup> More details on this particular type of sensorial reading are explored in the Introduction, in the 'The materiality of the book' section.

example, the Reading Agency in the UK organises an annual ‘World Book Night’, giving away approximately a quarter of a million books, aimed at various tastes and reading abilities.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, The Reading Agency draws attention to the small percentage of translated fictional works available, and the even smaller number of women writers being translated into English.<sup>14</sup> Similar initiatives, aiming to encourage people to diversify their reading, have also been put forward by individuals (or smaller groups), and financed by crowd-funding: for example, the *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls* collection was published in an attempt to offer young girls female role-models the authors deemed absent from classical fairy tales and bedtime stories<sup>15</sup> (parallels can be drawn between this initiative and Wittig’s rewriting of myths and foundational stories, in order to carve out a place in history for women). While these projects are still organised by individual groups and charities, their methods and research into reading practices can be incorporated into wider cultural and educational policies, promoting literacy, life-long learning, and a diversification of available reading materials to facilitate our encounter with the other (not just in fiction, but also in the real world).

This thesis has put forward a range of reading scenarios, returning to the texts, while simultaneously allowing the reader to have an active and engaged role, enabling the creation of an imaginative readerly space in fiction. It has also acknowledged that this engaged role needs to be embraced by the reader — the textual hospitality needs to be matched by readerly hospitality. This readerly hospitality is not without its dangers, but, as was shown throughout the thesis, it does carry significant transformative potential. This transformative potential was linked to our encounters with the other, be it the other in textual form, or the other as another person. Reception studies facilitated the analysis of paratextual elements involved in the reading process (for example, media reception), while theories of intertextuality helped create a web of literary and non-literary references that would enrich understanding and interpretations. The reader and the text were the two main pivots around which these three theoretical areas — reception studies, intertextuality and the other — were articulated. This transferable model sets up reading as a dialogue between the reader and the text (the text including the characters, the narrators, and the authors), analysing the way readerly spaces are created in fiction, and the tools needed

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<sup>13</sup> <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/apr/23/world-book-night-uk-book-giveaway>> and <<http://worldbooknight.org/>> [both accessed on 17 July 2017].

<sup>14</sup> <<https://readingagency.org.uk/news/blog/why-we-promote-literature-in-translation.html>> and <<http://readinggroups.org/resources/1730>> [both accessed on 17 July 2017].

<sup>15</sup> <<https://www.rebelgirls.co/products/good-night-stories-for-rebel-girls>> [accessed on 17 July 2017]. Some of the women presented in the stories include Frida Kahlo, Ada Lovelace, Virginia Woolf, Serena and Venus Williams.

for their exploration. When talking about exploration, we can turn to one of the most famous explorers of all time, Marco Polo, who believed that ‘the ear, not the voice, determines the nature of the tale’<sup>16</sup>. This thesis highlighted the significant contribution of the ‘ear’ (the reader) to the nature of the tale, without, however, disregarding the ‘voice’ (the text), nor the space between the ‘voice’ and the ‘ear’ (a space represented by the inter-, para-, and extra- textual elements analysed throughout).

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<sup>16</sup> Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 78.



# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1

### Interview with Marie Darrieussecq, conducted via e-mail, spring 2016<sup>1</sup>

1. Dans *Rapport de police* vous dites ‘J’ai un savoir-faire en métamorphoses’ (p. 28). Pensez-vous que les procès d’écriture et de lecture soient des métamorphoses en eux-mêmes ? Comment pensez-vous que les lecteurs interagissent avec une telle ‘écriture-métamorphose’ ?

Certains la rejettent violemment. D’autres adhèrent et se transforment en lisant. Les livres me transforment (les bons livres). Un livre comme *Things fall apart*, de Chinua Achebe, m’a transformée, par exemple (il a modifié ma vision du monde). Beaucoup de romans de Duras, de Perec, de Sarraute, Claude Simon, Faulkner, Kafka, Mandelstam, et Freud, etc.

2. Dans le même ouvrage (*Rapport de police*, p. 390) vous dites aussi que la lecture c’est ‘l’Autre de l’écriture.’ Pourriez-vous développer cette possible définition de la lecture ? Quels types de procès sont impliqués, selon vous, dans l’acte de lecture ?

La lecture ouvre des fenêtres dans le cerveau. Elle provoque un film mental très personnel. Que voit-on quand on lit ? Quel rythme entend-t-on ? Quel espace privé et pourtant littéraire, commun, s’ouvre ?

3. *Clèves* et *Il faut beaucoup aimer les hommes* sont vos deux romans qui racontent l’histoire du même personnage principale, Solange. Y-a-il des éléments différents dans le procès d’écriture, quand vous racontez l’histoire du même personnage (dans des périodes différentes) ? Sur les couvertures de ces deux romans il n’y a pas d’indices qu’il s’agirait toujours de l’histoire de Solange (par exemple, le 4<sup>e</sup> de couverture de *Il faut beaucoup aimer les hommes* ne nomme pas les personnages) ; est-ce que cela représente une liberté laissée au lecteur, la possibilité de lire les romans dans n’importe quel ordre ?

Oui. Ce n’est pas un feuilleton. C’est un autre état du même personnage. Je pense même que la chronologie n’a guère d’importance. C’est le même personnage, dans un autre état. Dans une autre métamorphose, si vous voulez.

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<sup>1</sup> With many thanks to Marie Darrieussecq for her generosity in answering the questions.

4. Comment voyez-vous votre relation avec votre maison d'édition/ votre éditeur ? Collaborez-vous avec les maisons d'éditions qui publient vos romans à l'étranger ? Êtes-vous en contact avec vos traducteurs ?

Je n'ai aucune raison de quitter POL. On m'a parfois offert plus d'argent ou plus de surface publicitaire, mais je ne retrouverais pas, je crois, l'atmosphère singulière, très littéraire, un peu marginale, qui existe dans cette maison. C'est une amitié éditoriale.

5. Je sais que POL encourage ses auteurs à écrire le 4<sup>e</sup> de couverture des livres. Comment trouvez-vous ce procès, et quelles en sont, selon vous, les principales difficultés ?

C'est difficile mais nécessaire. Tout ce qui est écrit dans et sur le livre fait partie du livre et doit donc être *écrit*.

6. Dans mes recherches, j'essaie de trouver des indices (et même des preuves), dans des œuvres de fiction, que la lecture peut influencer de manière positive nos interactions avec l'autre. Pensez-vous que cela soit le cas des lecteurs/ lectrices contemporain(e)s ?

C'est un beau sujet de recherche... La littérature rend-t-elle les gens meilleurs ? En tous cas je sais qu'un livre suffisamment fort peut me faire oublier un contexte. C'est typique dans les situations d'attente, par exemple : un livre peut être plus fort que la longueur d'une attente. Il peut court-circuiter le temps. Il peut aussi proposer des phrases qui aident à vivre et DONC rendent meilleur. Une longue réflexion sur le sujet est développée dans *Elizabeth Costello*, un roman de Coetzee important pour moi.

7. Considérez-vous que le lecteur soit/ puisse être un co-créateur ou un co-écrivain ?

Je considère qu'il ou elle fait la moitié du chemin. En Argentine en 1998 j'avais eu la surprise de voir mon roman *Naissance des fantômes* lu comme l'histoire, réaliste, de la veuve d'un disparu dans les geôles de l'Etat.

8. En lisant vos romans, j'ai eu l'impression que vos héroïnes ont une vive nécessité de raconter leurs histoires (et que, par conséquent, leurs histoires soient entendues attentivement). Pensez-vous que cela pourrait être une réflexion sur une des nécessités de la société contemporaine en général ? Dans quelle mesure croyez-vous que la lecture puisse combler cette nécessité ?

Je n'ai pas résolu définitivement la question de savoir si je dois mettre en scène (en texte) l'adresse à quelqu'un. Dans *Tom est mort* la narratrice écrit, littéralement, dans des cahiers, et j'ai trouvé cette position d'énonciation très dynamique et justifiée. Et son mari lit ses cahiers et modifie légèrement son écriture. Je n'ai pas d'avis sur la société contemporaine. J'évite seulement la dispersion sur les réseaux sociaux mais c'est très personnel. Je ne maîtrise pas cette écriture-là et cet usage-là du temps.

9. Quelle est la contribution de la psychanalyse dans la naissance de vos œuvres ?

La psychanalyse a débarrassé mes manuscrits des scories trop personnelles, des règlements de compte familiaux. Elle a élargi l'adresse, elle m'a autorisé un public. Mon *Je* (ou mon *Elle*) s'est à la fois diffusé (en termes physiques, moléculaires) et narrativisé. Un jour peut-être, par cet effacement de mes coordonnées d'Etat Civil et de famille, ce je et ce elle pourront s'autobiographiser, je ne sais pas.

10. En analysant votre œuvre, beaucoup de critiques soulignent l'émergence d'un univers créatif/ esthétique Darrieussecq-ien (avec des éléments comme le fantôme de l'enfant, les espaces marginaux ou périphériques, les images marines, les métamorphoses etc.). Quelle est votre interaction avec ces éléments récurrents ?

Je suis consciente de ces éléments mais je les laisse se déployer inconsciemment. Je les regarde opérer leur danse, un peu comme les poussières dans les rayons de soleil, dans le vide des après-midi. Quand ils n'apparaissent pas je ne peux pas écrire, je suis trop dans le temps présent, je sens trop ma table, mon ordinateur.

11. Quelles sont vos relations avec vos différents types de lecteurs – le public large, les critiques, et les académiques/ universitaires (français et internationaux ou anglo-américains).

Je suis souvent sollicitée et je réponds souvent, cela me distrait, me « sort » de l'usage strictement créatif de mon outil de travail. Je crée parfois des liens durables avec des universitaires. Je viens de l'université et parfois la recherche me manque, l'enseignement aussi. Je me rattrape un peu avec des conférences. Je réponds volontiers aux lettres ou mails de lecteur/trices, mais en établissant très rarement de longues correspondances (je ne peux rien donner sur le plan affectif, rien promettre). Le lien aux patients dans la psychanalyse est évidemment bien plus développé et différent, efficace sur le plan de la cure, car strictement oral. Le lien aux lecteurs/trices est plus spectral, et cela me va comme ça, il doit rester comme cela. Quant aux critiques, mes rapports avec eux se sont apaisés avec le temps, une question d'habitude sans doute. Nous faisons partie du même biotope.

## Appendix 2

### a. Jean François Josselin, 'Lettre à Sapho', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 8 October 1973

FEMMES

*Le Nouvel Observateur*

## Lettre à Sapho

Par un pur-sang de l'écurie  
Lindon, un livre dont chaque  
phrase est porteuse de volupté

LE CORPS LESBIEN  
par Monique Wittig  
Editions de Minuit, 188 p., 25 F.

Si la littérature déferle par vagues, Jérôme Lindon, directeur des Editions de Minuit, joue le rôle de la Lune : il ordonne les marées. On lui devait déjà le fameux « nouveau roman », apparu il y a une vingtaine d'années. Toutes les sottises ayant été dites sur cette école (qui d'ailleurs n'en était pas une), il reste aujourd'hui une demi-douzaine d'écrivains qui, d'évidence, sont les plus importants de leur époque. Le talent de Jérôme Lindon a été de ne pas les imposer dans l'instant au public, au moyen d'artifices publicitaires, mais de jouer avec le temps, de favoriser lentement leur carrière, c'est-à-dire l'évolution de leur art jusqu'au point de rencontre entre le texte et le lecteur, qui bouge lui aussi.

C'est que les auteurs de Jérôme Lindon ne sont pas de l'étoffe des écrivains traditionnels. Pour ceux-ci, le succès sera immédiat ou ne sera pas, dans la mesure où leurs œuvres, classiques, sont aussitôt classées. Les années qui passent les démontent souvent parce que leurs phrases sont comme arrêtées, pétrifiées. En revanche, les « nouveaux romans » de Jérôme Lindon évoluent. Aujourd'hui, ils ne sont plus les mêmes qu'hier. Alain Robbe-Grillet, par exemple, passait naguère pour un romancier austère. Vingt ans après, on le redécouvre amusant, sinon comique. Cette littérature, qui vit, qui glisse et qui dérape sans doute, est bien l'un des phénomènes les plus réconfortants de la course de notre culture vers son apocalypse. Et le succès de Jérôme Lindon est l'une des sanctions les plus logiques de l'édition française. Car, si l'on sait vaguement que les romans de Robbe-Grillet, Claude Simon ou Robert Pinget n'ont pas battu des records de vente au moment de leur parution, on ne peut ignorer que, ces romans, on les vend, ou plutôt on les achète, encore. Ils sont toujours aussi actuels que les successifs « livres de la rentrée » : ce sont des livres que l'on n'oublie pas.

Le « nouveau roman » épanoui — et par conséquent débarrassé de son adjectif inutile (« nouveau ») et rendu à sa pluralité (qu'y a-t-il de plus étranger à un livre de Claude Simon qu'un livre de Robbe-Grillet) —, Jérôme Lindon poursuit



« LES DEUX AMIES », DE COURBET  
*Le scandale ? Il est dans le « plaisir du texte »*

sa tâche. Grâce à ses recherches, se lève et grossit une nouvelle vague littéraire, sans étiquette cette fois. Deux écrivains singuliers et magnifiques apparaissent et troublent les eaux tranquilles du récit à la française : Tony Duvert et Monique Wittig. De Tony Duvert, on a pu lire, au printemps dernier, un livre étrange et accompli, « Paysage de fantaisie ». Monique Wittig publie aujourd'hui « Le Corps lesbien », un texte gracieux, qui ne fait pas de grâce mais, au contraire, se présente au lecteur avec une pudeur révolutionnaire et paradoxale.

### Saccager la phrase

Comme Duvert, Monique Wittig a une légende fondée sur le scandale et l'illisibilité. Le M.L.F., l'homosexualité et la couverture des Editions de Minuit masquent la silhouette menue de la lauréate du prix Médicis (en 1964, pour « l'Oppoponax ») qui bouleversa les échos par ses bottes cuissardes et l'emploi d'un mot effrayant (« quèque ») dans la première phrase de son premier livre. Le scandale ? Eh bien, il est dans ce « plaisir du texte » dont Roland Barthes a si bien parlé. Voici en effet une littérature dont l'érotisme ne naît pas de la représentation d'histoires sexuelles racontées mais envahit le lecteur d'une manière immédiate, par le seul jeu de mots porteurs de volupté. C'est que les mots de Monique Wittig agressent (ou caressent). Le corps s'éveille quand la phrase se déroule, le corps et toutes ses dépendances, le sang, la chair, les humeurs, les sécrétions, les plis, les grains de beauté, les papilles, les nerfs cutanés, les plexus, etc.

Cette longue confidence intime à Sapho devient le reflet écrit d'une multitude de gestes qui excitent à la fois le texte et les sens. Le livre n'a donc pas une orchestration progressive avec un début et une fin anecdotiques mais il se soulève et soupire de bonheur et de douleur au fil des pages. Si l'on ose dire, c'est une litté-

rature qui fait l'amour plus qu'elle ne le conte.

D'où l'apparence d'illisibilité : si le désordre des sens naît du désir, le texte est égaré à mesure que les phrases le conduisent vers le désir. L'important, pour le lecteur (ou plutôt pour la lectrice, évidemment privilégiée), c'est de subir le vocabulaire de Monique Wittig comme un attouchement pervers qui vous renverse et vous tord. Autre apparence d'illisibilité : la présence d'une barre après l'initiale des pronoms personnels de la première personne du singulier et celle des adjectifs possessifs singuliers (« J/e », « m/on », par exemple). Il ne s'agit pas d'une coquetterie typographique mais de la manifestation féministe de Monique Wittig contre le langage : « Un instrument qui n'est pas le nôtre, déclare-t-elle à Viviane Forrester (1), qui ne nous appartient pas [...]. Je trouve que l'expérience d'une femme, et en particulier d'une femme écrivain, est complètement schizophrénique. Il faut toujours faire coupure entre les deux : d'une part, employer un langage qui n'est pas le nôtre, que nous n'avons pas choisi, qui est une culture qui pèse si fort sur nous avec toutes ses contraintes, ses fascinations pour une certaine érudition, pour une certaine pratique du langage, etc., et la lutte qu'on mène sur un autre plan, qui tend à casser tout ça, à essayer de faire à travers et dans le langage autre chose... »

Cette coupure ce « / », saccage la phrase belle et soyeuse. La contestation naît au cœur de cette prose précieuse qui est, en effet, l'aboutissement d'un art « lesbien », presque trop baroque, à la manière des dessins de Mariette Lydis ou de Léonor Fini. Mais c'est dans cette perfection justement que l'art, comme un fruit trop mûr, se gâte et annonce peut-être un autre monde dont Monique Wittig avec Tony Duvert et Pierre Guyotat (pour ne citer que les plus exemplaires) seraient les futurs ancêtres.

JEAN-FRANÇOIS JOSSELIN

(1) In « Virginia Woolf », par Viviane Forrester, Ed. de la Quinzaine littéraire.



JEUDI 17 JUIN 1999

## Wittig, guérillère d'aujourd'hui

«Il n'y a pas de littérature féminine pour moi, ça n'existe pas. En

MONIQUE WITTIG  
Paris-la-politique  
P.O.L., 142 pp., 80 F.

**M**onique Wittig est de retour avec *Paris-la-politique*, un recueil de très beaux textes allégoriques labellisé P.O.L. et non plus Minuit, l'éditeur de toujours. C'est le premier livre qu'elle publie en France depuis 1985, depuis *Virgile, non*. *L'Opoponax*, son premier roman, soutenu par Marguerite Duras, a eu le prix Médicis en 1964, on y pense encore. Il existe un club sélect, purement littéraire, des amateurs de *L'Opoponax*. Leur signe distinctif est une soudaine illumination lorsqu'ils entendent prononcer le nom de l'auteur. Ils l'associent aussitôt au titre magique (voir page suivante).

Aux États-Unis, où elle vit depuis plus de vingt ans, où elle enseigne et où elle est enseignée, Monique Wittig est une star. *The Straight Mind*, recueil d'essais paru en anglais en 1992, théorise ce que ses fictions, à partir des *Guérillères* (1969), ont mis en images. L'hétérosexualité est le système à combattre. Comme il perpétue l'asservissement par l'homme, il convient de créer une catégorie qui aille au-delà de la répartition par sexes. Il n'y a plus de femme. Monique Wittig invente la lesbienne radicale.

Son engagement est connu et apprécié en France également. En juin 1997, lors de la Gay Pride, sa venue à Paris a attiré plus de monde qu'on n'en pouvait recevoir au centre Georges Pompidou. Mais quand même. On ne peut pas comparer la notoriété souterraine de Wittig dans son pays d'origine, et l'engouement qu'elle suscite de l'autre côté de l'Atlantique. Ici, elle est l'auteur d'un livre culte. Là-bas, ce sont ses personnages qui ont fait l'objet d'un culte. Si elle avait eu le genre à ça, Monique Wittig aurait pu inventer une secte des guérillères dont elle serait devenue la gourou richissime.

Dans chacun de ses livres, la psychologie se dissout dans un pronom. Il y a le «son» des enfants dans *L'Opoponax*. Il y a le «je» du *Corps lesbien* (1973), «je» scindé, écrit «je» tout au long de cette déclaration d'amour qui épiluche le corps en même temps qu'il l'épelle, exercice de dévoration et d'ensevelissement. On retrouvera un «je» plus ludique dans *Virgile, non*, divine comédie où Wittig traverse les enfers féminins avant d'accéder au paradis, en pensant à Dante, oui, mais pas avec Virgile comme guide.

«Elles» sont les héroïnes des *Guérillères*. C'est une utopie. Les femmes ont gagné la guerre. Elles règnent, elles se racontent leurs histoires d'O. *J'anneau vulvaires*, sans pour autant voir l'univers à l'aune de leur cercle. C'est-à-dire qu'elles se refusent à remplir leurs discours de symboles, comme l'ont fait les phalocrates. Leur relation au monde est de dépossession. Le concept de manque a disparu. Elles chicanent les oppresseurs nourris de psychanalyse. «Elles disent, ils ont tout prévu, ta révolte ils l'ont d'avance baptisée révolte d'esclave, révolte contre nature, ils l'appellent révolte par laquelle tu veux t'approprier ce qui leur appartient, le phallus».

Deux textes de *Paris-la-politique* traitent directement de l'esclavage. Ils rappellent que Monique Wittig, après des débuts classiques dont témoigne encore la nouvelle «Elsa Braum» (une gamine au parloir subit la visite d'un vieux monsieur au crâne rose), a transité par la science-fiction. Ils montrent comment le refus de la re-



présentation réaliste aboutit chez elle à une surreprésentation, voire un surréalisme. «Le jardin» (1978) est la description atroce d'une société où «les êtres», beaux et mobiles, exploitent «les corps», mols ectoplasmes immobilisés dans des transats, nourris de force, bercés par des grands singes. De temps à autre, il est posé sur leur sexe une machine à traire. Dans «Les Tchiches et les Tchouches» (1983), les Tchouches, beaux et forts, affament les Tchiches. Même schéma que ci-dessus: les Tchouches exploitent les Tchiches, leur différence biologique qui fonde leur supériorité. Ils invoquent «l'intuition tchiches», ou «l'éternel tchichien», suivent mon regard. Le comble de l'aliénation est atteint lorsque les Tchiches, revendiquant leur différence, font de leur faiblesse une vertu et renoncent à une vie meilleure. C'est que Monique Wittig n'appartient pas du tout au courant qu'on a nommé «différentialistes» au sein du féminisme

moderne, et qui est représenté par Luce Irigaray ou Hélène Cixous. Chez elle, pas de «féminitudes», mais, au contraire, un refus de la nature féminine, une exécution de tout ce qui est dit féminin. Question de forme (s). C'est un narcissisme dont elle se moque dans «Paris-la-politique», quand elle stigmatise «l'enroulement obligatoire». «Paris-la-politique» (ensemble daté de 1985 qui donne son titre au recueil) est la saisissante parabole des années de militantisme de l'auteur, qui fut une des pionnières du mouvement de libération des femmes en 1968. Plus généralement, c'est la parabole des luttes de pouvoir dans les groupuscules. Une narratrice mélancolique est contrainte de participer au carnaval où éclatent, sans fin, des baudruches. On discute de la meilleure façon de balayer les rues, et on ne décide rien. Les «petites chaises» font chorus. Les «elles acolytes» se soumettent. Les «judas» se déchaînent. «La trahison pourquoi? Quel

est l'enjeu dans ce monde précaire qui n'a rien?» La narratrice lesbienne se fait lyncher en assemblée générale. On tire d'un sac le mot «elles» qui l'exclut: «Il sera parlé de toi comme si tu n'étais pas là.» Interrogée sur ses souvenirs du féminisme, Monique Wittig préfère ne rien raconter. Elle n'est pas une rapporteuse. L'interview a lieu sur une péniche-café amarrée derrière Notre-Dame, où il y a des faucons pèlerins. Elle en a vu un la veille. Elle signale des choucas dans les arbres du square Jean XXIII. Elle aime l'eau et le temps gris qu'elle n'a pas à Tucson, Arizona. Pour le reste, un farouche refus de l'anecdote, dans l'entre-tien comme dans les livres, fait d'elle un écrivain hors du temps. Elle semble se vouloir délestée de son indéniable poids historique. On sait peu de choses. On sait que Monique Wittig est née à Dannemarie dans le Haut-Rhin. On sait son âge, mais on ne le dit pas.

C. D.

c. S.G., 'Retour de la Wittig', *Libération*, 8 July 1999

**E**  
re?  
LIBÉRATION 8 Jul 1999  
**Retour de la Wittig**

**Littérature.** Célébrité du monde féministe aux Etats-Unis, la Française Monique Wittig reste méconnue dans son pays d'origine. Elle dédicacera aujourd'hui à la librairie les Mots à la bouche, dans le Marais, son dernier ouvrage, *Paris-la-Politique* (POL), recueil de très beaux textes allégoriques. Rappelons que Monique Wittig a débuté sa carrière littéraire en 1964, avec un roman-culte sur l'enfance, *l'Opopanax*, salué par Marguerite Duras.

**Libé** L'écrivain, qui se définit comme une « lesbienne radicale », a ensuite participé à la fondation du Mouvement de libération des femmes en 1968. Monique Wittig enseigne au département des Women Studies à l'université de Tucson (Arizona) ●

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*Les Mots à la bouche*,  
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**Rectificatif**

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JEUDI 17 JUIN 1999

Wittig, guérillère d'aujourd'hui

littérature, je ne sépare pas les femmes des hommes. On est écrivain, ou pas.»

# «J'ai connu la guillotine»

On peut bien se trouver mal dans la «substance politique».

### Pourquoi ce livre vient-il si tard?

Il aurait pu être publié avant. C'est une question de circonstances. J'ai d'autres textes, qu'il va falloir que je regroupe. Paul Otchakovsky-Laurens est encourageant, il dit qu'on ne m'a pas oubliée. *The Straight Mind* a fait écho aux Etats-Unis, en France, rien, il a été refusé par deux ou trois éditeurs. C'est le plus loin que je pouvais aller dans ma pensée politique, qui n'est pas acceptable ici, et qui est de considérer l'hétérosexualité comme un régime politique, un régime de domination.

### Quel est le rapport entre Paris-la-politique, Les Guérillères et Virgile, non?

Le morceau de ce livre intitulé «Paris-la-politique», c'est l'enfer lesbien de Virgile, non, qui était une descente aux enfers de toutes les femmes; il ne pouvait pas lui appartenir, c'est pourquoi il en est tombé. Virgile, non est le livre que je préfère peut-être parce qu'il est mal aimé. C'est un opéra des gueux où Virgile est trop doux pour avoir une place, où la comédie de Dante rejoint John Gay et Brecht dans l'Opéra de quat sous.

*Les Guérillères* est une chanson de geste. Le début est chronologiquement la fin, dans un mouvement circulaire. C'est un des livres pour lequel le montage a été le plus difficile. En est tombé un des textes de Paris-la-politique, «Une partie de campagne». Le montage, je ne peux pas le faire à l'ordinateur. Il faut que je voie les fragments matériellement, que je les dispose autour de moi sur le sol de manière à pouvoir les organiser. C'est comme ça que je travaille.

Je peux écrire très longtemps avant de trouver la forme. J'ai écrit

m'étais pas engagée personnellement dans *Les Guérillères*. *Le Corps lesbien*, c'est comme si je me retournais complètement, j'avais le corps et l'esprit engagés. La presse avait été silencieuse avec *Les Guérillères*, là, les critiques français ont lu ce livre comme un poème. Aux Etats-Unis, c'était le contraire.

### Pourquoi le Corps lesbien est-il si violent?

Cela avait été une passion telle, il fallait quelque chose de violent. C'est la seule fois que j'ai fait ce que j'ai toujours voulu faire, donner mon lexique. Quand j'ai trouvé le titre, *Corps lesbien*, l'association de ces deux mots m'a fait rire, c'était absurdemment sarcastique.

On disait autrefois : l'amour qui n'ose pas dire son nom. «L'opopanax», il est clair que c'était le sésame ouvre-toi, que c'était ce qui n'avait jamais été dit. Mary McCarthy est la seule à avoir parlé de ça. Marguerite Duras en a parlé un peu dans son article, mais son hostilité envers l'homosexualité est la raison pour laquelle je me suis brouillée avec elle. C'était une personnalité comme j'en ai rencontré peu, avec elle c'était comme si on avait toujours été là, mais il fallait être dans son monde. Je l'aimais beaucoup. Je suis toujours reconnaissante de ce qu'elle a fait pour moi. C'est après son article sur l'Opopanax que je l'ai rencontrée.

### Pourquoi y a-t-il tellement de noms dans vos livres?

Il me semble que le nom d'une personne, c'est son histoire, c'est en soi un récit. Ce n'est pas seulement une étiquette. Là, il y a quelqu'un. Ce nom magiquement en donne une manifestation. Ce peut être un pseudonyme, le nom d'une personne réelle ou d'un personnage.

## Son Opopanax

L'Opopanax est l'histoire de Catherine Legrand, de la maternelle au brevet dans une institution religieuse sans que Monique Wittig donne la moindre indication de temps. Les sensations et les jeux indiquent que la petite fille grandit. Elle contemple son porte-plume, aime sa mère grand comme ça, fait des bâtons, de la géographie, du latin. Elle est surveillée par «ma sœur» et entourée d'enfants comme elle. «Pascal Fromentin Pierre-Marie Fromentin Véronique Legrand Catherine Legrand sautent dans les tés de foin, on essaie d'aller cogner de la tête les poutres transversales.» On a les paumes

C'est une utopie. Les femmes ont gagné la guerre. Elles

Elles règnent, elles se racontent leurs histoires d'O, d'anneau vulvaire, sans pour autant voir l'univers à l'aune

Je peux écrire très longtemps avant de trouver la forme. J'ai écrit pour la première fois un texte de fiction en anglais. Chaque fois qu'on écrit un livre, c'est comme la première fois. Ce que j'ai essayé de faire, en anglais, comme un exercice, c'était de créer une suspense avec les mots. De cette histoire on a tiré un script, *the Girl*, qui va être tourné à Paris cet été. Cela fait quelques années que j'écris des scénarios, seule ou en collaboration. J'ai commencé avec un scénario sur Jeanne d'Arc. Cette forme a suivi et déplacé mon travail sur le théâtre.

### Flore ou faune, vous avez un vocabulaire incroyablement étendu. Et en anglais?

J'ai un vocabulaire en anglais, ce ne sont pas les mêmes arbres. Pour l'Opopanax, j'avais fait un travail énorme sur ce qu'on aime dans l'enfance, sur les sensations physiques qui n'existent, qui ne sont compréhensibles que quand on trouve les mots pour désigner les fleurs, les plantes, les arbres, toutes choses extrêmement vivantes avec lesquelles on a des échanges, comme avec les gens. Pour *Le Corps lesbien*, j'avais besoin des mots anatomiques, savants, par opposition aux mots qui auraient déserté tout. Utiliser les mots les plus froids, les plus cliniques, était une façon d'évacuer la sentimentalité pour aller vers le brut.

### L'Opopanax laisse supposer une enfance à la campagne. Est-ce le cas?

Contrairement à ce que pensent certains critiques, l'Opopanax n'est pas un livre autobiographique. J'aime la campagne. La der-

rière maison de mon enfance était dans le Rouergue, dans les causses. Après, quand nous habitons la région parisienne, je parlais seule dans la forêt de Montmorency. Il y avait encore moyen de marcher toute une journée sans voir personne. Les souvenirs physiques les plus forts, les plus violents, viennent à 12, 13, 14 ans. Avant, ils sont plus localisés, ce peut être un petit morceau de mur dans un terrain vague.

Comment vous êtes-vous éloignée de la représentation réaliste?

Ce qui m'en a arrachée, c'est la compréhension du Nouveau Roman, de Godard. Chez Minuit, Alain Robbe-Grillet m'a lue, Jérôme Lindon m'a écrit. Ils sont les seuls à l'avoir fait. Je ne m'attendais pas être publiée, c'était une voix qui me répondait: je voudrais lire ce que vous ferez après. Après, j'ai envoyé un roman, qui s'appelait *La Mécanique*, et Lindon m'a dit: je vous conseille d'attendre, mais si vous devez aller chez un autre éditeur, je vous publie tout de suite. Sinon, je publie le prochain. Je lui ai fait confiance. Le suivant, c'était l'Opopanax.

Vous citez le nom de Nathalie Sarraute dans Paris-la-politique. C'est le génie du siècle. C'est beau littérairement, philosophiquement, c'est aussi révolutionnaire, je ne vois aucun écrivain qui puisse se comparer à elle. Elle a fait connaître des phénomènes de langage vivant qu'aucun linguiste n'aurait pu mettre au jour.

### Pourquoi avoir choisi le mode de la parabole?

«Paris-la-politique» est une parabole de ce qui se passe, de ce qui s'est passé. Il y a chez moi une espèce de pudeur, de mauvaise volonté à rapporter, dénoncer. La parabole est une façon de prendre une distance. Dans tous les groupes politiques quels qu'ils soient, il y a un fonctionnement, toujours le même, on n'attaque pas l'ennemi mais le plus proche, et ça fait mal, ça peut tuer. C'est la parabole de ça, de ce que ça peut faire aux gens. Tout le temps où j'ai été plongée dans cette substance politique, j'en rêvais, j'ai connu la guillotine, la tête coupée. C'était horrible.

### Qu'enseignez-vous à Tucson, Arizona?

Je n'enseigne plus la littérature dans le département de français, mais dans celui des Women studies. Les Français font à leur sujet une erreur totale. Ils les voient d'une façon très restrictive. En fait, il s'agit d'un carrefour de plusieurs départements, sociologie, anthropologie, sciences politiques, loi, histoire, littérature,

on essaie d'aller cogner de la tête les poutres transversales.» On a les paumes écorchées, on pêche la truite, on est des orpailleurs. On va à la messe. A la fin, Catherine Legrand tombe amoureuse de ValerieSorge. Dans France-Observateur, le 5 novembre 1964, Marguerite Duras parle de «langage objectif pur. Il est celui-là même - mais porté au plain-chant par l'auteur - dont l'enfance se sert pour débayer et dénombrer ses univers. Ce qui revient à dire que mon Opopanax est un chef-d'œuvre d'écriture parce qu'il est écrit dans la langue exacte de l'Opopanax.» Deux ans plus tard, quand le livre est traduit aux Etats-Unis, Mary McCarthy ferveur adepte des Guérillères par la suite, prend le relais de Duras dans un compte rendu intitulé «L'enfance de te le monde». L'Opopanax est un roman tellement fort que pendant les décennies suivantes, tous les écrivains qui voulaient parler de l'enfance l'ont imité, même quand ils ne l'avaient pas lu.

à l'aune de leur cercle.

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### Vos parents s'intéressent-ils à ce que vous faites?

Ma mère plus que mon père. C'est elle qui m'a faite écrivain. Elle m'a tenue à mes propres décisions. Jusqu'au Corps lesbien, où elle a eu un peu comme une réaction d'épouvante, elle lisait page à page tout ce que j'écrivais. Mes parents m'ont soutenue dans mes écrits. On leur disait: c'est votre fille qui a écrit le Corps lesbien? Ils répondaient fièrement oui. Le corps lesbien, j'ai attendu six mois avant de le montrer. Je ne

fait, il s'agit d'un carrefour de plusieurs départements, sociologie, anthropologie, sciences politiques, loi, histoire, littérature, etc.

Il n'y a pas de littérature féminine pour moi, ça n'existe pas. En littérature, je ne sépare pas les femmes des hommes. On est écrivain, ou pas. Il faut subsumer toutes les catégories comme écrivains femmes, écrivains noirs, afro-américains, latinos, «native Americans». On est dans un espace mental où le sexe n'est pas déterminant. Il faut bien qu'on ait un espace de liberté. Le langage le permet. Il s'agit de construire une idée du neutre qui échapperait au sexuel.

### Et le droit à la différence?

C'est très ambigu, le droit à la différence. C'est comme l'écriture féminine. La peur d'être le même. La non-compréhension de ce que cela veut dire. Et d'un autre côté, dire on est tout pareil à vous, essayer de recréer la famille - la bonne volonté des homosexuels, qui veulent se marier, avoir des enfants, et les mères lesbiennes, ça ne va pas non plus. Il faut abandonner le point de vue straight, normal, aller au-delà des catégories de sexe, ce sera un changement dans les consciences, plus grand que les changements économiques.

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# Sexe, mensonge et politique

**Altérité.** Disparue le 3 janvier, Monique Wittig, fondatrice du MLF, est une référence pour le mouvement lesbien.

**L**e 26 août 1970: huit femmes vont déposer solennellement une gerbe au pied de l'Arc de triomphe au nom de la « femme inconnue du soldat inconnu ». Aux CRS incrédules, elles lancent: « La moitié des hommes sont des femmes. » Fâchés, ils crurent qu'elles les traitaient de pédés... L'incompréhension des Compagnies républicaines de sécurité en disait long sur la place accordée aux femmes dans l'espace politique d'une France qui ne leurs avait toujours pas reconnu le droit d'avorter, et qui venait juste de fêter les vingt-cinq ans du vote féminin...

Monique Wittig était de cette marche décisive pour le Mouvement de libération des femmes (MLF) dont elle est une cofondatrice en France. Cet événement marquant de la lutte pour l'émancipation du « sexe faible » se passa curieusement des révolutionnaires de 1968, qui refusèrent de s'y associer. Wittig n'aimait pas revenir sur cette époque. On sentait, lorsqu'elle l'évoquait, une certaine amertume lasse: « En France, les féministes ne voulaient pas que l'on crée des groupes lesbiens, j'étais toujours la tête de Turc », confiait-elle en 1997 à une journaliste de *Libération*. Militante active, on la retrouve début 1970 au sein du premier groupe lesbien de Paris, les Gouines rouges et en 1973, lorsque paraît *Le Corps lesbiens* (Éditions de Minuit) qui provoque, de part son titre – à peine parlait-on d'homosexualité – un vrai scandale. Revenant sur la création du Front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire (FHAR), elle précise que ce sont des femmes qui en étaient à l'origine. Les mecs sont venus plus tard et ont ensuite pris la direction.

Dans *Paris la politique* (1985), elle revient sur cette période faste en idéal mais économe, selon elle, de ses actions. Il y est question d'un carnaval où la narratrice est invitée. En l'air, des baudruches éclatent, inlassablement,



Novembre 1971, les femmes demandent l'abolition des lois contre l'avortement.

lyncher la lesbienne encombrante. Ce livre est surtout, en creux, une critique des figures du « french feminism », incarné par la triade Cixous, Kristeva et Irigaray qui se sont distinguées en éliminant, selon elle, la dimension politique et en tenant à l'écart le courant féministe matérialiste.

La pensée de Monique Wittig est avant tout politique, dans le sens où elle revendique un espace de vie et de pensée pour cette autre de la femme qu'est la lesbienne, et, partant, pour ces autres de l'humanité que sont ceux et celles qui, au mieux, ne se retrouvent pas et, au pire, se perdent dans l'affirmation de l'hétérosexualité comme sexualité légitime et indépassable. Ses analyses se concentrent néanmoins sur la place des femmes dans nos sociétés et sur la distinction qui conduit à définir deux sexes. « L'idéologie de la différence des sexes opère dans notre culture comme une censure, en ce qu'elle masque l'opposition qui existe sur le plan social entre les hommes et les femmes en lui donnant la nature pour cause. Masculin-féminin, mâle-femelle sont des catégories qui servent à dissimuler le fait que les différences sociales relèvent toujours d'un ordre économique, politique et idéologique. » De la même façon que Foucault dans ses analyses sur l'inscription du politique dans les corps, elle

descriptif pur, et qu'un outil, le langage objectif pur ». Ce désir d'une autre langue, qui ne serait plus celle des dominants, est clairement exprimé dans son essai « Homo sun » (1), dans lequel elle analyse d'un point de vue philosophique les catégories de la différence mises en place depuis Aristote.

C'est donc une figure importante du féminisme et du lesbianisme qui vient de disparaître avec Monique Wittig même si elle demeure peu connue dans l'Hexagone, à l'exception du milieu homo et féministe. Professeur de littérature française – elle officiait jus qu'à sa mort à l'université de Tucson (Arizona), dans le département de « women studies » –, son travail, tant littéraire que théorique, reste une référence pour le milieu lesbien et bien au delà. Un monument même qui a marqué toute une génération, quand les lesbiennes américaines séparatistes des années soixante-dix prenaient soi roman *les Guerrillères* (1969) au pied de la lettre et partaient s'installer en communautés utopiques à la campagne, hors du monde hétéro.

La pensée de Monique Wittig est revendiquée par des théoriciennes comme l'Américaine Judith Butler la Française Marie-Hélène Bourcier ou encore par la jeune philosophe portugaise lesbienne Beatriz Preciado, auteure du *Manifeste contra*



f. Michel Grisolia, 'Non', *L'Express*, 23 February 2004



15 Mars 90

R X E S

# La guirlande de Julia

*Trente ans de vie intellectuelle parisienne. Le premier roman de Julia Kristeva.*

**L**a distribution est éclatante. Par ordre d'entrée en scène :

— Lucien Goldmann, alias Fabien Edelman, dans une pâtisserie: « Il tutoyait tout le monde et ne cessait d'en découbrer avec l'existentialisme, au profit de la raison dialectique revue et corrigée par l'expérience de Pascal, l'aliénation, le Nouveau Roman. »

— Roland Barthes, alias Armand Bréhal, au bar le Rosebud: « Le nez, découpé en ouvre-boîte, penchait asymétriquement à gauche et lui donnait, au gré des circonstances et des jeux de visage, un aspect simplet ou insolent. »

— Philippe Sollers, alias Hervé Sinteuil, dans le même bar: « C'était un jeune homme plutôt grand, corpulent, dont l'aspect physique ne trahissait en rien l'intellectuel d'avant-garde, le "pape de Saint-Germain", disaient les journaux, mais évoquait davantage un médecin posé et rusé consacrant ses loisirs au tennis et au golf. »

— Jacques Lacan, alias Maurice Lauzun, au restaurant du Cheval blanc: « (Il) oubliait de tirer sur son cigare tordu dès qu'il était question de la Chine, et ses yeux quittaient ses demi-lunettes pour le plafond: signe qu'il était intéressé. »

— Emile Benveniste, alias Benserade, chez lui: « Il planait tellement au-delà des nécessités humaines qu'il ne lui restait plus rien d'un animal. Benserade était une plante, c'est ça, il aurait pu avoir sa place sur la terrasse. »

— Michel Foucault, alias Scherner, à la Bibliothèque nationale: « Scherner massacre tous ceux qui osent lui déplaire, donc tout le monde, sauf (j'imagine) quelques intimes. Et encore, il faudrait voir. »

Passent encore Claude Lévi-Strauss, alias Strich-Meyer, avec son « élégante condescendance », son côté « mesquin, radin » et ses manières de « petit chef », dans son laboratoire; Antoinette Fouque, alias Bernadette, théorisant sur les

menaces de liquidation totale du corps de la femme « en caressant les seins de la fille assise à côté d'elle »; Jacques Derrida, alias Saida, prononçant sa « messe » hebdomadaire, à la sortie de laquelle « on comptait les survivants »; Louis Althusser, alias Wurst, et son « air pré-historique » qui le fait ressembler à « un reptile du fond des temps »; Philip Roth, alias Jerry Saltzman, qui se dit un « écrivain primate », seulement bon à « fabriquer des fantasmes »; ou encore Milan Kundera, alias Zoltan Panzera, qui « tient à rester inaccessible ». L'héroïne (qui s'appelle tantôt Olga Moreno, tantôt Joëlle Cabarrus — « Mme J. Ca., caca, avec son cabas russe ») ne croise jamais Simone de Beauvoir, mais elle lui fauche le nom de Dubreuil (Sartre), l'histoire de l'amant américain (Nelson Algren est devenu Edward Dalloway) et elle s'inspire de son roman le plus célèbre, *les Mandarins*, pour écrire *les Samourais*, « un livre pour enfants » car « en définitive, toute littérature est peut-être faite pour les enfants ».

Julia Kristeva, jeune étudiante bulgare débarquée à Paris en 1965, qui a passé sa vie entre Mallarmé, la sémiotique et la psychanalyse, et épousé Philippe Sollers, a donc écrit son premier roman. Son héroïne lui ressemble furieusement. C'est l'histoire d'une jeune fille qui tombe du ciel (de l'Est) dans le Paris des années soixante, découvre des intellectuels, structuralistes, techniciens, enragés, compromis, fatigués. Trente ans de vie intellectuelle parisienne, écrits sur le mode du roman-feuilleton, délaissant les grands événements pour les petits drames. Mais qu'a donc voulu faire Julia Kristeva, se demande le lecteur déconcerté. Le faux journal d'une analyste? Une autobiographie déguisée? Un roman populaire pour intellos?

**Antoine de GAUDEMAR**

*Julia Kristeva: les Samourais. Fayard, 460 pp., 120 F.*



h. Dominique Durand, 'Un Écureuil casse-noisettes', *Le Canard enchaîné*, 7 March 1990

Kristeva, Julia

Kristeva, Julia



**Paris**

**Canard**

Le Canard enchaîné 7-3-90 *Lettrés ou pas Lettrés*

## Un Écureuil casse-noisettes

« Les samourais »  
de Julia Kristeva  
(Feyard)

**J**ULIA Kristeva, arrivée de Bulgarie à Paris en 1965, n'est pas seulement l'auteur d'une « Approche sémiotique d'une structure discursive transformable » (Mouton, 1976) et d'« Au commencement était l'amour. Psychanalyse et foi » (Hachette, 1985), mais aussi l'épouse amoureuse de Philippe Sollers, de son nom Philippe Joyau, dans le roman Hervé Sinteuil, rejeton de la famille de Montlaur. Allez y piger quelque chose, vous, dans ce parti pris de pseudos, de « clés », de chevillettes et de bobinettes qui jamais ne cherront !

Si l'on comprend bien, Julia (Olga Morena, dans le récit) veut nous décrire la saga des penseurs qui ont fait frémir une certaine France, depuis vingt-cinq ans. Femme amoureuse, cavale linguiste parfois débridée, elle voudrait nous rendre la saveur de ces années de poudre à frimas, celles des intellos qui faisaient fondre les glaçons jusque dans les glasses du Manhattan Upper chic, et l'on se demande si Mademoiselle Bovaryna ne s'est pas fourvoyée du côté de la « Bibliothèque rose », après les années Mao qu'elle décrit pourtant sans complaisance.

**Côté Yin**

Olga-Julia est amoureuse d'Hervé Sinteuil-Philippe Sollers, qu'elle accepte avec et sans concessions. Pourquoi devint-il pro-chinois (avec cet apothéisme célèbre : « Un anti-chinois ne chie que des noix ») ? C'est parce qu'il « était extrémiste, parce que son rythme réalitait les étapes, les enchaînements, les transitions, et allait droit au spasme ». Mao ut l'odyssée de ces spasmes, mais il faut lire que Sinteuil-Sollers pratiquait « l'ellipse des sentiments concentrés jusqu'au



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et décrire, raconte comment elle rapporta un texte pour les Editions Des Femmes (« Des Chinoises »), et se fit rembarquer par la gouroucheffe, « Bernadette » (Antoinette Fouque) parce qu'elle était sceptique sur le matriarcat. Cela se termina par une engueulade sous forme de dialogue très collection « Harlequin », qui sonna la fin du militantisme d'Olga.

Suivent des portraits cryptés qui intéresseront les germanoprattins et sans doute un peu plus, un voyage à New York où elle

« suivra son désir », comme le lui conseille, le lui intime, Hervé Sinteuil... Et c'est alors que la catastrophe (qui couvrait) survient : elle devient, Olga, Julia Kristeva, « L'Écureuil », « L'Écureuil aux traits chinois », s'octroyant un galon animalier, elle, l'auteuse des « Samourais », que sa consœur des « Mandarins », Simone de Beauvoir, ne devait qu'à Sartre : « le Castor ».

**Côté Yang**

Olga-Julia est amoureuse d'elle-même que c'en pourrait être touchant, si nous n'avions que cela en tête. Elle nous tire par la manche en nous priant de remarquer ses cheveux en queue de scuriidé, ses yeux en amande si tant beaux. Une tombeuse de première, quoi. Sa première rencontre avec Hervé Sinteuil : « Il plongeait son regard dans sa grande bouche... aux lèvres larges, charmes. Non, on ne pouvait pas dire qu'elle était soite... Elle... sentait ses cuisses s'ouvrir et eut envie de se blottir contre lui. » En plus d'être très blottissante, l'Écureuille trouve les mots de la Bibliothèque mauve pour se décrire, délaissant... son amant américain, Ed Dalloway : « Précise, cristalline, Olga était si présent devenue un clavecin (...). Elle n'était plus cette viole à laquelle un musicien espagnol peut arracher des vibrations graves et noires. »

J'ai lu quelque part que « ce n'est pas un lierre bien écrit. C'est un lierre bon ». Beau sujet de français pour la prochaine session du bac ! Linguiste émérite, Kristeva fait fi, non du beau langage, privilège d'une élite-que-nous-vomissons-tous, mais étale sur la tartine de larges couches de confiture de clichés : « On croit s'éloigner, mais un bon voyage est toujours un éternel retour (...). Ah, la roue du temps, qui ne s'y est pas essuyé ? » Encore : « Qui dit que, aujourd'hui, son prochain comme soi-même ? Il n'y a pas de prochain, parce qu'il n'y a pas de soi-même. » Terminons, sans cruauté aucune sur « la secrète et sûre complicité des femmes qui connaissent le plaisir de l'effort pensé » (PS : « (...) Une femme sans secret est un nuil sans lune. »)

Ce n'est pas ici de l'acharnement thérapéutique, non. Un étonnement : pourquoi Olga-Julia, qui est une amoureuse rompue à la dialectique contrariée de l'auteur, « Femmes » (ce faux roman vrai est un superbe chant d'amour envers Sollers, enfi-gâté méritant), emploie-t-elle, comme rait la linguiste qu'elle est, un infra-st-bétifiant ? Parce que c'est le code du li-gage amoureux ? Parce qu'elle est terré par la contr'œuvre toujours prête à jai de Sinteuil ?

Ce livre ne nous apprend rien sur rien

martyre ». Quant aux Chinois... ils apprendront que mourir, c'est martyre, un peu.

Olga narre son voyage en Chine avec l'équipe de « Tel Quel » (sans Lacan, ténant par sa dragonne) en se demandant s'ils se précipitaient là-bas « pour échapper à une impasse personnelle ». Bonne question. Sinteuil rigole avec ses copains, Bréhal-Roland Barthes ne sort jamais du car d'excursions, préférant griffonner sur son carnet, ou s'imaginant (beau délire, là, d'Olga) à l'Opéra de Pékin, surpris à peloter un jeune Chinois orthodoxe en costume Mao, puis traduit devant un tribunal révolutionnaire et se défendant en pastichant le monologue expiatoire de Julien Sorel, dans « Le rouge et le noir ». Intellectuel, non ? Quant à Sinteuil, dont les édits ne seront pas pour rien dans le dévoiement du maoïsme en France, ses « jugements se basaient sur (sic) l'expérience physique », alors...

Où allons-nous ? Olga-Julia, qui sait voir

## Ne te fais pas de Bill !

« L'ami qui ne m'a pas sauvé la vie »  
d'Hervé Guibert  
(Gallimard)

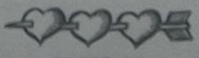
**Q**UAND il y a une urgence, un écrivain ne prend pas de précautions. L'encre, contre le sang empoisonné, est le meilleur des vaccins. Hervé Guibert l'utilise. Peut-être pas pour sauver sa peau, mais sa peur. Auteur de douze romans, Guibert, par ailleurs ex-critique photo du « Monde », lutte contre ce « processus de fuite » qui s'est installé dans ses veines. Le sida.

Alors, il raconte. Non, il écrit dans « cette frange d'incertitude »... ce « germe noir » qui fait perdre au corps toute identité. Il l'écrit, car seule l'écriture peut faire reculer l'échéance. Cela donne un texte-nu à nu, loin de toute jérémiade : « C'était une maladie à paliers, un très long escalier qui menait assurément à la mort, mais dont chaque marche représentait un apprentissage sans pareil, c'était une maladie qui donnait le temps de vivre, le temps de découvrir le temps et de découvrir enfin vie, c'était en quelque sorte une géniale invention moderne que nous avaient transmise les singes verts d'Afrique. »

Le temps de vivre, le temps de rencontrer ses amis, de fuir père et mère que Guibert, dans ce livre, poursuit d'une haine féroce : « L'avouer à mes parents, ce serait

son enterrement, en allant le mettre en terre du côté du Morvan, Guibert, avec des amis, s'arrêtera pour manger des « andouillettes grillées », que Foucault adorait. Et il écouterait la mère du philosophe déclarer : « Quand il était petit, il voulait devenir un poisson rouge. Je lui disais : mais enfin, mon lapin, ce n'est pas possible, tu détestes l'eau froide. Cela le plongeait dans un abîme de perplexité, il répliquait alors : juste une petite seconde, j'aimerais tellement savoir ce qu'il pense. »

Le livre de Guibert n'est pas seulement Foucault ni notre célébrité, mais l'auteur lui-même, qui « s'empiffre d'éclairs au chocolat et de chaussons aux pommes » lorsqu'il apprend les résultats catastrophiques de ses examens médicaux. C'est la confiance que Guibert met en un certain Bill, un ami, qui lui promet un médicament miracle qui ne sera qu'un mirage. D'où le titre du bouquin. C'est Guibert qui vénère



et exècre l'écrivain autrichien Thomas Bernhard, « ce diatribateur enculeur de mouches salibourgeoises » mais, « indéniablement, bien meilleur écrivain que moi ». C'est Guibert taraudé par la mort, qui est « une marotte » pour lui, depuis l'âge de 12 ans. Ce sont ses vieilles lumbes dans les

i. Jean Birnbaum, 'Julia Kristeva: « Faire de chaque patient un écrivain »', *Le Monde*, 21 March 2014



« Voix de femmes »  
**Julia Kristeva : « Faire de chaque patient un écrivain »**  
 Avec Isabelle Huppert, la psychanalyste et romancière était sur la scène de l'Odeon-Théâtre de l'Europe, à Paris, le 17 mars. Extraits

rares sont aujourd'hui les intellectuels qui prennent la religion au sérieux. Vous-même ne la réduisez pas à un ornement idéologique, opium du peuple ou illusion sans avenir... Vous affirmez que l'Europe doit renouer avec ses racines spirituelles, et que pour ce faire il y a une voie royale : la littérature.

Oui. En écoutant Isabelle Huppert, j'étais très émue, très sensible à l'attention que le public a accordée à ce dépaysement. Dépaysement par rapport à l'actualité, par rapport à l'histoire présente... Je pensais aux nuits pendant lesquelles j'ai écrit ce texte, et je me disais qu'il fallait que je sois une Européenne de naissance pour m'enfermer dix années durant avec une carmélite espagnole, mystique, intense et extrême, et qui est devenue sainte de l'Eglise catholique apostolique romaine. Pourquoi ? Parce que je pense que, pour ne pas mourir de cynisme politique, et de coups boursiers, il nous reste un seul remède, c'est d'essayer de réveiller la mémoire de notre continent. Cette mémoire dont nous nous sommes écartés quand nous avons coupé le fil pour ouvrir les chemins de la liberté, qui est une mémoire grecque, juive, chrétienne, et maintenant musulmane. Une mémoire dramatique, une mémoire blessante, une mémoire blessée, une mémoire résistante et une mémoire renaissante, et qu'il nous revient de réveiller pour l'habiter, l'incorporer, l'évaluer, la transvaluer et peut-être innover. Dans le texte qu'on a entendu, Thérèse met l'accent sur quelque chose qui fait partie de notre culture européenne : une manière de penser, qui est essentiellement la philosophie ou la science, mais qui est aussi ce qu'elle appelle la fiction.

« J'ai fait cette fiction pour donner à comprendre », dit Thérèse d'Avila dans votre texte. Dans votre œuvre aussi, la pensée ne va pas sans la prose, le savoir appelle le style. La littérature ne s'oppose en rien à l'essai : elle est d'abord une autre manière de penser...

Si la vie est un drame, il nous faut, pour l'assumer, essayer de construire une pensée à l'unisson avec le corps sensible, et c'est ce que Thérèse fait ici. Elle a un corps douloureusement sensible et essaie de trouver une pensée à l'unisson avec cela. A partir de là, le langage devient une rencontre permanente entre le sens et le sensible. Les instruments de cette rencontre sont la métaphore et la narration. Et le résultat c'est la perte de soi, l'annulation de soi, la reconstruction de soi. Alors, comment ça s'appelle ? On peut l'appeler écriture. On peut l'appeler aussi roman. On peut enfin prendre le terme de Thérèse, « fiction ». Du reste, le lieu propice à cette permanence de la narration, c'est l'expérience analytique. C'est ce que Freud nous a légué. « Vous souffrez, vous ne savez pas de quoi, racontez-moi ! » Il a apporté quelque chose de révolutionnaire : il a fait de chaque analysant un écrivain sans religion esthétique. Chacun raconte son histoire. Moi je pratique la psychanalyse ainsi : j'essaie d'accompagner les personnes qui me font confiance pour qu'elles deviennent les poètes qui trouvent le langage, les auteurs de leur résurrection.

Quand Thérèse d'Avila dit : « Je ne suis qu'un nourrisson », on pense à ces passages où Bernanos – que vous citez – rapproche esprit de sainteté et esprit d'enfance. Les saints, voici « des êtres qui ne sont pas sortis de l'enfance mais qui l'ont peu à peu comme agrandie à la mesure de leur destin », dit-il. Pour lui comme pour vous, en psychanalyse comme en littérature, il s'agit de prêter l'oreille à cette expérience de l'enfance.

Je suis évidemment très sensible à cela. Ma mystique à moi est moins souffrante que voyageuse, elle n'est pas enthousiaste mais d'un pessimisme énergique, je dirais. Pourquoi ? Parce que l'enfance, telle que je la vois chez Thérèse, et peut-être aussi chez mes patients, c'est une enfance artificielle, ce sont des états où la psyché et le soma font un, dirait Winnicott. Ce sont des formes de régression où vous êtes tellement renvoyé à votre enfance, sur le divan, que vous n'avez pas de mots pour dire les sensations qui vous submergent. Ce sont les psychanalystes, et les écrivains, qui donnent ces mots pour émerger. Cette enfance retrouvée, moi, je l'ai rencontrée dans l'expérience de la maternité, qui est un moment capital de la vie de chaque femme, un voisinage permanent de joie et de douleur, de vitalité et de mortalité sous-jacente. Et je suis de celles et de ceux qui disent qu'un des grands manques de notre civilisation sécularisée, c'est que nous n'avons pas de discours sur la maternité : nous avons des lois pour tous, mais nous ne savons pas ce que c'est que l'expérience maternelle. En analyse, on joue avec ce rôle aussi pour essayer d'aller du sensible au nommable, mais c'est assez limité, c'est assez ésotérique : il nous manque une philosophie de tout cela. Cette philosophie passe aussi par les récits, par la littérature. Ainsi, et sans les hiérarchiser, la littérature comme la psychanalyse permettent de traduire l'indicible. ■

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