

**MEN, MASCULINITY AND THE FEMALE REBEL IN
FRENCH WOMEN'S FICTION, 1900-1913**

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Abbreviations

DM = Lucie Delarue-Mardrus, *Douce moitié* (Paris: Fasquelle, 1913)

E = Colette, *L'Entrave*, in *Œuvres*, ed. by Claude Pichois, 4 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1984-2001), II, 325-474

LC = Colette Yver, *Les Cervelines* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1928 [1903])

LJ = Rachilde, *La Jongleuse* (Paris: Des femmes, 1982 [1900])

MP = Marcelle Tinayre, *La Maison du péché* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1902)

N = Daniel Lesueur, *Nietzschéenne* (Paris: Plon, 1908)

PT = J. Marni, *Pierre Tisserand* (Paris: Ollendorff, 1907)

RV = Gabrielle Réval, *Le Ruban de Vénus* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1906)

Abstract

Men, Masculinity and the Female Rebel in French Women's Fiction, 1900-1913

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This thesis examines representations of men and constructions of masculinity in eight female-authored French novels published between 1900 and 1913: Rachilde's *La Jongleuse* (1900), Marcelle Tinayre's *La Maison du péché* (1902), Colette Yver's *Les Cervelines* (1903), Gabrielle Réval's *Le Ruban de Vénus* (1906), Jeanne Marni's *Pierre Tisserand* (1907), Daniel Lesueur's *Nietzscheenne* (1908), Lucie Delarue-Mardrus's *Douce moitié* (1913) and Colette's *L'Entrave* (1913). It approaches the issues of men and masculinity by analysing male characters' relationships and interactions with female protagonists engaged in forms of rebellion against prevailing feminine norms.

The study explores women's fiction produced in a period that has frequently been considered as one of significant upheaval or change in gender relations in French society. This era saw the emergence of increasingly prominent groups of women – feminists, New Women, female doctors and lawyers – whose lives and activities challenged bourgeois or liberal gender norms. According to many historical accounts, this era also saw a crisis of masculinity among French men. Rebellious, transgressive or 'new' women figure, in such accounts, as a grave threat to masculine supremacy, eliciting fears among men of a radical inversion of the gender order and the subjugation and/or feminization of the hitherto dominant male sex. Taking such cultural narratives as a backdrop for its investigation, this thesis seeks to map out the ways in which women writers of the period imagined the effects and implications of these kinds of female rebellion for men's lives and gender identities.

Connecting the readings contained in this thesis is the proposition that, in these novels, rebellious female protagonists are called upon to endorse and uphold the desirability and necessity of masterful, authoritative masculinities as performed in public contexts and in heterosexual relationships. Rather than staging women's attack on the bases of male supremacy, the novels point to the intractable linkage of maleness and power and, crucially, to the ways in which even those female subjects who problematize conventional scripts of femininity are shaped to invest in ideals of dominant masculinity.

Female protagonists' complicity in upholding powerful masculinities takes two main forms in the novels analysed in this study. It is manifest, first, in rescue and mentorship plots in which women assist and encourage struggling male characters to approximate to more heroic or masterful masculinities. Female competence and talent are, in these narratives, yoked to the cause of the male subject in a way that reinforces his claims to power and centrality. Second, the thesis identifies instances in which the closure of the narrative of female revolt emerges as the necessary condition for men's performance of powerful masculinities, particularly where these masculinities are performed through men's control of the female body in heterosexual relationships. In these cases, the female subject is, in various ways, enjoined to acquiesce in her subordination and to endorse masculine power.

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Introduction

In spring 1898, an article examining representations of men in the work of contemporary French women writers appeared in *La Revue des revues*. Frédéric Loliée's piece, provocatively titled 'Comme elles nous jugent!', exposed the purportedly harsh treatment afforded to men in female-authored fiction.¹ Citing established and successful writers such as Rachilde, Gyp, Daniel Lesueur and Georges de Peyrebrune, Loliée argued that a generation of belligerent female novelists had set about criticizing and undermining men in their work. Loliée furnished his readers with a selection of short quotations from around a dozen offending writers, accompanied by detailed commentary on the social and cultural developments that had conspired to bring about what he perceived to be an unfortunate trend in contemporary literature by women.

Loliée located the inspiration for these literary attacks in the activities of France's feminists, those 'farouches égalitaires' (7) who, he claimed, were determined to reject traditional feminine roles:

Emues de quelques grandes injustices sociales dont leur sexe aurait à se plaindre depuis une longue suite de siècles, elles en ont conclu que toutes choses étaient à refaire. Nettement, résolument, elles ont manifesté, comme d'une seule voix qu'avant elles on n'avait rien compris du juste partage des rôles, [...] que les temps d'oppression allaient finir, qu'elles le voulaient ainsi... Et les femmes ont déclaré la guerre aux hommes. (7)

Feminists had ceased to value women's place in the home, their responsibilities as mothers, their position as men's muse and inspiration. Construing such roles merely as oppression, they were bent on challenging them. Loliée understood the implications of

¹ Frédéric Loliée, 'Comme elles nous jugent!', *La Revue des revues*, 1 April 1898, pp. 7-18 (p. 14). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

this challenge, meanwhile, in catastrophic terms. Women's disenchantment with their traditionally designated roles could, for the critic, mean only gender warfare and the aim of outright revolution: feminists had decided that 'toutes choses étaient à refaire.'

Evidence of this desired insurrection was, according to Loliée, to be found in women's fiction. Women writers, he argued, had joined forces with feminists in what he termed a 'ligue offensive' (7). As a result, their novels bore the marks of a systematic attempt to assert women's moral and intellectual merits and to 'déprécier, ruiner d'autant cette fâcheuse convention de la supériorité masculine' (11). The critic identified a number of common ways in which men were mocked and belittled in women's fiction. He pointed, first, to the widespread depiction of morally bankrupt male characters whose iniquities were all the more apparent when compared with their virtuous female counterparts. He turned, more unexpectedly, to the unjust manner in which female writers maliciously exploited the restrictive sartorial codes governing men's dress and their inability to beautify themselves like women. The crux of Loliée's argument, however, concerned women writers' degradation of their fictional men by divesting them of desirable masculine traits. The critic lamented the fact that the 'héros magnanimes qui fascinaient les princesses d'antan' (14) had been replaced by a parade of pathetic, timid male creatures:

feuilletez quelques-unes des productions les plus récentes de nos douces conteuses. Les maris, les amants, les épouseurs, s'ils ne sont pas odieusement pervers, ou tristement pleutres, ou pis encore, se découvrent à nous neuf fois sur dix comme des êtres faibles et timorés, soumis ainsi que les enfants craintifs à celles qu'ils n'adorent qu'à genoux... (15)

The martial, strong-willed heroes of past times had thus given way to weak and fearful men, in thrall to the fictional avatars of precisely those 'farouches égalitaires' whose ascendancy threatened to bring about men's fall. The thoroughly modern heroines of women's fiction, meanwhile, looked with derision upon the men they would once have idolized.

‘Comme elles nous jugent!’ prompted a flurry of responses from both amused and indignant women writers. Two weeks after its publication, Loliée produced a second article, ‘Opinions et réponses’, in which he printed letters from several of the writers who had been targeted in the original piece. The two articles also caused something of a stir in the press. In a response piece published in *La Fronde*, Daniel Lesueur prefaced her remarks with the observation that Loliée’s article had ‘fait couler des flots d’encre’ and noted that his original selection of quotations from women’s writing had been reprinted in several newspapers.²

In ‘Opinions et réponses’, Loliée’s arguments were refuted, questioned and laughed at by most of his correspondents. Some, though by no means all, displayed annoyance at the critic’s sweeping generalizations. Concluding that these responses merely confirmed his original thesis – that ‘elle existe, cette rancœur de la « femme nouvelle » contre l’homme»³ – Loliée nonetheless ended on a conciliatory, if rather patronizing, note. He affirmed that in time women’s writing would certainly adopt a less combative tone and thus render itself ‘plus amène et plus intéressante’.⁴

‘Comme elles nous jugent!’ prefigures my own task in this study insofar as, like Loliée, I set out to explore representations of men and constructions of masculinity in French women’s fiction of the Belle Époque. While Loliée considered women’s fiction from the 1890s, I examine novels published between 1900 and 1913, the period immediately following the first controversies surrounding the New Woman, and during which images of dangerously transgressive women continued to plague anxious French

² Daniel Lesueur, ‘Comment ils nous lisent’, *La Fronde*, 10 April 1898. Loliée’s article was discussed, for example, in *Le Gaulois*, 15 April 1898.

³ Frédéric Loliée, ‘Comme elles nous jugent!: opinions et réponses’, *La Revue des revues*, 15 April 1898, pp. 125-140 (p. 139).

⁴ Loliée, ‘Opinions’, p. 140.

men. The decade and a half before World War I has also been marked out by historians as a time of particularly intense scrutiny of, and reflection on, masculine ideals, with fears about the national body played out across the individual bodies of French men. The dawn of the twentieth century was, meanwhile, often perceived by commentators as one of immense success for French women's writing. As Jules Bertaut wrote in the introductory remarks to his 1909 study of contemporary women writers: 'le succès de la littérature féminine actuelle a été foudroyant, il nous a tous surpris, il nous a tous mortifiés, il nous a tous un peu humiliés.'⁵

Where the author of 'Comme elles nous jugent!' offered brief examples from his chosen writers, I focus in much more detail on eight female-authored novels published during the first years of the twentieth century: Rachilde's *La Jongleuse* (1900), Marcelle Tinayre's *La Maison du péché* (1902), Colette Yver's *Les Cervelines* (1903), Gabrielle Réval's *Le Ruban de Vénus* (1906), Jeanne Marni's *Pierre Tisserand* (1907), Daniel Lesueur's *Nietzschéenne* (1908), Lucie Delarue-Mardrus's *Douce moitié* (1913) and Colette's *L'Entrave* (1913).

I pay close attention, in my readings of these texts, to the ways in which they stage the encounter between rebellious, modern or 'new' women and their 'maris', 'amants' and 'épouseurs'. I think about the configurations of masculinity that are associated with these encounters and the ways in which female rebels are implicated in producing and reproducing, constructing and reconstructing, these masculinities. In focusing on the encounter between the rebellious woman and the male subject, my study maintains the importance that critics have accorded to narratives of female revolt in the work of French women writers of this period, and hence to the contestatory aspects of women writers' treatment of gender identities and relations. However, where

⁵ Jules Bertaut, *La Littérature féminine d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Des Annales Politiques et Littéraires, 1909), p. 1.

existing studies centre on female lives and subjectivities, my thesis aims to think through the implications of contestatory and subversive feminine performances and activities for men and masculinity, as represented in my chosen texts.

Loliée detects, in women's fiction of this period, the traces of a systematic attempt to break down masculine authority and to place male characters in a feminized – and hence degraded – position vis-à-vis their newly empowered female counterparts. This argument transposes to the field of women's fiction a more pervasive construction of the feminist and the *femme nouvelle* as threats to the patriarchal order of Belle Époque France, as the instigators of a process of gender inversion that would consign men to the home. In contrast, I suggest that the novels analysed here explore the ways in which figures of female rebellion come to be implicated in upholding the desirability, naturalness and necessity of the male subject's claim to mastery, authority and power in heterosexual relationships and in public, professional and cultural life. Put another way, the female rebel participates in the reproduction and endorsement of precisely those powerful, authoritative and heroic masculinities that Loliée deems to be under threat from the 'farouches égalitaires' and their literary allies. The novels discussed here do stage the emergence of configurations of masculinity that encompass weakness, passivity and forms of feminization. However, such instances do not constitute the radical challenge to gender hierarchies that Loliée suggests. Rather, the modern female characters that the critic understands to be contemptuous of the men around them are called upon to re-inscribe and legitimize masculinities which uphold the linkage between maleness and power. Some weak, passive or feminized male protagonists undergo a process of reform; some remain failed approximations to a valorized norm. In other cases, male appropriations of traits coded as feminine are revealed to be compatible with the persistence of hierarchical gender arrangements privileging men.

In deploying the terms ‘rebellious’ and ‘revolt’ I refer primarily to the contestatory performances and identities of those female subjects who, in various ways, troubled the norms of bourgeois femininity in the years around 1900. Mary Louise Roberts defines these norms as the ‘liberal ideology of womanhood’⁶ that developed after the French Revolution and which operated powerfully in Belle Époque France. This ideology construed women as being inherently maternal and in possession of ‘nurturing and self-sacrificing’⁷ instincts. As such they were excluded from politics and public affairs and believed to belong in the domestic sphere, where ‘they also served as the bedrock of social morality’.⁸ In addition to caring for their children and husband, women also had a decorative function, serving as ‘an ornament’⁹ for men. In the last years of the nineteenth century, a group of women began to challenge this circumscription of female lives, offering a variety of challenges to the naturalness or ineluctability of ‘liberal womanhood’. It is within the historical and cultural context of these challenges, often discussed by cultural historians as the emergence of the New Woman, that I consider the significance of the transgressive female characters in my chosen texts. The forms of female rebellion I discuss are closely aligned with dominant conceptions of New Womanhood: they are premised on the rejection of love or marriage as the centre or meaning of the female life and on the valorization of female autonomy and work or activity in the public sphere.

The female rebel’s endorsement of masculinities aligned with mastery and authority takes different forms. In Tinayre’s *La Maison du péché*, Réval’s *Le Ruban de*

⁶ Mary Louise Roberts, *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 3.

⁷ Roberts, p. 3.

⁸ Roberts, p. 3.

⁹ Roberts, p. 3.

Vénus and Colette's *L'Entrave*, female protagonists question the norms of liberal womanhood by seeking out roles in the public sphere or asserting their right to autonomy and self-determination. However, these claims are presented as being, in various ways, inimical to the performance and reproduction of masculinities founded upon male control of, and power over, the female body in heterosexual relationships. Tinayre, Réval and Colette chart the female protagonist's more or less enforced recognition of the necessary authority of the male subject in the heterosexual relation and her renunciation of autonomy and agency. Elsewhere, female protagonists' transgressive behaviours are compatible or even coextensive with their articulation of support for the ongoing legitimacy of male power and authority over women. This support is enacted through forms of female promotion of men's success and supremacy in both public and private contexts. This is a pattern that I detect, in various forms, in Rachilde's *La Jongleuse*, Yver's *Les Cervelines*, Marni's *Pierre Tisserand*, Lesueur's *Nietzschéenne* and Delarue-Mardrus's *Douce moitié*.

The encounters that I analyse in this study are marked by ambivalence. The novels stage narratives of female revolt that are centrally concerned with challenging the inscription of women as necessarily dependent, intellectually inferior to men, as objects of exchange among men. However, in articulating this challenge, they frequently reinscribe these positions by endorsing the necessity of masculinities wedded to power and the inevitability or naturalness of women's submission. In this regard, they testify to the apparent intractability of hierarchical arrangements of gender and sexual difference in Belle Époque France. If, as Joan Lipman Brown has asserted, 'depictions of men by women are intimately revealing in that they point to the social precepts and the cherished myths of their creators',¹⁰ the insistence with which these texts bind and re-

¹⁰ Joan Lipman Brown, 'Men by Women in the Contemporary Spanish Novel', *Hispanic Review*, 60 (1992), 55-70 (p. 56).

bind maleness and power may be read as a product of the shaping of female subjectivity under patriarchy. The ‘social precepts’ and ‘cherished myths’ shared among these women writers, in their historical specificity, include the injunction to understand the male subject as the bearer of meaning and value in the female life, especially through the formation of a heterosexual relationship characterized by masculine authority and feminine gift of self. Such precepts and myths must also include the still pervasive association of intellect, creativity and public activity with the masculine. The literary careers and subversive gender performances of the writers discussed here point, in many cases, to the contingency of these precepts and myths. However, their force as ideals regulating forms of social life and gender relations in Belle Époque France, without all lives or subjectivities being reducible to them, remained significant.

Cultural Contexts: *Femmes nouvelles* and Masculine Crisis

As well as foreshadowing, albeit with a radically different set of propositions, my own study, Loliée’s article and the controversy that it prompted interest me for their opening up of a number of critical and contextual issues that impact upon my own work.

‘Comme elles nous jugent!’ is indicative of the intensity of debates around gender roles and relations in France in the years around the turn of the twentieth century. It points, in particular, to fears concerning the implications of feminism and the emergence of the *femme nouvelle* for existing gender arrangements and hierarchies.

Loliée’s article was, as Lesueur put it, ‘piquant’¹¹ because it placed women’s writing squarely in a certain narrative of changing gender relations that was rehearsed numerous times in the years around 1900. Loliée suggested that women’s fictional representations of men constituted one more piece of evidence that the emergence of a

¹¹ Lesueur, ‘Comment’, p. 1.

generation of autonomous, emancipated women spelled the end of the submissive wife and mother and posed a grave threat for masculine authority and identity. Women's claim to new rights and freedoms was persistently construed as a claim made at male expense, as an assault on men's rights, privileges and status. Debora Silverman illustrates her discussion of the fears of gender upheaval that were attached to feminists and New Women with a series of caricatures that appeared in the Parisian press in the 1890s. The caricatures, appearing in *Gil Blas illustré* and *Le Grelot*, show female figures smoking, cycling, and leaving home for feminist congresses, while the male figures are berated, guided through the streets and left to do the housework.¹²

As Roberts notes, the feminist movement represented 'the most easily recognizable language of resistance'¹³ to feminine norms in the last years of the nineteenth century. Steven Hause and Anne Kenney argue that in the years between 1896 and 1900 French feminism, while remaining a small, largely Parisian and bourgeois movement, gained significant momentum. They attribute the growth of feminism in the years around 1900 to several factors, notably the four feminist congresses held in Paris in this period, with the wide press coverage they received, and the establishment, in 1900-1901, of the Conseil national des femmes françaises (CNFF), a federation of women's organizations. Early in its life, the CNFF united around feminist issues such as women's right to file paternity suits and the improvement of women's salaries.¹⁴ The

¹² Debora L. Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 64-68.

¹³ Roberts, p. 8.

¹⁴ Steven C. Hause and Anne R. Kenney, *Women's Suffrage and Social Politics in the French Third Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 40. Jennifer Waelti-Walters and Steven Hause underline the diversity of feminist groups and objectives. They suggest that the movement 'was not a homogenous, monolithic phenomenon [...] there were many varieties of feminism, many feminisms' and note the schism between Catholic feminists, such as Marie Maugeret's *Féminisme chrétien*, which was suspicious of the Republic, and Republican groups such as the *Ligue française pour le droit des femmes*, founded by Léon Richer in 1882 (Waelti-Walters and Hause, 'Introduction', in *Feminisms of the Belle Époque: A Historical and Literary*

membership of the CNFF at its establishment is estimated to have been between 20,000 and 25,000 members¹⁵; between 1910 and 1914, membership is estimated at 90,000 to 100,000.¹⁶

A final factor linked with the new momentum of the French feminist movement in the years around 1900 was the development of the feminist press. Hause and Kenney afford particular importance to Marguerite Durand's *La Fronde*, the entirely female-staffed newspaper, published daily between 1897 and 1903, that extended the reach of feminist ideas beyond the small readership of earlier feminist publications. Lenard Berlanstein has more recently questioned this assessment of the role of *La Fronde* in popularizing feminist ideas.¹⁷ Pointing to the rapid decline in the circulation of *La Fronde* after 1900, he argues for the importance of the magazine *Femina*, which was successful until 1914, to the promotion and valorization of high-achieving women. *Femina*, Berlanstein argues, was committed to the same aim originally espoused by Durand, that of spreading 'a feminist message while changing the image of feminism, making it compatible with femininity'.¹⁸

If feminism was gaining ground in the Belle Époque, it was the New Woman, a broader category mobilized to identify female subjects engaged in a variety of subversive or unconventional behaviours, who came to embody the growing sense of what Diana

Anthology, ed. by Jennifer Waelti-Walters and Steven C. Hause (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), pp. 1-14 (p. 4).

¹⁵ Hause and Kenney, p. 42.

¹⁶ Hause and Kenney, p. 134.

¹⁷ Lenard R. Berlanstein, 'Selling Modern Femininity: *Femina*, a Forgotten Feminist Publishing Success in Belle Époque France', *French Historical Studies*, 30 (2007), 623-649.

¹⁸ Berlanstein, p. 625.

Holmes and Carrie Tarr call ‘some significant change in female identity’¹⁹ in the years around 1900. According to Roberts, these subversive or unconventional behaviours included the rejection of marriage in favour of an independent single life, ‘nontraditional marriages’, engaging in feminist activism, and entering into professions such as medicine, law, teaching and journalism.²⁰ ‘Despite their differences’, Roberts writes, ‘all of these women challenged the regulatory norms of gender by living unconventional lives and by doing work outside the home that was coded as masculine’.²¹

It should, however, be emphasized that the number of French women engaged in these non-traditional activities was relatively small.²² As James McMillan notes:

The vision of a gender order turned upside down may well have been a distinctive cultural feature of the French [...] fin-de-siècle [*sic*], but [...] the conditions under which the great majority of middle-class women lived their lives bore little resemblance to the emancipated existence imagined by troubled male minds.²³

However, the importance attached to the New Woman as a symbol of a perceived transformation of gender relations may be read in the intense interest to which she was

¹⁹ Diana Holmes and Carrie Tarr, ‘New Republic, New Women?: Feminism and Modernity at the Belle Epoque’, in *A Belle Epoque?: Women in French Society and Culture, 1890-1914*, ed. by Diana Holmes and Carrie Tarr (New York: Berghahn, 2006), pp. 11-22 (p. 15).

²⁰ Roberts, p. 3.

²¹ Roberts, p. 3. The advent of the New Woman has been interpreted in the context of Third Republic reforms that opened the way for her challenge to prevailing gender ideals. Of particular importance was the Camille Sée law of 1880, which allowed for the establishment of a network of state secondary schools for girls. As James McMillan notes, the aim of this reform was not to facilitate women’s social and professional autonomy via the amelioration of their educational opportunities. Rather, it aimed to render young women less susceptible to clerical influence. However, in time the reform opened the way for the entry of more women to higher education and the professions (McMillan, *France and Women 1789-1914: Gender, Society and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 145-148).

²² With respect to professionalization, Edward Berenson records that by 1906, there were 573 female doctors in France, 3% of the total. He notes that women’s progress in the legal profession was less rapid, since they totalled only 0.25% of lawyers in 1913 (Berenson, *The Trial of Madame Caillaux* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 112).

²³ McMillan, p. 142.

subject in the French press, in fiction and on the stage. The notion that the New Woman was in some way inherently un-French was also commonplace. Loliée expressed his disquiet over the proliferation of instances of female revolt by alluding to the ‘américanisme’ (15) of the contemporary *jeune fille*, before denouncing the ‘désolant cortège des spinsters anglo-saxonnes’ and the ‘réfrigérantes prêcheuses de la Scandinavie’ (18) who threatened to destroy the loving disposition of French women.²⁴

The sense of transformation in female lives in France during the Belle Époque has been interpreted as a key factor in what some historians have termed the crisis of masculinity in the decades around 1900. Edward Berenson has argued that French bourgeois men were afflicted with an acute sense of anxiety as the nineteenth century closed. These men were, he asserts, suffering from ‘a lingering sense of impotence stemming from France’s disastrous defeat at the hands of Prussia in September 1870 and from the bourgeoisie’s momentary collapse some six months later at the hands of Paris’s revolutionary Communards’.²⁵ Such humiliations, Berenson goes on, prompted French men to place ever more significance on their capacity to enforce strict gender roles and, more particularly, to prove their dominance over women. The emergence of newly mobile, autonomous women, therefore, posed a grave threat to this sense of supremacy.²⁶

Similarly, Christopher Forth has asserted that a set of specific concerns about masculinity, and particularly about the male body, emerged prominently in the years around 1900. Forth connects the Dreyfus Affair to the politics of male bodies and

²⁴ Loliée’s negative characterization of foreign feminists was nothing new; unflattering descriptions of feminists from a number of European countries appear, for example, in Maupassant’s *Les Dimanches d’un bourgeois de Paris* (Paris: SEDES, 1989 [1880]). See ‘Séance publique’ (pp. 145-154).

²⁵ Berenson, p. 114.

²⁶ Berenson, p. 115.

concepts of masculinity, asserting that the Affair ‘provided the French with an opportunity to elevate hitherto localized anxieties about masculine identity to national proportions’.²⁷ Of particular concern in Forth’s account are the ways in which aspects of modern, urban life such as office work, crowds, cabarets and cafés were pervasively constructed in medical discourse as phenomena that threatened to erode or overcome men’s willpower and agency – prized signifiers of authentic virility – and to assault or poison their bodies. The multiple sensory excitations of the city, for example, were often conceptualized as forms of seduction that overrode the defences of the ‘bounded male self’,²⁸ while ‘pathologies of the will’ were increasingly diagnosed.

Forth posits a shift in masculine ideals that took place in the years around 1900, with a new value being placed on physical strength, sporting activity and displays of muscularity. The increasing importance placed on men’s participation in sport and physical activity throughout French culture was rooted in fears over the enervating effects of sedentary lifestyles and intellectual *surmenage* among both male adults and school pupils. Like Berenson, Forth also links his account of masculine crisis to men’s anxiety concerning a loss of control over women. He argues that the development of what he calls ‘the culture of force’ in the years after 1900, particularly in its discursive manifestations, should be read as a response to shifting gender norms and identities: ‘whether expressed through fantasy or outright violence, the value of physical force was praised even within the respectable bourgeoisie, at once as the ultimate foundation of male sexual difference and as a political weapon against dangerous feminists’.²⁹

²⁷ Christopher E. Forth, *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), p. 5.

²⁸ Forth, *Dreyfus Affair*, p. 119.

²⁹ Forth, *Dreyfus Affair*, p. 217. See also Michelle Perrot, ‘The New Eve and the Old Adam: Changes in French Women’s Condition at the Turn of the Century’, trans. by Helen Harden-

Annelise Maugue offers another account of the period's crisis of masculinity, arguing that the emergence of newly mobile and autonomous women instituted a period of intense self-scrutiny on the part of men in the first decades of the Third Republic.³⁰ Maugue reads the crisis of masculinity through the plentiful discourse on women and sexual difference produced by those who opposed feminism and other forms of female revolt. It is, she argues, in the insistence with which such writers maintained the necessity of traditional gender roles and hierarchies that their fears and anxieties concerning a potential loss of power and status manifest themselves. Theirs is a 'discours de certitudes où s'insinuent à chaque page l'hésitation, le doute, le questionnement'.³¹ Echoing Silverman's use of press caricatures to illustrate responses to the New Woman, Maugue also highlights the recurrent representation, in the work of anti-feminist writers, of passive men whose emancipated wives have domesticated and feminized them: 'Image leitmotiv du discours antiféministe que celle de l'homme devenu « ménagère », et leitmotiv encore l'idée que cette sinistre mutation adviendra à très court terme : le masculin se meurt, sa crise est sans remède'.³²

This emergent sense of crisis can be read within a longer history of the regulation of the bodies, sexualities and sociability of bourgeois men mapped out by Robert Nye, who interrogates French bourgeois masculinity from the French Revolution to the outbreak of World War I.³³ Nye discusses the ways in which ideals of

Chenut, in *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, ed. by Margaret Randolph Higonnet and others (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), pp. 51-60.

³⁰ Annelise Maugue, *L'Identité masculine en crise au tournant du siècle, 1870-1914* (Paris: Payot, 2001 [1987]) and 'Littérature antiféministe et angoisse masculine', in *Un siècle d'antiféminisme*, ed. by Christine Bard (Paris: Fayard, 1999), pp. 69-83.

³¹ Maugue, *Identité*, p. 19.

³² Maugue, 'Littérature', p. 80.

³³ Robert A. Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

masculinity were produced and regulated throughout the long nineteenth century. He argues that this period was characterized by intensified scrutiny of perceived corporeal markers of virility and by the gradual development of a strict set of sexual behaviours, centring on marital reproductive heterosexuality, that were deemed to be proper, desirable and natural for bourgeois men. The concern with regulating men's sexuality was, Nye argues, connected to a specifically bourgeois concern with heredity: the imperative of producing healthy, productive heirs who would safeguard and build upon hard-earned family wealth. Bourgeois masculinity was increasingly produced and policed by medical and scientific discourses that were themselves, Nye contends, bound up with the notion of sexual dimorphism and complementarity as the drivers of human reproduction and, critically, with political fears over France's declining birth rate, especially after the Franco-Prussian war. The fate of the French nation, he argues, was frequently held to be tied to the quality of male bodies. By the last years of the nineteenth century, France's perceived geopolitical and demographic inferiority was a problem to be solved via the physical and moral reinforcement of men: 'when an "ideal" or "typical" male sexual identity was invoked, those features were stressed that could contribute best to the national welfare: strength, vigor, decisiveness, courage, a manly appearance and comportment, and, of course, fertility'.³⁴

The masculine ideals operating on bourgeois male subjects in this period were also, Nye suggests, regulated by discourses of honour and dishonour. The honourability or *honnêteté* of the bourgeois man was compromised by deviations from the corporeal and sexual ideals sketched above. Concepts of honour, which, as Nye notes, were taken from *ancien régime* noble traditions and adapted to the more egalitarian and democratic French Third Republic, also governed interaction among men in professional contexts as well as male sociability more broadly. The injunctions to honour thus bridged the

³⁴ Nye, p. 96.

private domain of sexual conduct and the more public aspects of men's lives. Nye considers the importance of the re-emergence of duelling among men of the ruling bourgeoisie in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Duelling became, for many men, both a key mechanism for the settling of disputes great and small and, perhaps more significantly, a privileged arena for the performance of the prized masculine quality of courage. Nye suggests that the years between 1900 and 1914 in particular were marked by a national obsession with men's physical courage. Like Forth, Nye asserts that this obsession was in part a response to 'the crisis of masculinity provoked by the challenge of feminism and by the first signs of the twentieth-century gender revolution'.³⁵ He adds that men's striving for an 'ideal of physical courage' was the means by which 'they could both shore up traditional notions of masculinity and rearticulate the boundaries of traditional sexual difference'.³⁶

The crisis thesis, as it refers to a generalized fear among men of a loss of power or to the emergence of a definitional instability concerning masculine identity, has been subject to criticism. It has been argued, for example, that assertions of a generalized sense of crisis implicitly rely on the assumption of a stable, coherent masculinity that pre-dated the period of crisis. Such a premise is radically at odds with many strands of scholarship on gender identity which, in varying terms, posit that gender is necessarily a precarious, unstable construction, constantly re-articulated, and affirmed only in relation to a constitutive and often repudiated oppositional term which can never be wholly excluded. Masculinity, understood broadly in this way, can only be affirmed by a continual policing of its borders against a femininity which always threatens it but upon

³⁵ Nye, p. 226.

³⁶ Nye, p. 226.

which masculinity relies for its definition.³⁷ To state that French men only came to be troubled by the threat of feminization following the events of 1870 or, more pertinently to this study, in response to women's troubling of liberal norms of femininity, would be to deny the constitutive dependency upon which gender identity rests and its *continuous* re-articulation against femininity.

Insofar as it may be taken to denote a discrete or discernible break with a set of previously fixed gender identities, I agree that the concept of crisis is problematic. However, the scholarship on the 'crisis' of masculinity in France at the end of the nineteenth century is useful in its illumination of the particular meanings that attached to new configurations of femininity and figures such as the New Woman, of the obsessive documenting of their emergence, and of the ways in which their significance for men, masculinity and male power were imagined. If masculinity/ies are constantly defined and re-defined through and against femininity/ies, the New Woman and the belief in 'some significant change in female identity' may be understood as necessarily engendering re-articulations of masculinity and re-imaginings of gender relations. This does not mean that analogous processes were not always at work before the purported crisis period, however. I am concerned, in this study, with the ways in which these re-articulations of masculinity and the re-imaginings of gender relations occur through the encounter between the male subject and the female rebel in my chosen female-authored texts.

³⁷ In her *Sexing the Citizen: Morality and Masculinity in France, 1870-1920* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), her study of masculinity and citizenship in Third Republic France, Judith Surkis problematizes the crisis thesis: 'I do not argue that a formerly stable, bounded, liberal male individual was suddenly dislodged from a sense of sovereign self-assuredness and mastery in the wake of the transformations of turn-of-the-century culture and politics' (p. 11). Instead, Surkis conceptualizes masculinity and 'the gender and sexual order that organized it' as 'contingent norms, constituted by ever-present possibilities of abnormal deviation' (p. 12).

Women Writing, Women Writing About Men

Loliée's identification of the woman writer as key agitator and agent of change points to women's growing visibility in the literary culture of Belle Époque France and to the sense of threat associated with women's writing. Géraldi Leroy and Julie Bertrand-Sabiani outline what they term 'l'intrusion de nombreuses femmes dans les circuits de la production littéraire' in the years between 1890 and 1914.³⁸ Discussing the number of French women making a living from writing in the first years of the twentieth century, Leroy and Bertrand-Sabiani cite *Bibliographie de la France* statistics for 1902, which show the number of 'femmes auteurs' to be 243 and the number of published works by women to be 378.³⁹ They refer to other surveys which, taking account of the work of female journalists, offer much higher figures.⁴⁰ The flourishing of the French press in the last decades of the nineteenth century, the result of a number of factors, including the liberalization of the laws around publishing, increased urbanization and the drop in the price of daily newspapers, opened up unprecedented opportunities for women to make a living from writing. All of the writers discussed in this thesis were journalists, reviewers or *chroniqueuses*. Their fiction was also commonly serialized in newspapers and magazines prior to publication in volume format.⁴¹

As Roberts has shown, writing, whether journalism, fiction or drama, was one of the key arenas in which the rebellious activity of the New Woman was performed. Clearly, a tradition of French women's writing precedes the advent of the New Woman and, indeed, many successful women writers of the Belle Époque distanced themselves

³⁸ Géraldi Leroy and Julie Bertrand-Sabiani, *La Vie littéraire à la Belle Époque* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998), p. 264.

³⁹ Leroy and Bertrand-Sabiani, p. 274.

⁴⁰ Leroy and Bertrand-Sabiani, pp. 264-265.

⁴¹ For more on the roman-feuilleton, see Anne-Marie Thiesse, *Le Roman du quotidien: lecteurs et lectures populaires à la Belle Époque* (Paris: Seuil, 2000).

from such labels; Rachilde consistently denied any affinity or shared interest between her own career and the activities of feminists, *révoltées* and *femmes nouvelles*. Readings of *La Jongleuse*, my own included, indicate that the New Woman was in fact subject to ridicule in Rachilde's work.⁴² However, the association between the cultural phenomenon of New Womanhood and the increased visibility of women writers was nonetheless close. As Rachel Mesch notes, 'by the late nineteenth century, women writers were associated with the much feared New Women, who were often caricatured as "whores, bluestockings or desiccated old maids"''.⁴³

The development of women's writing in this period was often greeted with hostility, perplexity or ambivalence by male critics. Mesch writes of the negative ways in which commentators such as Bertaut, Paul Flat and Charles Maurras described women's entry into the literary field, noting the metaphors of invasion and epidemic that litter their discourse.⁴⁴ In the introductory comments to his 1909 study of contemporary women's writing, Flat acknowledges the marked increase in women's writing, and admits to men's difficulties in assimilating the shift. 'La Femme-auteur', he remarks resignedly, 'à notre époque, ne se manifeste plus comme un phénomène isolé [...]. Elle est devenue un fait collectif, un fait social'.⁴⁵ Yet the possibility that some women writers might prove themselves superior to their male counterparts, he added, risked inflicting upon men 'la plus cruelle blessure d'amour-propre'.⁴⁶

⁴² See chapter 4.

⁴³ Rachel Mesch, *The Hysteric's Revenge: French Women Writers at the Fin de Siècle* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2006), p. 2.

⁴⁴ Mesch, pp. 12-13. Aside from the symbolic injury of female rivalry, Mesch notes that the issue of commercial competition also arose (p. 10).

⁴⁵ Paul Flat, *Nos femmes de lettres* (Paris: Perrin, 1909), p. i.

⁴⁶ Flat, p. viii.

Mesch reads the studies by Bertaut and Flat as being motivated by an anxious wish to demonstrate that the existence of large numbers of women writers did not undermine men's superior claim to intellectual prowess. Both critics, she argues, engage in the task of distinguishing the few truly talented women from the mediocre masses in order to ward off the threat to 'male intellectual authority'.⁴⁷ Flat and Bertaut, while offering laudatory commentaries on work by certain writers, were, like many other critics of the period, at pains to circumscribe the limits of female literary talent. Such efforts often operated through the reiteration of those gendered conventions according to which women's capacity to think and write was confined to the particular and the subjective. In characterizing women writers' abilities, such conventions translated to the valorization of their writing on love or emotion and the rejection of their ability to broach the intellectual or the abstract. Han Ryner concluded his study of women writers by remarking that 'la femme dira mieux que nous les émotions de l'enfant, et ses propres émotions, et aussi ce qu'il y a de commun à son cœur et le nôtre [...]. Car la femme est la sensibilité, l'homme la pensée et le mouvement.'⁴⁸

Flat lauded Tinayre's unusual ambition and intellectualism in *La Maison du péché*. Tinayre, he wrote, was not one of those writers who, 'penchées sur elles-mêmes et mettant la main sur leur cœur pour en suivre les battements, ne font à vrai dire que transposer leurs émotions'.⁴⁹ Flat's characterization of the mass of women writers reinscribes not only their feminine propensity to write about feeling, a subjective approach that lacked intellectualism and objectivity, but also, in alluding to '*leurs émotions*', hints at the autobiographical element that was often thought to inhabit most women's

⁴⁷ Mesch, p. 13.

⁴⁸ Han Ryner, *Le Massacre des amazones: études critiques sur deux cents bas-bleus contemporains* (Paris: Chamuel, 1899), p. 264.

⁴⁹ Flat, p. 150.

writing. Flat gives voice to what Mary Jacobus calls ‘the autobiographical “phallacy” whereby male critics hold that women’s writing is somehow closer to their experience than men’s, that the female text *is* the author, or at any rate a dramatic extension of her unconscious’.⁵⁰

If, bound to the feminine self and its emotional states, women writers were barred from the realms of objectivity and intellectualism, it is perhaps unsurprising that the capacity to see and speak authoritatively about the sexual other was often construed as the province of the male writer. The questioning of women’s ability to portray plausible or rounded male characters was nothing new in the Belle Époque. In the context of her own, more recent, critical engagement with the female-authored male, Naomi Schor refers to George Sand’s comments concerning the difficulties that the nineteenth-century woman writer experienced in portraying an active male character. Schor notes that, for Sand, ‘women writers are prevented from creating well-rounded [male] protagonists by their infantilizing education’.⁵¹ Elaine Showalter, writing of the British context in the same period, notes that many nineteenth-century British women writers were, like Sand, ‘eager to make public confessions of their deficiencies in male portraiture’.⁵² Showalter suggests that such deficiencies were linked to the social constraints operating on women in a patriarchal society: ‘women had to build their

⁵⁰ Mary Jacobus, Review of *The Madwoman in the Attic* and *Shakespeare’s Sisters*, *Signs*, 6 (1981), 517-523 (p. 520).

⁵¹ Naomi Schor, ‘The Portrait of a Gentleman: Representing Men in (French) Women’s Writing’, in *Bad Objects: Essays Popular and Unpopular* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 111-131 (pp. 113-114). First publ. in *Representations*, 20 (1987), 113-133.

⁵² Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), p.134.

heroes from imagination, since so many areas of masculine experience were impenetrable'.⁵³

While the Belle Époque, as noted, saw some changes to women's historic exclusion from the public world inhabited by men, the kinds of social and educational barriers discussed by these scholars still operated powerfully on many women in this period. However, the question of women's more limited education or experience did not always figure prominently in critical censure of the female-authored man. Bertaut argued that male writers, unlike their female counterparts, had shown themselves to be equal to the task of accurately depicting women throughout history:

Les femmes de toutes les époques [...] ont rencontré pour les peindre, et pour les peindre exactement, avec une ressemblance criante, des observateurs littéraires très avisés et qui sont devenus, dans cette connaissance du cœur féminin, des spécialistes aussi compétents que les femmes les plus perspicaces elles-mêmes.⁵⁴

Women writers, according to Bertaut, were simply incapable of such impartial observation. Having evaluated the examples of fictional men offered by contemporary women writers, Bertaut concluded his chapter on men in women's writing with the following opinion on their efforts: 'avec une pénétration extraordinaire, avec une subtilité sans égale, elles *voient* et nous font voir leurs semblables, et, quand elles veulent observer les êtres de l'autre sexe, elles éprouvent des difficultés presque insurmontables'.⁵⁵

Twenty years after Bertaut's study was published, similar de-authorizing strategies were applied to women's representations of men by another critic, Jean Larnac. Reflecting on the most well known women writers of the early twentieth

⁵³ Showalter, p. 133.

⁵⁴ Bertaut, p. 75.

⁵⁵ Bertaut, p. 97.

century, notably Colette and Anna de Noailles, Larnac wrote admiringly of the portraits of female lives offered in such texts as *La Vagabonde* (1910) and *L'Entrave*. Like Bertaut before him, however, he noted the 'pauvre esquisse de l'homme'⁵⁶ emanating from these writers, as well as locating the problem of women's inadequate male portraits in their inability to penetrate beyond the truths or experiences of femininity: 'on dirait que les femmes sont impuissantes à sortir d'elles-mêmes'.⁵⁷ For Larnac, one result of this inability to transcend the subjective was women's creation of male characters that were merely versions of the female authorial self. Antoine Arnault, the protagonist of Noailles's novel *La Domination* (1905) was, according to Larnac, merely 'un travesti'⁵⁸ of the writer, a comment that connected women's purportedly inadequate male portraits with the 'autobiographical phallacy' alluded to above.

The censure of women's representations of men was not practised by all male critics of the Belle Époque, or in relation to all women's writing. However, the female-authored man was, in some instances, a site for the policing of what material legitimately fell within the remit of the woman writer, or, more broadly, what the female-authored text could claim to do. As Mesch has argued, this was a project that took on renewed urgency among some commentators in the context of the developments in women's writing that occurred in the years around 1900. In postulating women's incapacity to see the other from a position of objectivity, these critics point, moreover, to the ways in which purportedly universal or objective systems of knowledge and representation were in fact deeply invested with masculine privilege. The phenomenon of male critical de-authorization of women's images of men, on the grounds of their failure to conform to 'objective' standards, may therefore be understood within the context of what Schor

⁵⁶ Jean Larnac, *Histoire de la littérature féminine en France* (Paris: Kra, 1929), p. 231.

⁵⁷ Larnac, p. 231.

⁵⁸ Larnac, p. 232.

describes as women's necessarily complex negotiations with 'a representational system coterminous with patriarchy'.⁵⁹

Schor's brief inquiry into the French tradition of women's representations of men, first published in 1987, begins with the premise of women's subordinate position in relation to 'the means of representation – the pen, the brush, and the chisel'.⁶⁰ With respect to women's writing on men, there are two problems arising from this subordinate position. First, Schor suggests that, given the historic discrepancy between women's opportunity to write about men and men's much more plentiful production of images of women, there has been a tendency for modern female-authored representations of men to be read as necessarily threatening, subversive or aggressive. Alluding to late twentieth-century accusations of misandry among male critics of women's writing, Schor asks whether, given their historic monopoly over systems of representation, men are able 'so surely [to] distinguish between misandry and women's talking, looking, and writing back'.⁶¹ This question may also be levelled, in hindsight, at the late nineteenth-century critic Loliée, who appears to conflate what is, for him, the disturbing prospect of large numbers of women writing about men in the age of feminism and the New Woman with the charge that these women are necessarily degrading men in their work.

The second problem relating to women's subordination in relation to male-dominated systems of representation is the imperative that, as writers, they produce images that show a properly powerful male subject. For Schor, representation itself works in the interests of male power by inscribing and re-inscribing the male subject as

⁵⁹ Schor, p. 112.

⁶⁰ Schor, p. 114.

⁶¹ Schor, p. 114.

the site of authority and plenitude. Women writers, as female subjects living and writing in patriarchal societies, have been bound by the imperative to support these interests. For a woman writer to question the privileged linkage of maleness and power, in whatever way, is to risk the plausibility of her representation, and to elicit the accusation of its inaccuracy or partiality. Schor asks, ‘can men who have, for centuries, [...] consigned women to the role of magnifying mirrors so surely distinguish between life-size representations and caricatures?’⁶² A woman writer’s refusal to ‘magnify’ the male subject in her work risks her representation being viewed as mere (negative) caricature.

Schor argues that the tradition of French women’s representations of men does contain a strand of subversion of what she terms ‘phallic hegemony over the symbolic’.⁶³ This subversion is located in a recurrent topos in women’s fiction in which male characters see their own image, or that of another man, through the eyes of a loving woman. Schor identifies this topos in fiction by Mme de Lafayette, Mme de Staël, Sand and Nathalie Sarraute. In each case, Schor reads the scene involving the portrait as a reflection, *en abîme*, on representation and its close relationship to ‘the male subject’s fascination with the evidence of phallic power’.⁶⁴ However, Schor detects in women’s writing evidence of female characters withdrawing their support for ‘a representational system so intimately bound up with male narcissism’⁶⁵; they cease to support men’s self-love through the blissful adoration of the powerful male imago. Lafayette, Staël, Sand and Sarraute, Schor argues, find ways of unsettling men’s usually gratifying relationship with their own image.

⁶² Schor, p. 115.

⁶³ Schor, p. 112.

⁶⁴ Schor, p. 117.

⁶⁵ Schor, p. 118.

In this thesis, I pay close attention to the ways in which female-authored texts tend to endorse and uphold powerful, authoritative masculinities even as they explore forms of unconventional, subversive and rebellious feminine behaviour. In doing so, I suggest that these novels, while contestatory in some respects, in many ways stage what Schor calls the ‘magnifying’ function of the female subject in relation to the male other. This function is perhaps most explicit in Réval’s *Le Ruban de Vénus* in which, I argue, one of the female characters persistently ignores evidence of male failure and deficiency in order to sustain the myth of masculine omnipotence. However, the same novel contains a sharp critique of the aggrandizement of the male subject. This critique emerges via Réval’s re-working of the topos that Schor identifies in earlier female-authored texts. Réval’s version of the portrait scene is written into the story of a second female protagonist who, unlike most of those considered here, rejects the female subject’s complicity in upholding the necessary linkage of maleness and power.

Theoretical Contexts

Before continuing, some definition of terminology is needed. I understand masculinity as the cultural, social and sexual traits, practices and behaviours that are deemed to be constitutive of gender and which acquire meaning in opposition to femininity. My study focuses on masculinities associated with, and performed by, male bodies. However, the notion that masculinity should necessarily be construed solely as the effect of the male body has been subject to question. Such an assumption is based, in Judith Butler’s terms, on ‘the belief in a mimetic relationship of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it’.⁶⁶ Butler writes that, if gender is understood to be the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes – and hence is not in any simple sense

⁶⁶ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999 [1990]), p. 10.

rooted in biological sex – ‘it does not follow that the construction of “men” will accrue exclusively to the bodies of males or that “women” will interpret only female bodies’.⁶⁷ Judith Halberstam has also argued that masculinity may be performed by and constructed across female bodies.⁶⁸

I want also to locate my use of the terms ‘masculinity’ and ‘masculinities’ within a broader understanding of gender as the product of regulatory practices. Butler has challenged ‘expressive’ conceptualizations of gender which posit that gendered traits and behaviours are in some sense the effect of a stable sexed or gendered core possessed by an individual. Rather than understanding gender as something that one has, Butler argues that gender is performative; it is something that one does. Gender is produced by the very acts and gestures that appear to be its expressions. The performance of gender is neither freely nor naturally undertaken. Rather, Butler writes that:

If gender is a kind of doing, an incessant activity performed, in part, without one’s knowing and without one’s willing, it is not for that reason automatic or mechanical. On the contrary, it is a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint. Moreover, one does not “do” one’s gender alone. One is always “doing” with or for another, even if the other is only imaginary. What I call my “own” gender appears perhaps at times as something that I author or, indeed, own. But the terms that make up one’s own gender are, from the start, outside oneself, beyond oneself in a sociality that has no single author...⁶⁹

The ‘scene of constraint’ within which gender is performed may be understood as the subject’s compelled identification with, and imitation of, genders that comply with ‘socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility’.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 10.

⁶⁸ See Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

⁶⁹ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 1.

⁷⁰ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 23.

The terms of this ‘intelligibility’ are founded upon the ideal of coherence among the sexed body, gender identity and (sexual) desire within a binary framework. Within this framework, femininity is understood to be discrete from, and opposite to, masculinity; this relation of binary difference is secured via heterosexual desire. Butler argues that the binary framework of gender thus works in the service of compulsory heterosexuality.⁷¹ Gender is, in Butler’s formulations, exclusionary: the idealization of models of coherence and continuity within the binary framework of gender has as its corollary the prohibition of what she terms ‘the spectres of discontinuity and incoherence’⁷² from the performance of gender. Butler also stresses that these same ‘spectres’ – practices, desires, identifications that fail to adhere to the ideal of coherence – are de-authorized and produced as failures by the very regulatory laws that install the ideals of coherence and continuity.

Read within Butler’s terms, the masculinities analysed in this study should be construed as the products of reiterated acts, gestures and desires that signify across male bodies and which gain (or lose) legitimacy and intelligibility according to their relation to culturally instituted norms. Butler’s work alerts the reader to the fact that no male subject (or any subject, for that matter) ever truly embodies or attains an ideal, coherent, gender identity. Rather, gender is produced via an imitative process in which there is no original and no model of stable and complete embodiment. This conceptualization of gender as imitation without original is, Butler argues, elucidated via a consideration of drag:

when a man is performing drag as a woman, the “imitation” that drag is said to be is taken as an “imitation” of femininity, but the “femininity” that he imitates is not understood as being itself an imitation. Yet if one considers that gender is acquired, that it is assumed in relation to ideals which are never quite inhabited

⁷¹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 46.

⁷² Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 23.

by anyone, then femininity is an ideal which everyone always and only “imitates.” Thus, drag imitates the imitative structure of gender, revealing gender itself to be an imitation.⁷³

This set of formulations does not mean that the notion of true, real or authentic gender identities does not persist. As already noted, this study deals, in part, with the re-inscription of the purported naturalness or necessity of certain configurations of powerful masculinity, those premised on male authority over women and on forms of public, professional and cultural supremacy. Butler theorizes the operation of such ideas of realness or authenticity as truth effects produced over time through the reiteration of culturally authorized gender ‘identities’. Butler writes that ‘certain cultural configurations of gender take the place of “the real” and consolidate and augment their hegemony through that felicitous self-naturalization’.⁷⁴ These configurations of gender conceal their performative construction and reinforce their privileged status by posturing as true, natural and substantive.

As well as drawing on Butler’s theorizations of gender and performativity, this study also acknowledges work in masculinity studies that problematizes the concept of masculinity as a monolithic category that operates trans-historically or trans-culturally. As R. W. Connell notes, ‘[w]ith growing recognition of the interplay between gender, race and class it has become common to recognize multiple masculinities’.⁷⁵ By speaking of masculinities in the plural, Connell points to the importance of reflecting upon the ways in which gender intersects with questions of sexuality, race, ethnicity and class, as well as its historical mutability. This plural category, as deployed by Connell, also points to the importance of relations among masculinities, including those hierarchical

⁷³ Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 145.

⁷⁴ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 45.

⁷⁵ R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995), p. 76.

relations that ensure that some configurations of masculinity are more closely aligned with power and domination than others.⁷⁶ Connell's arguments necessitate a sensitivity to the narrowness and specificity of my own inquiry, which deals principally with masculinities performed by white, heterosexual, bourgeois male subjects, in female-authored texts, within a particular national and historical context. This thesis concerns itself with representations of gender relations and performances that implicate those male subjects who may be understood, historically, as having been most closely allied with forms of legal, institutional and cultural power and privilege in Belle Époque France.

This study has a relatively narrow field of inquiry, examining representations of masculinity largely associated with the bourgeois spheres explored by Nye and Forth. Yet in focusing on white, bourgeois, heterosexual male masculinities, it nonetheless explores configurations of masculinity that are constructed through various discourses and scripts of gender and power. I consider, for example, male characters performing the role of bourgeois *père de famille*, which encompasses a set of ideals governing public and professional authority and guardianship of the home and family. Also implicated in such performances are certain imperatives governing paternal identification and, in particular, the taking up of the paternal mantle in domestic and professional life. I look

⁷⁶ In *Masculinities*, Connell develops an influential set of formulations concerning the relations of power and prestige that operate among masculinities. Connell posits that in any given historical and social context, a configuration of 'hegemonic masculinity' operates. This is defined as 'the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women' (p. 77). The particular features of this hegemonic masculinity are necessarily contextually specific, since this privileged formation is always relationally produced and sustained. It operates through its relationships to non-hegemonic masculinities, which take up positions of 'subordination', 'complicity' and 'marginalization' in relation to it. Connell argues, for example, that hegemonic masculinity operates through a relation of 'dominance' over subordinated masculinities; the most important example of this relation in contemporary European and American societies is 'the dominance of heterosexual men and the subordination of homosexual men' (p. 78).

at the claims of the godlike male artist, his right to possess the world and the female body with his sight, as well as the subversion or undoing of this ideal. I look at the ways in which masculine power and privilege are (re)produced above and against a repudiated femininity by Catholicism and its constructions of gender relations and sexuality.

Read through Butler's theories of gender performativity and intelligibility, the narratives of female rebellion explored in this study may be viewed as enacting forms of unintelligible or incoherent femininity. This unintelligibility arises in relation to the norms governing 'natural' feminine identities in the Belle Époque. When bourgeois women chose to work in the public sphere, eschew marriage and children in favour of autonomy and self-determination, they posed problems for the category of femininity as defined through women's purportedly inherent maternal and nurturing qualities. That some rebellious female subjects of this period troubled prevailing categorizations of femininity is perhaps most clearly evidenced in Yver's *Les Cervelines*, in which the male protagonist, Jean Cécile, must establish a new category of feminine identity – the eponymous 'cerveline' – to account for those 'women' who, because of their intellectualism and its channelling into professional success, are not *women* in the accepted sense of the word. The *cervelines* are among those female protagonists analysed here whose appropriation of masculine-coded traits and practices such as cycling and smoking further added to the questioning of a historically specific, constructed set of gender ideals that were pervasively understood as a natural binary gender order.

The troubling of the category of femininity, as staged in the texts explored here is, broadly, accompanied by the re-inscription of the necessity and desirability of dominant masculinities, performed by bourgeois men, and premised on power, authority and guardianship of women and other subordinate subjects in the public and private spheres. I do not claim that the encounters between the female rebel and the male subject analysed here offer unproblematic, non-contradictory versions of those

masculinities or their reproduction. The female rebel, in her interactions with the male subject, at times enables the articulation of forms of male dependency and weakness that in fact undermine the naturalness of these masterful configurations of masculinity and point to their precariousness. In Lesueur's *Nietzschéenne*, for example, the male protagonist Robert Clérieux must undergo a radical process of psychic reinforcement in order to attain the category of 'homme', indicating that this category is by no means coextensive with maleness. Similarly, the encounters I explore here illuminate instances of failed or refused identification, instances in which the male subject turns away from, or ceases to believe in, the value of the powerful ideal. These breaks or incoherencies in the edifice of authoritative masculinities point, in various ways, to the contingency and fragility of their accomplishment. However, the novels I analyse do not, in general, stage the female rebel's complicity or pleasure in witnessing the male subject's failed approximation to a powerful ideal. Rather, such failed approximations are largely disavowed or de-legitimized as models of masculine behaviour by these female protagonists, and, frequently, by female-authored narrators. Instead, mastery and authority are reinstated and reinvested as necessary to the project of being a man.

Critical Contexts

With the exception of Colette, who has always maintained a position on the critical horizon, the women writers examined in this study, and many more who were active in France in the years prior to 1914, were consigned to a marginal place in literary history for much of the twentieth century. In the 1990s, however, scholarly interest in French women's writing of the Belle Époque began to flourish once more. This resurgence in interest began with Jennifer Waelti-Walters's foundational *Feminist Novelists of the Belle Époque: Love as a Lifestyle*, an invaluable introduction to the work of thirty women writers

of this period.⁷⁷ A number of studies considering the shared themes and strategies of women writers of this period as a group or generation have subsequently appeared, including Mesch's *The Hysteric's Revenge: French Women Writers at the Fin de Siècle*. All of the writers whose fiction I examine in this study have been the subject of some discussion in such critical work, although in some cases, notably Marni, this analysis is extremely brief. Colette excepted, however, Rachilde is unique among the other writers analysed in this study in attracting a large volume of recent scholarship in her own right.

As Schor has noted, the question of women's representations of men has been 'neglected by feminist critics [...] more concerned with the urgent question of the representation of women first by male writers and, more recently, by women writers'.⁷⁸ Reflecting these broad trends in feminist literary criticism, it is with the still urgent question of female lives and subjectivities that most recent scholarship dealing with the women writers in this thesis is concerned. Waelti-Walters states that the aim of her study is 'to bring the women novelists of the [1900-1914] period to the attention of both anglophone and francophone readers interested in women's writing, in women's rights, and in social history'.⁷⁹ She offers detailed readings of women's fiction in the first years of the twentieth century, with analysis organized around what she takes to be the key preoccupations of women writing in this period, including love, marriage, maternity and profession. The critic's overarching argument is that the Belle Époque witnessed the emergence of a generation of novelists whose work demonstrates a commitment to

⁷⁷ Jennifer Waelti-Walters, *Feminist Novelists of the Belle Époque: Love as a Lifestyle* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

⁷⁸ Schor, p. 112.

⁷⁹ Waelti-Walters, *Feminist Novelists*, p. x.

challenging women's oppression and promoting their right to work, to love and to be 'independent human being[s] on equal terms with men'.⁸⁰

Other scholars have suggested that Waelti-Walters is at times too quick to ascribe a feminist message to writers and texts that display an ambivalent or indeed hostile response to women's emancipation and feminism.⁸¹ Nonetheless, her work has inspired further inquiry into the work and shared interests of women writers of this period, including their contestatory approaches to questions of female subjectivity and gender relations. Mélanie Collado has conducted a detailed comparative study of novels by Colette, Delarue-Mardrus and Tinayre, focusing on the ways in which the three writers negotiated the tension between their identification with dominant constructions of femininity which de-authorized female intellectualism and their wish to pursue their literary ambitions. Collado frames this tension as a conflict between the categories of 'femme' and 'femme de lettres' which was played out across each writer's constructed literary persona as well as in her fiction.⁸² While she focuses on novels that denounce women's servitude, Collado dwells upon the ambivalence that inhabits each text's claim for female autonomy. This ambivalence is, she notes, manifest in the forms of 'résignation' that characterize each text's denouement.

More recent critical interventions concerned with Belle Époque women's fiction have considered this work through different lenses. Mesch's *The Hysteric's Revenge* covers the decades between 1880 and 1910. In her analysis of female-authored texts from this period, Mesch engages with the cultural fears and anxieties often linked to the fin de siècle – degeneration, depopulation, sexual perversion – as well as with the optimism

⁸⁰ Waelti-Walters, *Feminist Novelists*, p. x.

⁸¹ See, for example, Mélanie Collado, *Colette, Lucie Delarue-Mardrus, Marcelle Tinayre: émancipation et résignation* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003), p. 10.

⁸² Collado, p. 19.

and political progressiveness more usually aligned with the Belle Époque. Mesch's principal concern is to explore women's writing on female sexuality and the body and its significance for understanding female subjectivity and authority in this period.⁸³

Mesch begins with the established premise that the female body, along with the desires and dangers associated with it, was a favoured object of scrutiny in late nineteenth-century medical, sociological and literary texts. The development of what Michel Foucault calls the *scientia sexualis* was, to a large extent, dependent on the 'truth' and knowledge derived from the female body, truth and knowledge that were, largely, produced and consumed by and among men. Mesch argues that the medical and literary discourses around sexuality and the female body, while male-dominated, in fact permitted female writers to produce a set of 'female counterdiscourses'.⁸⁴ These counterdiscourses were both dependent upon dominant male-authored discourses for their articulation, but also functioned as a contestatory or resistive re-scripting of accepted truths about women's bodies and desires. Mesch traces these contestatory discourses through women's fiction, detecting their operation in, for example, the re-working of naturalist constructions of female sexuality in Tinayre's *La Maison du péché* and in Delarue-Mardrus's first novel, *Marie, fille-mère* (1908). She also argues for Rachilde's subversive versions of misogynist decadent discourse in *Monsieur Vénus* (1884) and *La Jongleuse*.

In another recent study, Juliette Rogers explores the ways in which women's work in the public sphere was represented in women's fiction of the early twentieth century. Rogers argues that it was in this period that a new sub-genre of the *Bildungsroman* developed. She terms this the *Berufsroman*, or novel of women's

⁸³ Mesch, p. 5.

⁸⁴ Mesch, p. 7.

professional development. The critic argues that by focusing on the professional and educational aspirations of female-authored fictional heroines in such novels, her work marks a departure from more familiar images of women associated with this period, such as ‘the decadent, hysterical or perverse sexual being’ or the ‘nurturing and self-sacrificing romantic wife and mother’.⁸⁵ Rogers’s study, in identifying and exploring a rich vein of women’s writing on profession and education in the first years of the twentieth century, offers a new framework within which to read relatively well known novels such as Colette’s *Claudine à l’école* (1900) alongside texts that have largely been neglected for decades, including novels by Yver and Réval.

Diana Holmes, meanwhile, positions novels by several of the writers discussed in this study, including Lesueur and Tinayre, within a broader history of twentieth-century French romantic fiction.⁸⁶ These writers, she argues, wove explorations of feminist questions and concerns into more familiar plots centring on love in what Holmes calls their ‘New Woman romances’.⁸⁷ In such novels, Holmes writes, ‘the central question of whether and how the couple could find happiness together was inextricably linked to another question: can a woman fall in love with a man yet keep her freedom?’⁸⁸ Holmes’s approach to these texts is not primarily focused on male characters or constructions of masculinity. However, her analysis is pertinent to this study insofar as it is rooted in the ways in which conventional gendered identities and

⁸⁵ Juliette M. Rogers, *Career Stories: Belle Epoque Novels of Professional Development* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), p. 8.

⁸⁶ Diana Holmes, *Romance and Readership in Twentieth-Century France: Love Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). While Rachilde’s position within the decadent movement would appear to distance her work from the themes and premises of romance, Holmes has argued elsewhere that some of Rachilde’s fiction draws on romantic tropes and structures. See Diana Holmes, ‘Decadent Love: Rachilde and the Popular Romance’, *Dix-Neuf*, 1 (2003), 16-28.

⁸⁷ Holmes, *Romance and Readership*, p. 34.

⁸⁸ Holmes, *Romance and Readership*, p. 34.

performances are challenged and/or reinforced in the feminist romances written by women in Belle Époque France. In particular, it considers the ways in which, in this period, conceptualizations of romantic love were closely bound up with the supposed naturalness of masculine domination and feminine submission within the heterosexual relationship. Feminist romance writers thus explored the tension between advancing the rights and autonomy of the female subject and the apparent inevitability of her subordination in romantic relationships. Discussing Tinayre's *La Rebelle* (1905), Holmes writes:

Writing for an audience emotionally and sexually shaped – like the author and her heroine – by a culture of polarized gender identities, Tinayre finds it impossible to portray heterosexual love that transcends entirely the domination/submission scenario which informs her society's view of sexual relations.⁸⁹

The intractability of what Holmes calls 'the domination/submission scenario', in which 'domination' is the province of men, connects to one of my central concerns in this study. For, given this ingrained construction of heterosexuality as a set of relations premised on opposing, hierarchically organized, positions and roles for women and men, the representation of heterosexual love in women's fiction becomes one of the modes through which masculinities premised on power and authority are produced and reproduced.

Scope and Development of the Thesis

My project shares with these existing studies the premise that it remains critically useful to explore the commonalities and shared interests of French women writers of the Belle Époque. For this reason, it follows the studies discussed above in reading these writers as a group rather than solely as individual talents. This is not to suggest that all writers

⁸⁹ Holmes, *Romance and Readership*, p. 38.

of this period evinced the same attitudes towards gender relations, or that their representations of men and constructions of masculinity are identical. However, to maintain this approach to women's writing is to acknowledge the ways in which, as my brief discussion of Loliée and other male critics indicates, women writers wrote and were read in a patriarchal culture in which their work was marked both as 'feminine' – versus the supposed universality of men's writing – and, often, as inferior. This applied even to women writers, like Rachilde, who preferred not to identify themselves as 'femmes de lettres'.⁹⁰ Such an approach acknowledges the significance and difference of the female signature for both authors and readers, or, as Nancy K. Miller puts it, acknowledges 'the author as sexually gendered subject in a socially gendered exchange'.⁹¹

Like other critics who have researched women's writing of the Belle Époque, I aim to contribute to the task of recuperating and re-reading neglected female-authored texts of the period, and thus to promote deeper understanding of the tradition of French women's writing. Not all of the writers and novels analysed in this thesis have been neglected. *L'Entrave* has been the subject of much scholarly attention; *La Jongleuse*, meanwhile, features among those of Rachilde's novels that have received particular attention in the recent renaissance of interest in her writings. Nonetheless, much work remains to be done. My analysis of Marni's *Pierre Tisserand*, for example, sheds light on the work of a writer who was widely placed at the forefront of women's writing in

⁹⁰ Rachilde was among those writers whose response to 'Comme elles nous jugent!' was reprinted in Loliée's second article. In her letter, Rachilde repudiates the label of woman writer for herself, writing, 'n'étant pas du tout femme de lettres, je n'ai aucun mépris pour l'homme'. Quoted in Loliée, 'Opinions', p. 138. Rachilde hints that she endorses both the rather pejorative connotations of the label 'femme de lettres' – as it concerns other women – as well as the substance of Loliée's thesis.

⁹¹ Nancy K. Miller, 'The Text's Heroine: A Feminist Critic and Her Fictions', in *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 67-76 (p. 71). First publ. in *Diacritics*, 12 (1982), 48-53.

France in the years after 1900, who was central to the group of journalists involved in *La Fronde*, but who has been almost entirely neglected in more recent criticism.

The specificity of my study lies in its focus on men and masculinity. In exploring these questions, I aim to widen the renewed debate concerning the generation of French women writing in the Belle Époque and the constructions of gender in their work. The relatively large volume of critical work on Rachilde and Colette includes some discussion of these writers' representations of men and masculinity.⁹² This study engages critically with such existing scholarship, attempts to add to the insights it has provided, and extends the discussion to include new texts and new writers. In so doing, it also aims to begin to respond to the more general lack of critical work on representations of men in French women's fiction identified both by Schor, and, more recently, by Nigel Harkness. Writing in 2007, Harkness recalled Schor's essay, first published twenty years earlier, and noted that the continued absence of sustained interest in masculinity in women's writing was more remarkable given the development of masculinity studies from the 1980s onwards. As Harkness wrote:

The flourishing of masculinity studies in recent years has not given rise to a corresponding growth in critical work on masculinity in women's fiction. The questions Schor asked then [...] have thus lost none of their relevance today, and if anything are now all the more intellectually urgent.⁹³

This thesis approaches the question of masculinity in Belle Époque women's fiction by focusing on a very specific set of concerns: it considers masculinities that are constructed and performed through the male subject's relationships with rebellious female protagonists. The adoption of this particular approach grew out of close reading

⁹² For example, Mesch (pp. 119-154) explores issues around masculinity in Rachilde's *Monsieur Vénius* and *La Jongleuse*, while Marcelle Biolley-Godino interrogates Colette's representations of men in *L'Homme-objet chez Colette* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1972).

⁹³ Nigel Harkness, *Men of their Words: The Poetics of Masculinity in George Sand's Fiction* (London: Legenda, 2007), p. 27.

of key New Woman novels, especially the fiction of Marcelle Tinayre. Reflecting on the ‘newness’ of heroines such as Fanny Manolé in *La Maison du péché*, I began to wonder about the ways in which Tinayre imagined the effects of the *femme nouvelle* on men and to think about whether analysis of men’s reactions to this transgressive figure might prove to be a fruitful way of exploring masculinities in women’s fiction of this period. Men’s efforts to possess and subjugate Fanny in *La Maison du péché*, for example, raised a number of questions concerning the ways in which powerful masculinities appeared to be performed and secured via men’s restriction of the female subject’s social, spatial and sexual freedoms.

It was also from reading Tinayre’s fiction that the first clues as to the significance of the female rebel’s role in endorsing powerful masculinities emerged. Collado and others have remarked on feminist critics’ disappointment with Tinayre’s novels, in which the subversive behaviours or desires of the heroines are gradually replaced by acceptance of a more conventional female destiny.⁹⁴ Fanny’s independent life as a Parisian artist gradually gives way to a radical dependence on her lover, Augustin; she experiences his decision to end their relationship as a kind of death sentence. If such dénouements may be read as evidence of Tinayre’s inability to sustain the rebelliousness of a New Woman heroine to the end of the novel, I reflected, in my own research, on whether such instances of failure and female domestication might also be read as female complicity in upholding the necessity and desirability of certain configurations of masculinity. The female subject, in other words, is called upon to sustain and uphold ideals of powerful masculinity, and even those women who challenge the conventions of devoted, domesticated liberal womanhood often struggle in vain to reject this injunction.

⁹⁴ Collado, for example, notes that ‘les critiques féministes recherchent sans véritable succès la subversion dans les textes de Tinayre’ (p. 112).

The discovery that female-authored New Woman protagonists might sustain such configurations of masculinity created a potentially interesting contradiction with those cultural narratives that held the New Woman to be bent on destroying male authority and traditional gender roles. It therefore prompted me to seek out and analyse other versions of the male subject/female rebel encounter produced by prominent women writers of the period. I soon detected key parallels between the New Woman's gradual acceptance of masculine domination in Tinayre's fiction and Renée Néré's eventual renunciation of her freedom in favour of loving the powerful male other in Colette's *L'Entrave*. Continuing my study of these encounters via readings of Réval and Yver, meanwhile, I began to perceive a broader relevance to the patterns I had first considered in relation to Tinayre.

Further research prompted me to extend and complicate my conceptualization of the modes of female endorsement of powerful masculinities in these texts. Lesueur's *Nietzschéenne* first alerted me to the more active ways in which the Belle Époque rebel might come to support the powerful male. This novel stages a kind of rescue narrative in which the transgressive New Woman heroine mentors the more inept, passive hero, thus re-making him in a more powerful image. The identification of this second mode of female support for the dominant male subject in turn inspired my re-reading of texts such as Rachilde's *La Jongleuse* and Delarue-Mardrus's *Douce moitié* and the discovery therein of similar kinds of female mentorship of men.

The development of my central arguments and the selection of my corpus began, therefore, with close reading of a small number of novels, notably Tinayre's *La Maison du péché*. Having begun to formulate a set of hypotheses concerning what appeared to be an important facet of Belle Époque women's writing on men and masculinity, this set of hypotheses in turn informed my subsequent research and reading. It narrowed the focus of my inquiry from a broad initial interest in thinking

about men and masculinities in women's fiction of this period to a more specific concern with mapping masculinities through men's encounter with rebellious female subjects closely aligned with conceptions of New Womanhood. Although such encounters feature in many novels by women of this period, this thematic focus excluded other writers and texts. It prevented my discussion in this thesis of fascinating, male-centred novels such as de Noailles's *La Domination* and Myriam Harry's *La Conquête de Jérusalem* (1904), the first winner of the Prix Vie heureuse. Similarly, during my research I explored several novels by writers whose work is analysed here before selecting those texts best suited to this focus. Rachilde's *Le Dessous* (1904) and Delarue-Mardrus's *L'Acharnée* (1910), for example, offer much valuable material for exploring the male homosocial bonds discussed in chapter 3, but do not stage the male subject/female rebel encounter upon which I chose to concentrate in this study.

I have chosen the eight texts that make up my corpus on the basis that they present sustained and interesting examples of the female rebel's support for powerful masculinities. Together, they illustrate the recurrence of the operations and responses that I have detected in my research into the encounters between the male subject and the female rebel. The eight novels do not constitute the only examples of such operations and responses. For instance, Tinayre's *La Rebelle* and Yver's novels *Princesses de science* (1907) and *Les Dames du Palais* (1909), no less than *La Maison du péché* and *Les Cervelines*, offer versions of the rebellious woman's recognition of the necessity of powerful masculinity and female submission. The kind of female mentorship of weak or failing men that I identify in *Nietzschéenne* and *Douce moitié*, meanwhile, finds echoes in the plotting of novels such as *Tu es femme* (1913) by the feminist journalist Harlor (Jeanne Perrot). However, given the constraints of this study and my wish to offer a detailed reading of each of my primary texts, I have limited my corpus to eight novels and to one novel by each selected writer.

I do not contend that all female-authored novels dealing with the encounter between the male subject and the female rebel necessarily conform to the models I have identified. For example, in *La Vagabonde* (1910), the novel in which Renée Néré first appears, Colette's heroine repudiates the bonds of heterosexual love and the gender positions such relationships appear inexorably to secure. This study, with the examples offered below, can only seek to map out and explore what I take to be an important set of patterns in female-authored fiction of the period. It does not aim to deny or efface the complexity and diversity of women's writing on men in the Belle Époque.

The study is composed of four chapters, each of which contains readings of two of the eight novels that make up my corpus of primary texts. The readings are arranged consecutively within each chapter. I have adopted this structure in order to allow for detailed analysis of each novel as well as for the exploration of thematic or structural congruences between the two texts discussed in each chapter. The structure aims to establish a series of productive dialogues between the pairs of novels. While each chapter centres on a set of shared thematic and/or structural concerns, I point more broadly to continuities and shared interests across all eight novels.

In chapter 1, I examine Yver's *Les Cervelines* and Lesueur's *Nietzschéenne*, focusing on depictions of fearful bourgeois men. I think about the connection between these portraits of masculine anxiety and each novel's transgressive female character(s). The novels complicate the cultural narratives of Belle Époque gender crisis discussed above in various ways. Yver depicts a complex set of masculine responses to the New Woman, among which is men's attraction to intellectual, professional women who break with conventional bourgeois femininity. Such attachments, I argue, permit the male

protagonists to admit weakness and defer or renounce the onerous demands of bourgeois masculinity. This relief is short-lived; Yver's novel reinstates the necessity of precisely those demands. In *Nietzschéenne*, Lesueur's disgraced yet defiant New Woman heroine Jocelyne comes to the aid of the struggling male protagonist, factory boss Robert. Rather than dispossessing him of his right to mastery, Jocelyne embarks on a project of mentorship that permits Robert to approximate to the authoritative, powerful masculinity that has hitherto eluded him.

Chapter 2 continues to explore themes of masculine anguish by offering readings of two novels centring on anxious seducer figures, Marni's *Pierre Tisserand* and Delarue-Mardrus's *Douce moitié*. In both, the male protagonist's sexual adventures are terrifying experiences associated with forms of symbolic castration, evoking, in an often humorous tone, the effects of the fin-de-siècle *femme fatale*. The mockery of the male subject has its limits, however. Marni's novel re-inscribes an ideal masculinity premised on courage, controlled heterosexuality and guardianship of women. Delarue-Mardrus's novel re-works the mentorship function undertaken by Jocelyne in *Nietzschéenne*; as in Lesueur's novel, an independent and professionally knowledgeable woman appears on the scene to rescue an embattled male subject, her painter Armand. *Douce moitié* reverses the outcome of this project; Delarue-Mardrus's protagonist rejects the help of this female mentor figure and refuses to identify with the model of public success and mastery offered to him, instead performing a masculinity that encompasses 'feminine' traits such as sensitivity and vulnerability. This feminized masculinity remains, however, consistent with male privilege in the novel's construction of gender hierarchies.

In chapter 3, I think about triangular encounters in Tinayre's *La Maison du péché* and Colette's *L'Entrave*. Where, in the first two chapters, the rebellious female character performs the role of mentor or critic of the anxious male subject, in chapter 3 she functions differently, taking up a position as the third partner in male-dominated

triangles. Both novels are centrally concerned with a heterosexual relationship. These heterosexual relationships are, however, embedded in, and circumscribed by, a relationship between men that pre-dates and takes precedence over the heterosexual bond. My concern with these structures is two-fold. I examine, first, the ways in which Tinayre and Colette dramatize the closure of the narrative of female rebellion through the forging of a heterosexual relationship, suggesting that female autonomy is incompatible with heterosexual love. Second, my reading of the triangular structures operative in both novels points to the ways in which the production and reproduction of masculinities aligned with power over women relies upon the appropriation and use of the female subject as an object of exchange who functions to cement bonds of identification and desire between men.

The closure or failure of the narrative of female revolt is also a preoccupation in chapter 4, in which I analyse Rachilde's *La Jongleuse* and Réval's *Le Ruban de Vénus*. Rachilde and Réval both stage two stories of female revolt, one of which, in each novel, ends in the female protagonist's domestication and subordination to masculine authority, and one of which is characterized by success or the evasion of this distribution of gendered power. I suggest that both novels are centrally concerned with mapping out the effects of masculine domination in heterosexual relationships and with the ways in which this domination relies upon forms of female endorsement and complicity for its maintenance. *La Jongleuse* offers a paradoxical set of female negotiations with the male subject. Rachilde's eponymous heroine, Eliante, withdraws her endorsement of the male subject's right to possess and control her body and sexuality, repudiating, in her relationship with the student Léon, the gendered power relations that obtained in her earlier marriage. However, her refusal to comply with these positions is premised upon her reproduction, elsewhere, of similar hierarchical relations; Eliante escapes Léon by orchestrating his marriage with her niece, Missie, a

New Woman whose own revolt against bourgeois femininity is defeated in the process. In *Le Ruban de Vénus*, Réval also offers meditations on the female subject's role in upholding forms of masculine domination within the heterosexual relationship. One of her female protagonists, Cécile, overlooks the manifold deficiencies of her husband in order to reinvest in the ideal of an all-powerful male subject. Her complicity is assured through her experience of sexual desire as an enslaving force for the female subject. Réval's second female character, Suzanne, follows Eliante in perceiving this ideal as the root of female subjugation, and refusing to invest in it.

Chapter 1

Cries for Help: Men in Trouble in Colette Yver's *Les Cervelines* (1903) and Daniel Lesueur's *Nietzschéenne* (1908)

Les Cervelines and *Nietzschéenne* offer compelling portraits of the bourgeois man in trouble. He is, in these novels, in thrall to painful doubts and fears about his ability to do his job, to control the public sphere and to take care of his wife and family. In both novels, New Woman heroines come to be closely embroiled in the trials of the bourgeois male. Given the particular fears attached to the New Woman as a figure of gender disorder, and, more particularly, as a threat to traditional family life and the patriarchal order, it is perhaps unsurprising to find her at the heart of men's problems. However, the texts I analyse in this chapter problematize constructions of the New Woman as a usurper of men's public power and wrecker of the bourgeois family.

Les Cervelines focuses on three intellectually gifted professional women who refuse marriage and motherhood in order to pursue their careers. The marital aspirations of the male protagonists, provincial doctors Jean Cécile and Paul Tisserel, fall victim to each woman's determination to retain her independence. In contrast to the dazzling intellectual gifts of the women, Jean and Paul are distinctly mediocre. Both men, unlike their highly successful female counterparts, are made to experience professional failure and inadequacy alongside romantic disappointment. Yver's men are frustrated, often bitter, given to begging for women's attention and to bouts of weeping when events turn against them. While *Les Cervelines* dramatizes male confusion and, indeed, some hostility towards the transgressive female subjects who out-perform them in the public world, it is centrally concerned with men's desire and love for the intellectual woman. Such attachments to competent, authoritative New Woman figures

permit their articulation of the inadequacy and deficiency that ideals of dominant masculinity call upon them to deny.

Similar concerns emerge in *Nietzschéenne*. Lesueur's novel, like Yver's, stages the encounter between a competent, autonomous woman and a bourgeois male subject experiencing difficulties in fulfilling his duties. Robert Cléricux has recently taken over at the head of the large car factory established by his father and uncle, and exists in a state of nervous terror over his responsibilities. Jocelyne Monestier is a disgraced bourgeois *jeune fille* who rejects social rehabilitation through marriage in favour of autonomy and her work, which consists of funding and developing housing projects for the workers of Paris. It is to the independent Jocelyne that Robert confesses his timidity, fear, and lack of willpower.

Both novels are, therefore, thematically concerned with exploring issues of male vulnerability and their articulation through men's encounter with heroines linked with traits and practices more usually coded as masculine in Belle Époque France. My argument in both cases, however, is that the rebellious activities of the New Woman heroine do not preclude her implication in the task of reinforcing the necessity of men's authority in public and private life. In this respect, the encounters between the female rebel and the ostensibly vulnerable male subject do not correspond to cultural narratives which constructed the New Woman as a threat to male authority and the gender order. Men's articulations of weakness or inadequacy serve, in these novels, as a prelude to a re-endorsement of their claims to power and authority that is voiced and enacted by the New Woman herself. In *Les Cervelines*, this process occurs via a conservative movement within the text whereby men's embrace of weakness or passivity in their relationships with leading female protagonists is gradually de-authorized as a viable position for the male subject. In Lesueur's novel, the process works differently: *Nietzschéenne* dramatizes

the channelling of the female rebel's activities into the task of imbuing the hesitant male protagonist with those ideally masculine qualities that he is lacking.

1. *Les Cervelines: Dreaming of a Doctor for a Wife*

Colette Yver was the penname of Antoinette de Bergevin (1874-1953).¹ Yver grew up in Brittany and began her literary career at an early age, publishing novels for children with the Rouen publisher Mégard throughout the 1890s.² *Les Cervelines* was the writer's first novel for adults and was first published, in Paris, by Félix Juven in 1903. Yver went on to marry Auguste Huzard, who worked at Juven and read her manuscript. *Les Cervelines* inaugurated a series of novels published in the first decade of the twentieth century in which Yver addressed some of the changes to women's lives occurring in the years around 1900, notably the opening up of careers such as law and medicine to female entrants. The most well-known of these novels is arguably *Princesses de science*, which was awarded the Prix Vie heureuse in 1907. Like *Les Cervelines*, it depicts the lives of female doctors, but builds upon its precursor by exploring the female professional's experience of marriage and motherhood. *Les Dames du Palais*, which focuses on women lawyers, appeared in 1909. Like contemporary Réval, whose novels about women students and teachers explore the implications of Third Republic educational reforms, Yver's fiction interrogates the dilemmas and problematics of women taking up roles in what had hitherto been exclusively male professional fields.

Among these dilemmas is the effect upon men of women's transgression of the domestic boundary. *Les Cervelines* explores male responses to the emergence of a

¹ Published biographical information on Yver is relatively sparse. Waelti-Walters (*Feminist Novelists*, p. 188) and Rogers (*Career Stories*, p. 221) offer brief biographical sketches.

² Jennifer E. Milligan reports that Yver's work featured prominently in Mégard's didactic 'Bibliothèque morale de la jeunesse'. See *The Forgotten Generation: French Women Writers of the Inter-war Period* (Oxford: Berg, 1996), p. 151.

generation of independent, professional women in some detail. Indeed, the novel, while centrally concerned with female characters and their professional and personal struggles, demonstrates a clear concern with thinking about male subjectivity and the ways in men's lives are to be shaped by the advent of the New Woman. Both male protagonists are, for example, deployed as character-focalizers at various junctures,³ encouraging the reader to consider the rise of the *cerveline* from a male perspective and creating a sense of intimacy with men's complex, sometimes contradictory, feelings towards their brilliant female colleagues.

Les Cervelines explores the lives and relationships of two young doctors, Paul Tisserel and Jean Cécile, the medical student Jeanne Bœrck, and the history teacher and researcher Marceline Rhonans. All four live in the provincial city of Briois. Jean, who has recently returned from Paris, is bitter following romantic rejection by the famous Parisian writer Eugénie Lebrun, the novel's first *cerveline* figure. His friendship with this autonomous woman, who prefers to live alone and support herself rather than marry him, prompts Jean's early rancour towards professional, intellectual women. Back in Briois, Jean, coining the term 'cerveline' for this newly autonomous female subject, issues a warning about her dangers to his friend Paul, who has fallen in love with the brilliant Jeanne. Soon afterwards, however, Jean himself rejects the meek and devoted Henriette Tisserel, Paul's sister, in order to pursue another intellectual woman, Marceline. Both men eventually fail to persuade Jeanne and Marceline to risk their

³ I take this term from Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's formulations in *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Methuen, 1983). Rimmon-Kenan notes that 'External focalization is felt to be close to the narrating agent' (p. 74), while 'the locus of internal focalization is inside the represented events' (p. 74). The principal vehicle of external focalization is the 'narrator-focalizer'; the principal vehicle of internal focalization is the 'character-focalizer'. Rimmon-Kenan also differentiates between focalization 'from without' (p. 76) and 'from within' (p. 76). When the focalized object is a character, focalization from without may be limited to 'external actions' (p. 76), while focalization from within encompasses the object's 'feelings and thoughts' (p. 76).

professional success by marrying. Henriette, the only female character whose loving and submissive disposition matches Jean and Paul's purported ideal of femininity, contracts tuberculosis and, at the end of the novel, dies.

Men and the *cerveline*

Yver's depictions of women professionals in the decade before World War I have attracted new, largely female-centred, readings from critics in the past twenty years. Most recently, Rogers's analysis of the female novel of professionalization in the pre-1914 period draws heavily on Yver's work.⁴ Rogers builds on Waelti-Walters's earlier discussion of Yver's treatment of women and careers, in which the writer is positioned within a generation of French feminist novelists challenging the constraints operating on women's lives in the Belle Époque.

While critics such as Waelti-Walters and Rogers have attempted to rebut or problematize the arguments for Yver's reactionary gender politics,⁵ it has been more usual to view Yver's texts as intensely defensive of traditional gender positions.⁶ Holmes characterizes Yver's fiction as 'a vehement reassertion of the doctrine of separate and complementary roles, in the face of threats posed by women's increased access to education and employment'.⁷ This is a view largely echoed by Louise Lyle, who asserts that Yver's fiction demonstrates her conviction that 'marriage and motherhood remain

⁴ Rogers, *Career Stories*, especially chapters 4, 5 and 6.

⁵ Rogers, *Career Stories*, especially pp. 149-150; Waelti-Walters, chapter 6.

⁶ Yver articulated her views concerning the desirability of women retaining their roles as wives and mothers in articles such as 'Sur le féminisme', *La Coopération des idées*, 16 May 1912, pp. 247-250. Yver acknowledges the necessity of unmarried women having the right to earn a living, but notes that 'c'est un pis aller que, dans une société, une femme travaille en dehors du foyer' (p. 248).

⁷ Diana Holmes, *French Women's Writing, 1848-1994* (London: Athlone, 1996), p. 50.

the best, if no longer the only life choices available to women'.⁸ Maugue, meanwhile, cites Yver liberally in her study of fin-de-siècle literary misogyny, discerning no difference between Yver's purported horror of the emancipated woman and that of the numerous male writers whose work she analyses.⁹ At the root of such assessments are Yver's emphasis on the multiple difficulties attaching to women's efforts to manage both a career and family life, along with what Rogers calls her "renunciation" plots, in which the professional woman eventually retires to the domestic sphere.¹⁰

My reading of *Les Cervelines* centres on male responses to women's challenge to what Holmes calls 'the doctrine of separate and complementary roles'. The *cerveline* characters represent the violation of this doctrine: these women repudiate the domestic life viewed by many to be women's natural or desirable destiny, and, in preferring to work as writers, researchers and doctors, perform roles usually coded as masculine in this period. Yver's novel suggests that this violation raises a number of questions concerning gender relations, the first of which is a problem of identity. For Jean Cécile, the female subject's performance of 'masculine' traits and practices such as intellectualism and professional mastery lends, in Butler's terms, an unintelligibility to her gendering. The intellectual, professional woman cannot be easily categorized within a binary gender framework. Early in the novel, Jean speaks with confusion and, in the

⁸ Louise Lyle, 'Maternity and Cultural Reproduction in Fin-de-Siècle French Fictions', *French Studies Bulletin*, 104 (2007), 58-61 (p. 61). Milligan's analysis of Yver's 1928 novel *Rose, Madame* concludes along similar lines. Milligan notes that the novel's message is that 'it is fine to be educated, but that self-development is inappropriate in marriage where subservience to the man, irrespective of his qualities or abilities, is the order of the day' (Milligan, p. 159).

⁹ Maugue asserts that Yver '[consacre] exclusivement son œuvre à la dénonciation des « cervelines » et parmi elles, bien sûr, les femmes de lettres' (Maugue, *Identité*, p. 18).

¹⁰ See Rogers, *Career Stories*, especially Chapter 4, for further discussion of Yver's renunciation plots. *Les Cervelines* constitutes an exception to this pattern of female renunciation, since all three professional women choose work over marriage.

wake of Eugénie's rejection, some bitterness, about those female subjects who maintain many of the trappings of femininity but who have sacrificed the heart – the site of authentic womanly tenderness – for the 'masculine' brain:

[Le péril] est chez celles qui sont demeurées charmantes, qui n'ont pas de système, pas d'affiliations, pas de mots d'ordre, mais qui, ayant laissé leur vie refluer au cerveau, n'ont plus besoin d'amour, tout simplement. (*LC*, 9)

It is the confusion wrought by this transgression of the rules of intelligible gendering that causes Jean to devise the name 'cerveline' for the new woman for whom love, both romantic and maternal, is not the meaning of life.

The novel dramatizes not only the novelty of women's occupation of hitherto masculine public spaces, but also the scenario of her manifest superiority vis-à-vis the more mediocre male. While their female counterparts enjoy prestige and acclaim, the men battle professional setbacks, monotony, and intellectual insecurity. The novel's thorough undermining of men's claims to professional and intellectual supremacy is established early on when Paul informs Jean that Jeanne Bœrck is more able than any of the medical men at Briois's hospital: 'à cette heure, elle est plus forte que moi; elle nous dépasse tous pour la pathologie; il n'y a guère à l'Hôtel-Dieu que le père Le Hétrais qui puisse lui tenir tête, et encore. Le Hétrais n'a pas sa pénétration, je dirai même sa divination du malade' (*LC*, 3).

In these respects, *Les Cervelines* appears to bring to fictional fruition the nightmares of those Belle Époque commentators and caricaturists who viewed women's education and professionalization as the prelude to a radical re-ordering of gender roles and hierarchies. The effects of this threatened transformation upon men, meanwhile, have frequently been understood by cultural historians and critics in terms of male anxiety and crisis concerning lost power and prestige and the disappearance of the nurturing, domesticated femininity that characterized the ideal bourgeois woman. Yver herself postulated that the professional woman threatened to visit a kind of loss upon

men. In a comment piece dealing with the question of female professionalization in *Princesses de science*, Yver argued that men's wishes and desires should not be neglected by women advocating their right to a career outside the home, whom she aligns with feminism:

Les hommes ne sont pas à dédaigner dans le problème; ils épousent les femmes; à ce titre au moins peuvent-ils devenir intéressants aux féministes. Si l'on interrogeait cent célibataires de trente ans, combien pourraient avouer qu'ils rêvent une doctoresse pour épouse? Leur avis n'est cependant pas négligeable dans la matière...¹¹

If Yver did not write in terms of masculine crisis, her concern with men's wishes – and the implication that most men would not wish to marry a doctor – suggests that she perceived women's professionalization to constitute an unwelcome development for men. She goes on to note that 'le dévouement seul, à défaut du reste, suffit à l'âme masculine'.¹²

While *Les Cervelines* deals with men's confusion and disappointment when confronted with women's rejection of traditional femininity, their responses, as mapped out in the novel, are more complex than these narratives of loss and resentment would suggest. It is important to note, for example, that both Jean and Paul *do* dream of an intellectual woman for a wife. The *cerveline* is eroticized and desired, in Jean's case at the expense of two more conventionally feminine women whose ignorance, childishness and passive devotion promise to foreclose any female intellectual threat to the male subject. The novel deals with the forging and breaking of male attachments to the very women whose intellect and professional success relegate men to positions of inferiority and inadequacy. These attachments, I want to argue, are not marked solely by male hostility, or, as Waelti-Walters has argued, by male efforts to destroy the sources of the

¹¹ Colette Yver, 'Réponse de Colette Yver à Mme Camille Marbo', *La Vie heureuse*, October 1907.

¹² Yver, 'Réponse'.

cerveline's talent and success.¹³ Rather, I read these attachments as bonds which in fact permit male subjects to articulate and avow the fear and inadequacy that divide them from ideals of authoritative, omnipotent masculinity. They accept the competence and public authority of the *cerveline* as a gendered performance which authorizes their admission that they do not approximate to such ideals. Such avowals and the relationships through which they emerge are, however, gradually de-authorized. The *cerveline*, for most of the novel desired at the expense of her ideal feminine counterpart, finally becomes an impossible object, and the male subject's desire is re-directed to those women whose vulnerability and passivity require a masculine enactment of domination, protection and guidance. Through the utterances of one of Yver's *cerveline* protagonists, Marceline, the necessity of traditional gender roles and hierarchies at the expense of what are potentially more subversive arrangements is forcefully reinstated. Yver's 'omniscient' narrator also contributes to this process by issuing judgements and commentary on events that frame the reader's interpretation.¹⁴

The foreclosure of the more subversive gender relations that emerge through the romantic attachments between male subjects and intellectual women is consistent with critical views of Yver's conservative gender politics. However, I do not read the conservatism of Yver's text to be manifest in a wholly antipathetic or condemnatory response to her female characters. In fact, Yver's narrator at times endorses the decisions made by the female protagonists. Rogers remarks, for example, that the

¹³ Waelti-Walters, *Feminist Novelists*, p. 101.

¹⁴ Following Gérard Genette's formulations in *Figures III* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), Rimmon-Kenan defines an extradiegetic narrator as one who belongs to the highest narrative level, that is, the level 'immediately superior to the first narrative and concerned with its narration' (Rimmon-Kenan, p. 91). A heterodiegetic narrator is one who 'does not participate in the story' (Rimmon-Kenan, p. 95). The extradiegetic, heterodiegetic narrator is closely aligned with notions of omniscience: 'it is precisely their being absent from the story and their higher narratorial authority in relation to it that confers on narrators the quality which has often been called "omniscience"' (Rimmon-Kenan, p. 95).

‘narrator’s words frequently support Jeanne’s love for science and are meant to inspire awe in the reader’.¹⁵ Rather, Yver’s conservatism operates via the text’s authorization and de-authorization of different heterosexual bonds and the gender positions and identities that, read within Butler’s terms, they may be deemed to secure.

Men’s love for the intellectually superior female subject is foreclosed as a viable romantic possibility because this love brings with it the threat of the subjugation or feminization of the male subject, whose necessary position of authority and control the novel upholds. The *cerveline* herself, while at times endorsed in her decision to choose intellectual endeavour over marriage and maternity, is radically excluded from the possibility of heterosexual love. All three intellectual women exempt themselves from such relationships on the grounds that love – and its concomitant requirement of female submission – is incompatible with their work.

Men Admitting Weakness

Jean’s narrative offers the novel’s best exemplification of the complex and ambivalent relationship that binds the male subject to the intellectual woman, and it is upon this character that I focus my reading. The novel’s account of his failed romantic pursuit of Eugénie Lebrun, which appears early in the novel, tends to reinforce those accounts of men’s hostility to the New Woman alluded to above. A well-known writer who becomes successful after the death of her older husband, Eugénie rejects Jean’s proposals of marriage in order to retain the independence that nourishes her writing. Eugénie’s description, in a terminal dialogue with Jean, of the pleasures to be gleaned from a solitary life – watching, walking, eating and writing – prefigures Renée’s rejection of Max in Colette’s *La Vagabonde*.¹⁶ Yver’s narrator makes clear, in a brief summary of the

¹⁵ Rogers, *Career Stories*, pp. 124-125.

¹⁶ Rogers also detects parallels between these two characters. See *Career Stories*, pp. 170-171.

character's feelings, that Eugénie experiences an inner struggle, again analogous to that of Renée, between the pleasure derived from being desired by a man and that which comes from her independence (*LC*, 44-45). However, Jean's perception is that her final refusal constitutes an outrage against male rights over women:

Tranquille, à peine remuée cérébralement d'une petite émotion de pitié qu'elle notait pour le prochain besoin littéraire, elle le martyrisait, elle le tuait, sans perdre une période de sa phrase longue, coupée d'un rythme à peu près régulier, en quatre ou cinq propositions graduées par mots – ce qui était son style d'écrivain. (*LC*, 44)

For Jean, Eugénie calmly torments him by refusing to evince a properly feminine acquiescence when faced with his declarations of love. The centrality of Eugénie's writing to her rejection of Jean is also made clear here; his perception is that the rhythm of her cruel speech is consistent with her writing style, suggesting that the female writer's literary production is another instance of her torture of male subjects. Viewed through Jean's bitter eyes, Eugénie numbers among those fictional New Women whom Loliée views as being bent on degrading men rather than loving them.

Jean is disappointed in the outcome of his relationship with Eugénie because he had hoped to establish a home and family with her. Indeed, along with his struggles to achieve professional security, first by setting up a practice in Briois and then by applying for a job at one of the city's hospitals, this aim of bourgeois domesticity drives his efforts throughout the novel. Jean's is a narrative of masculine *Bildung*: he is attempting to become an exemplary bourgeois male, professionally successful, with a wife to ensure his domestic bliss and, eventually, a family to guard and support. At first glance, the advent of the New Woman represents the key barrier to the success of his quest; Eugénie will not obey the rules of bourgeois femininity, and his own ambitions suffer. However, his failure to accomplish these markers of bourgeois masculinity is also, the novel suggests, the result of his repeated attachment to those women who are least likely to play the role of bourgeois wife and mother. Along the way to the finale of the

novel, which has Jean and Paul standing side by side at Henriette's funeral – the grieving male dyad evoking the bride and groom at the marriage that might have been – Jean rejects or overlooks two women who embody precisely that loving femininity that the *cerveline* has sacrificed for intellectual and professional achievement: Henriette Tisserel, who has loved him for years, and Blanche Bassaing, the daughter of a Parisian doctor acquaintance.

The turn away from Henriette, the countertype who belies the purported ubiquity of the *cerveline*, exemplifies Jean's refusal to take up a 'masculine' position vis-à-vis the ideal femininity of the submissive woman. Jean's failure to answer Henriette's affection with a marriage proposal is subsequently replicated when his desire for another exemplary female subject turns to terror at the prospect of marriage. Blanche Bassaing is suggested to Jean as a potential match by a mutual acquaintance. The scene of introduction privileges Jean's responses to the prospective bride, detailing his growing enthusiasm for acquiring 'ce petit être si obscur' (*LC*, 118). Most significant of all are the references to Blanche's 'yeux délicats de myope' (*LC*, 117), her weak vision contrasting starkly with the heightened ability of other female characters to see, test and diagnose. However, Jean's initial attraction to this exemplary female subject gives way to a sudden revulsion at the prospect of marrying her:

Après cette soirée, il passa trente-six heures dans l'état le plus troublé qu'il eût jamais connu. L'idée de ce mariage, maintenant résolu sans qu'il pût en douter, le remplissait d'épouvante. Il se jugea fou d'avoir pris, sans que la passion la justifiât, cette formidable initiative. Il lui semblait que sa vie allait se rompre.
(*LC*, 120)

To take up the role of husband to this ideally passive young woman is, for Jean, to enter a 'prison' (*LC*, 120).

Commenting on this pattern of refused attachments, Waelti-Walters notes that, after the failure of his relationship with Eugénie, Jean

sets out [...] to fail again. He ignores Henriette Tisserel, who wants nothing more than to care for him, even though (or perhaps because) she fits his requirement of submission perfectly. Marceline Rhonans is the woman who attracts him, and she is, of course, very like Eugénie Lebrun, his first love.¹⁷

The critic draws attention to the recurrent discrepancy between Jean's apparent wish for a conventional domestic existence and the choice of romantic object that he makes. For Waelti-Walters, Yver's novel, as it concerns men and male behaviour, explores their destructive responses to autonomous, intellectual women. She writes that, having fallen in love with her, Jean sets about 'diminishing Marceline, crushing her genius, and extinguishing her career'.¹⁸ While aspects of subsequent events support this reading, my argument is that Jean's relationship with Marceline does not solely constitute a destructive enterprise of diminishing the intellectual woman. Yver's depiction of this attachment also suggests that Jean's love for this brilliant New Woman may be thought of as a mechanism through which the male subject – suddenly the 'lesser' or intellectually subordinate partner – is permitted to articulate the weakness, dependency and vulnerability that bourgeois masculinity calls upon him to disavow. The *cerveline's* display of competence and authority in the public sphere still coded as masculine is shown to permit Jean to avow his own inadequacies and failures while he recognizes the supremacy of the female other.

A key example of this avowal of weakness through the attachment to the *cerveline* occurs at a public lecture given by Marceline. Jean first sees her at an earlier public lecture, where he is pleasantly surprised to hear her discussing ancient costume with the aid of a mannequin (*LC*, 87-90), thus softening with 'feminine' subject matter the cold image he has created of this intellectual woman in advance. The description of his

¹⁷ Waelti-Walters, *Feminist Novelists*, p. 110.

¹⁸ Waelti-Walters, *Feminist Novelists*, p. 112.

responses during the second lecture scene, some months later, reveals something different. As the audience gathers for the lecture in Briois's Hôtel des Sciences, Jean waits impatiently in the amphitheatre for Marceline's appearance on the stage, his eyes 'invinciblement rivés' (*LC*, 137) to the door through which she will make her entry. The lecture hall scenario evokes the more conventional arena of male visual consumption of the female object, the theatre, and perhaps more specifically the famous opening of Zola's *Nana* (1880). Indeed, the parallel between Marceline's public lecturing and the performances of an actress is made explicit later in the novel, when Jean's mother disapprovingly describes her prospective daughter-in-law as a 'jeune fille dont le nom est sur tous les murs comme celui d'une actrice, qui se donne en spectacle deux fois la semaine dans un lieu public' (*LC*, 251). When Marceline finally appears, Jean, like a male theatre-goer consuming the actress 'qui se donne en spectacle', takes in Marceline as a beautiful object under the lights in the amphitheatre: 'Cécile voyait la blancheur de la nuque ployée sous la lampe. [...] Et toute l'heure de la leçon, lui que personne ne voyait, il la mangea des yeux, follement' (*LC*, 139).

These scopic arrangements appear to render the lecture hall scene, despite the somewhat subversive aspect of a woman delivering an academic lecture, rather conventional in the distribution of gendered power and desire. Jean's visual consumption of Marceline, with its focus on individual body parts such as the 'nuque ployée', seem to confirm his power as desiring consumer and her status as object of masculine desire. It appears to accomplish what Todd Reeser terms the 'perceived corporeal fragmentation' of the female object and its opposition to '[the male subject's] unified, stable status as perceiver'.¹⁹ While Marceline is visually consumed, Jean, hidden from sight in a corner of the amphitheatre, is not subject to the same visual appraisal.

¹⁹ Todd W. Reeser, *Masculinities in Theory: An Introduction* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p. 110.

However, Jean's appreciative visual consumption of Marceline serves not to reinforce his sense of power or control through the operations of his desiring gaze. In fact, it elicits an acute sense of his inadequacy:

Il buvait sa vue délicieusement. Il pensait :
 — Quel sorte d'homme suis-je ? J'ai trente-deux ans ; qu'ai-je fait de ma vie ? Je suis une loque. De tous mes désirs, de tous mes efforts, de toutes mes pensées, de toutes mes ambitions et de tous mes actes mis bout à bout, depuis que je me connais, ressort-il quelque chose qui puisse s'appeler un homme ? Moralement aujourd'hui, je suis la résultante de mille minutes successives mais décousues. Oh ! la belle continuité forte de cette femme ... (LC, 138)

The construction of the lecture hall as theatre, with Marceline as 'actrice', thus operates in tension with Jean's acknowledgement of Marceline's performance as an act of intellectual virtuosity and control. The theatre becomes a place of work. Witnessing Marceline's command of this space, Jean is made to confront his own lack of professional success and the gulf that separates him from the ideal of mastery and achievement denoted by the term *homme*. The language of this recognition, meanwhile, links this masculine ideal with a kind of wholeness or plenitude to which Jean cannot lay claim. His inadequacy is rendered as a kind of fragmentedness. He is a 'loque'; he is a set of disunified pieces, 'la résultante de mille minutes successives mais décousues'. The wholeness that the male subject lacks – that prevents his identification with the term 'homme' – meanwhile, is explicitly located at the site of the female subject.

Jean's appreciation of Marceline's supremacy in a public sphere still coded as masculine drives both his recognition of his own inadequacy in this sphere and, significantly, his desire for her. In Jean's relationship with Marceline, beginning with this scene, Yver dramatizes a male experience of heterosexual desire that is founded not wholly on mastery or conquest of the dominated and weaker female other, but upon an acknowledgement of female mastery and male insufficiency. In response to this encounter at the lecture, rather than wishing to flee or overcome Marceline's manifest supremacy, Jean immediately begins to envisage their future together. He imagines a

relationship with her in which his inferiority would be recognized and inscribed, in which Marceline would be his judge as well as his lover: 'Je suis venu à elle pour la juger, se disait-il, et c'est elle qui me jugera' (*LC*, 139).

In the wake of his witnessing Marceline at work, Jean elaborates an imaginary relationship premised on his acknowledged insufficiency. In such a relationship, Jean would allow himself to be judged by the beloved, and intellectually superior, woman. Marceline, Jean posits, would judge and love him *for* this inadequacy, for the culpable gap that exists between Jean and the category of 'homme'. This guilt – and the judgement that Marceline will supply – would stand in place of Jean's continued efforts to conform to this ideal. The relationship with Marceline, put another way, promises to allow Jean to suspend his efforts to meet the elusive masculine ideal; instead he will become an object of judgement – and pity – for a woman who is superior to him in the 'masculine' professional arena.

Jean's articulation of his failings and inadequacies comes to dominate discourse between the lovers. After a mutual acknowledgement of love, Jean and Marceline exchange a series of confessional letters that are supposed to represent a prelude to their engagement. It is in this epistolary exchange, in particular, that Jean reveals his investment in the relationship. His love letters consist principally of self-abasement and declarations of unworthiness in comparison with Marceline's erudition: 'Qu'ai-je à vous offrir? Je ne suis qu'un pauvre médecin de province, je n'ai rien en moi de brillant ou de flatteur' (*LC*, 241).

Such articulations of worthlessness invite Marceline to play the role of judge that Jean, in the earlier scene, imagines for her. She is, moreover, asked to attach herself to the penitent male subject because he admits his failed approximation to her own talents and to those of the ideal male subject. Marceline's gentle reproof of his 'modestie' (*LC*,

241) elicits still further expressions of self-hatred. Marceline, wishing for intellectual intimacy with her fiancé, is forced to give up on any such bond:

Elle comprit, avec un peu de chagrin, qu'il n'en sortirait pas; c'était bien là la lettre masculine où l'homme, avec tout l'esprit qu'il possède, peut s'acharner, faute de n'avoir su du premier coup la dire assez subtilement, à une idée fixe, thème sur lequel maladroitement il brode ses enroulements de pensée épaisse. (LC, 245)

The persistence with which Jean expresses his worthlessness suggests that male self-criticism becomes in some sense the foundation of the relationship; he has nothing else to write in his love letters and is not comforted or silenced by her demurrals. That Jean's expressions of love for Marceline can only take the form of self-criticism suggests that, as I argued above, the attachment to the intellectual woman is on some level connected to her authorization of the male's subject's acknowledgement of weakness and deficiency.

The intellectual and professional inequality that marks the relationship between Jean and Marceline is also central to the novel's third failed romance, Paul Tisserel and Jeanne Bœrck. Again, the male subject's acknowledgement of the female character's superiority in skills and abilities still coded as masculine elicits love rather than resentment or fear. I read in Paul's love for Jeanne a similar impulse to that which is at work between Jean and Marceline; the competence of the *cerveline* is attractive because she enables the male character to admit his weaknesses and to take up a subordinate position in relation to the beloved woman.

The most salient examples of this occur during Henriette Tisserel's illness. Paul's duty, upon recognizing the gravity of the situation, is two-fold: he is called upon to take care of his younger sister as both a doctor and as an elder brother and substitute father. Yet these duties weigh too heavily upon him, and, 'la tête fléchie et douloureuse' (LC, 104) he turns to Jeanne to articulate his inadequacy: 'Cette responsabilité de sa vie

m'écrase; je crois plus en vous qu'en moi-même. Et il me semble bon de l'abandonner à vous, la pauvre petite fille' (*LC*, 104). The investiture of Jeanne with the capacity for taking on the duty that crushes the male subject authorizes Paul's abandonment of both sister and self.

Having shifted professional and paternal responsibility for Henriette to Jeanne, Paul attempts, in the wake of this renunciation, to declare his love for her: 'il en arrivait à ne plus pouvoir retenir les mots de sa passion' (*LC*, 104). This entanglement of admission of weakness and admission of desire characterizes Paul's negotiations with Jeanne, who remains uninterested by his proposals, for much of the novel. Openly renouncing his claims to power, he both endorses the right of the *cerveline* to supremacy, and seeks to negotiate – from a position of inferiority – a new heterosexual relationship founded upon male deficiency and female pity for the dependent male other.

In preparation for the admission of powerlessness quoted above, Paul imagines Jeanne both saving his sister and loving him: 'il se dit qu'il irait la trouver dans quelques heures pour lui confier son angoisse, simplement, pour lui demander de guérir Henriette et de le consoler' (*LC*, 100). The dual request joins together the displacement of his responsibility for curing Henriette to Jeanne and Paul's desire that, when she recognizes his impotence, this very deficiency will yoke Jeanne to him. The threatened loss of Henriette is, moreover, to be deployed as a kind of tool of seduction. Having convinced himself, at the same moment, that Jeanne will be able to cure his sister, Paul goes so far as to welcome Henriette's illness: 'il sentait l'heure exceptionnellement préparée pour atteindre enfin au cœur de cette impénétrable femme, par l'artifice de son chagrin' (*LC*, 100). Henriette as object of fraternal neglect is here almost willingly offered up, her demise promising to ensure Paul's winning of the stronger woman's attentions.

Reinstating Masculine Authority

The relationship between Jean and Marceline, with its elements of male self-punishment and subordination to the judgement of the superior female subject, is gradually excluded as a viable romantic possibility by Yver's narrative. For feminist readings of *Les Cervelines*, it is important to account for the demise of this romance in the context of Marceline's decision to privilege her career over marriage. However, I would also argue that the failure of the relationship should be read as a de-authorization of the gender relations and positions that Jean's acknowledgement of subordination and inadequacy vis-à-vis Marceline implies. In recounting the decisive stages of their courtship, Yver's narrator enjoins the reader to construe heterosexual relationships as being necessarily based on complementary gender positions in which the male subject must be strong, knowledgeable and dominant. The configuration of gender relations in which he embraces passivity and subordination to the female subject, seeking her pity and judgement for his deficiencies rather than awe and respect for his authority, is, the novel suggests, not permissible. Tracing women's choice of profession over marriage and motherhood, *Les Cervelines* also performs what might be understood as conservative work in tracing men's re-education and turn away from the intellectual female subject and towards a submissive woman who, parading as lack, upholds their claims to power and authority.

After a brief courtship, Jean and Marceline decide to marry. Problems arise, however, when Jean seeks his parents' permission for the engagement. Marceline adopts a rebellious attitude towards family commitments: her decision to pursue teaching and research puzzles her family, and she lives, alone, far from their home in the Languedoc. This detachment from her family is symbolized by the alteration of her surname from 'de Rhonans' to 'Rhonans': 'comme elle s'était séparée de sa famille volontairement, pour suivre sa carrière, elle avait aussi détaché de son nom la particule patronymique' (*LC*, 61). In contrast, Jean takes a much more conventional approach to

family politics. This is, in part, the product of his status as a reformed prodigal son. Having squandered a fortune during the years of study in Paris, he is financially reliant on the benevolence his parents, who run a shoe shop catering to the bourgeois women of Briois. Informed of her son's decision to marry Marceline, Mme Cécile is seriously displeased.

Mme Cécile is the more wilful and dominant parent, the undisputed manager of the family business. Her husband is almost always ready to be guided by her judgement (*LC*, 255), only dissenting in order to comfort his son against the disapproving words of Mme Cécile when Jean first announces his marital intentions: 'il prit son fils dans ses bras et lui dit des douceurs' (*LC*, 255). Jean's mother objects to Marceline as a daughter-in-law on the grounds of her career, remarking ominously, as Jean later reports to Marceline, that '« cette femme-là te préférera toujours ses livres »' (*LC*, 268). Successful in her own right, Marceline appears to be a poor marital prospect to a mother heavily invested in seeing Jean married to a *femme d'intérieur* whose domestic skills would support her son's public activities. Unlike her son, who is dazzled by Marceline's intellect, Mme Cécile perceives it merely as a threat to his success.

In painting Mme Cécile as both the clear head of the Cécile household and as the intransigent opponent to Jean's unconventional marriage, Yver's narrative introduces a note of irony into proceedings. For, it is the authoritative, professionally active mother, rather than the father, who objects to her son's engagement to another authoritative, professional woman. It is Mme Cécile who imposes the absoluteness of her son's conformity with a model of authoritative masculinity that is in some ways questioned by the gender relations operative in her own household. Once articulated, Mme Cécile's prescription for Jean's future happiness, based on this highly traditional configuration of gender roles, goes unchallenged by her son; the maternal prohibition

on Jean's attraction to a relationship in which his position is marked by intellectual inferiority cannot be overcome.

As the familial negotiations surrounding the engagement proceed, Jean and Mme Cécile meet to discuss Marceline:

ils l'avaient analysée, cherchant l'impénétrable anatomie de cette âme anormale. Ils l'avaient sondée, accusée, disséquée. Ils avaient abordé – tout rêve et toute poésie mise à part – la question du mariage, et Mme Cécile avait alors posé cette condition à l'estime et à l'approbation qu'on demandait d'elle pour cette belle-fille imprévue:

—Lui as-tu demandé si, une fois en ménage, elle renoncerait à ce qui jusqu'à présent a fait sa vie, et que tu devras absorber, toi, Jean? (*LC*, 268-269)

Yver's couching of this discussion in terms redolent of medical investigation or diagnosis shifts the intellectual Marceline from producer of meaning to object of meaning production. If it is, for once, the male subject who takes up this analytical role, it is significant that it requires the collaboration – indeed, the direction – of Mme Cécile to allow Jean to make sense of the 'anatomie de cette âme anormale'. The subtext here is that there is a material truth about this aberrant female subject that has thus far eluded Jean and which his mother is more able to reveal to him. The 'truth' about Marceline is her inability to foster male interest and success by undertaking that domestic role more commonly occupied by bourgeois women. Marceline is 'anormale' in wishing to pursue for herself the public activity and prestige that is more usually construed as the province of men.

As noted, Marceline's public 'performances' do not, thus far in the novel, militate against Jean's love for her, or against his wish to found a permanent relationship with her. Rather, he re-imagines his own lesser status and failings in a new set of gender arrangements in which the *cerveline* would accept the lesser male subject and offer pity and judgement for his deficiencies. Such a prospect is a scandal for Mme Cécile, who will only countenance the union if Marceline can be made to fit a more conventional feminine mould and if Jean can be made to assert his authority in making this request of

her. The necessary recalibration of their respective positions in the relationship is articulated in Mme Cécile's question, moreover: Jean should 'absorb' all that has been the focus of Marceline's life. Mme Cécile's choice of words here points not only to the idealized self-effacement of the bourgeois wife, but also suggests that Jean must appropriate Marceline's activities and achievements in the public sphere.

Jean struggles with his mother's condition, but is gradually convinced of the need to abandon the basis of their initial courtship in order to install a more traditional gender arrangement between them:

Il adorait Marceline comme il l'avait connue, son activité [...] faisant corps avec elle, parachevant sa personnalité; il ne l'en aurait pas dégagée. En devenant sa femme, elle continuerait d'être la savante qu'il vénérerait trop humblement pour rien exiger d'elle, hors le don de son amour. Mais la mère avait raison. Médecin établi et de clientèle riche, il ne pouvait avoir pour femme une *institutrice*. Il y a dans le monde une foule de lois subtiles ou ridicules qui forment ainsi, sans qu'on sache au juste pourquoi, une fatalité. (*LC*, 269)

Jean's humble veneration of the *cerveline*, along with the marital division of labour that might ensue from union with her, are de-authorized by Mme Cécile, and Jean comes to accept the legitimacy of his mother's arguments. What interests me here, however, is the ideological work that Yver's narrator undertakes in recounting this critical decision in the plot. In the passage quoted above, which appears during the account of a dialogue between Jean and his mother, the use of free indirect discourse lends a sense of ambiguity to the voice(s) through which the outcome of this deliberation is recounted. The verdict is, finally, that: 'la mère avait raison'. The preceding lines suggest that Jean's voice is being indirectly deployed here, in response to his mother's comments in the dialogue. Yet the use of the definite article in the reference to 'la mère' – rather than 'sa mère' – suggests that it is Yver's narrator who speaks. This subtle shift from Jean's voice to that of the narrator, whose knowledge of the narrated world exceeds that of the characters, encourages the reader to understand Mme Cécile's view as having some inherent logic.

The reference to the unsuitability of an *'institutrice'* for Jean's wife may arguably be attributed to Mme Cécile, given its congruence with her expressed views, or even to Jean. However, the final sentence, the barring of Jean from the unconventional arrangement of a doctor having a professional wife, can more clearly be attributed to the narrator: 'il y a dans le monde une foule de lois subtiles ou ridicules qui forment ainsi, sans qu'on sache au juste pourquoi, une fatalité'. This utterance functions within a broader pattern in *Les Cervelines* in which Yver's narrator interjects to articulate social and moral truths governing human behaviour. It closes down the play of voices and attitudes in the preceding paragraph, inviting the reader to construe Mme Cécile's prescription as following some incontrovertible social logic. There is, clearly, an element of critique here. This social logic may be 'subtile' or 'ridicule'. Yet its force forecloses the possibility of the configuration of gender positions that the relationship between Jean and Marceline has begun to enact.

A similar kind of prohibition is placed on Paul's renunciation of paternal and professional authority to his beloved Jeanne. Paul's attachment to, and faith in, this medical genius gestures towards a male subjectivity which reconciles heterosexual desire, pleasure in passivity and acquiescence in lack. However, if this possibility haunts the novel as one of the bases of Paul's attraction to Jeanne, it is also constructed as a scandal by Yver's narrator. This is evident in the narrator's account of the implications of Paul's love for his student:

Jeanne Bærck était trop pour lui ; elle alimentait trop souvent de sa proximité parfumée sa fièvre d'amoureux, elle introduisait dans cet homme normal et honnête une démence. (*LC*, 94)

Jeanne represents a threat because Paul is incapable of controlling or circumscribing the relationship, a duty that belongs, for Yver's narrator, to the male partner. Paul's *honnêteté* – the honourability or rectitude of the bourgeois male – is compromised by the attachment to Jeanne. On both counts, the relationship is presented by the narrator as

in some sense perverse. This ‘homme normal’ has been led away from what is right and true for the male subject – paternal duty and domination of self and others – by a bond in which he enjoys conceding power; Paul’s idleness and willingness to let Jeanne take his place at the hospital figure as manifestations of ‘une démente’.

Returning to Jean and Marceline, it should be noted that Mme Cécile’s prohibition on their relationship, though absolute, is not the only barrier to the successful accomplishment of what the couple proposes. Marceline, having been informed of the intolerable condition attached to marriage with Jean, finally rejects the requirement that she give up her work and, coming to realize the primary importance of her intellectual endeavours, ends the relationship. Yet she does so in terms which endorse Mme Cécile’s view of the impossibility of Jean figuring as a subordinate partner in the heterosexual couple. In a parting conversation, she tells him:

Pour vous, [le bonheur] doit être le mélange d’un agréable exercice de votre métier avec la domination sentimentale d’une famille. Vous serez un père de famille admirable. Il faut vous épouser, sans nul souci de passion, une jeune fille que vous aurez choisie froidement et que vous chérez sans folie. (*LC*, 328-329)

Like Jean’s mother, Marceline proposes that happiness, for the male subject, lies in ‘la domination sentimentale’ of an innocent young bride and a secure place in the professional field that is, presumably, uncomplicated by the claims of a more brilliant woman. Finally, the *cerveline* herself endorses the notion that happiness, for men, rests on a highly traditional distribution of gender roles and signifiers. She delegitimizes the possibilities opened up by the male subject’s attachment to the brilliant woman. It is, however, striking that Marceline also acknowledges, implicitly, that such positions contravene Jean’s wishes: she enjoins him to marry an ideally feminine woman, but without passion. His desires do not correspond to the structures of bourgeois marriage and the gender positions enshrined within it. Happiness, Marceline suggests, nonetheless lies in accepting them as law.

2. Nietzschéenne: Propping up the Boss

Daniel Lesueur, pseudonym of Jeanne Loiseau (1860-1921), began her literary career as a poet, publishing with Lemerre in the 1880s, before going on to forge a highly successful career as a novelist. Diana Holmes, who has recently explored Lesueur's constructions of gender and sexuality in her feminist romances,²⁰ notes that the writer's fiction appeared in both the high-brow press and in more popular publications such as *Le Petit Journal*.²¹ Both Holmes and Yves Olivier-Martin record the official acclaim afforded to Lesueur during her career: she was the first woman writer to receive the Légion d'Honneur and was awarded the Prix Vitet by the Académie française.²² If, like many of her fellow women writers of the Belle Époque, Lesueur did not position herself as a feminist writer, her interest in reflecting on, and challenging, the constraints operating on French women's lives in this period is evident in her work. Lesueur was closely associated with Durand's *La Fronde* from its inception in 1897; her novel *Lèvres closes* was the first feuilleton featured by the newspaper.

Olivier-Martin identifies two broad categories of novel within Lesueur's œuvre. First, the *roman d'idées*, in which she explores a set of moral or philosophical questions, and which was aimed at an educated readership. Second, the popular novel, such as *Flaviana, princesse* (1910), with which Lesueur reached out to a wider reading public. *Nietzschéenne*, first published in *L'Illustration*, fell into the first category. Lesueur herself was sceptical of the neatness of the distinction between the two types of novel, and

²⁰ Diana Holmes, 'Daniel Lesueur and the Feminist Romance', in *A Belle Époque?*, ed. by Holmes and Tarr, pp. 197-210. For a brief reading of Lesueur's 1892 novel, *Névroosée*, see Kari Weil, 'Men and Horses: Circus Studs, Sporting Males and the Performance of Purity in Fin-de-Siècle France', *French Cultural Studies*, 17 (2006), 87-105.

²¹ Diana Holmes, 'Novels of Adultery: Paul Bourget, Daniel Lesueur and What Women Read in the 1880s and 1890s', in *Currencies: Fiscal Fortunes and Cultural Capital in Nineteenth-Century France*, ed. by Sarah Capitanio and others (Oxford: Berg, 2005), pp. 15-30 (p. 18).

²² Holmes, 'Novels of Adultery', p. 19; Yves Olivier-Martin, *Histoire du roman populaire en France de 1840 à 1980* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1980), p. 218.

perhaps more particularly of the varying levels of prestige attached to them. In 1910, on the occasion of the publication of *Flaviana, princesse*, Lesueur discussed the respective qualities of the two categories of novels that she was famous for producing. She described the careful observation and realist detail that informed her writing of popular novels such as *Flaviana, princesse*, and concluded by denouncing what she termed ‘l’absurde division des catégories en ce qui concerne le roman’.²³ Noting the continuities across Lesueur’s more cerebral and popular narratives, Holmes writes that the writer’s work ‘assumes no sharp distinction between the reading pleasure of an educated and intellectually sophisticated public [...] and that of a literate but less leisured and cultivated ‘popular’ readership’.²⁴

The high drama and hectic pace of *Nietzscheenne* attest to this continuity. The novel’s plotting encompasses exegesis of Nietzsche, an obsessive spurned lover, commercial conspiracies, a suicide, the last-minute reconciliation of a divorcing couple, a mass strike, and a fatal shooting. At the centre of this web of narratives are Jocelyne Monestier, Lesueur’s eponymous heroine, and Robert Clérieux, struggling owner of a large car factory. Jocelyne, disgraced after a broken engagement and the death of her fiancé in a duel several years earlier, lives at the margins of the Parisian *haute* bourgeoisie in which she grew up, shunned by all her former acquaintances except the banker Jérôme Nauders and his daughter Huguette. At the root of Jocelyne’s disgrace is a sexual transgression: her decision to sleep with her fiancé just as she becomes aware that their engagement will be broken by the machinations of a jealous childhood friend. Refusing to acknowledge this sexual relationship as criminal, Jocelyne chooses, like

²³ Daniel Lesueur, ‘*Flaviana, princesse* : la vérité dans le roman romanesque’, *L’Éclair*, 13 June 1910, Dossier Daniel Lesueur, Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand.

²⁴ Holmes, ‘Daniel Lesueur’, p. 203. On Lesueur and the popular novel, see also Diana Holmes, “Ouvrière des Lettres”. Writing as Work, Fiction as Play: The Case of Daniel Lesueur’, *Dix-Neuf*, 15 (2011), 155-165.

many New Woman heroines of this period, to highlight the discrepancy whereby such 'fautes', as she phrases it, are 'charmantes' (*N*, 104) for men and unforgivable for young women. This refusal to endorse society's indictments of her behaviour compounds her estrangement from her former social world and, taking inspiration from her reading of Nietzsche, she cultivates her faith in her own moral and intellectual strength and self-sufficiency. Echoing the choices made by Jeanne, Marceline and Eugénie in *Les Cervelines*, Jocelyne also rejects love as the source of meaning for the female subject, investing her intelligence and wealth in commercial and philanthropic projects that she develops and leads.

Nietzschéenne stages the encounter between this confident and autonomous female figure and the nervous and fearful Robert. Central to Lesueur's text is a detailed account of the turmoil and anxiety afflicting the outwardly competent and powerful male subject. Having recently taken over the Clérieux factory from his deceased father and uncle, Robert struggles to muster sufficient willpower and confidence to live up to the paternal example. Apprehensive of the loyalties of his three thousand workers, he remains subservient to the factory manager, Eugène Sorbelin, the villain who, it emerges, is the author of both Jocelyne's downfall and of a plan to oust Robert from his place at the head of the Clérieux factory. It is Jocelyne who, in seeking Robert out to apprise him of a plot against him, reconciles this hesitant and recalcitrant male subject with his responsibilities and engenders in him the confidence to face the obstacles and conflicts that bar his path to success. Urging him to follow her example in striving to strengthen the will and to conquer the inner sources of weakness and hesitancy, Jocelyne re-shapes Robert for the role of leader, a task that is yoked explicitly to an ideal of masterful, heroic masculinity. This mentorship develops alongside the romantic relationship between Jocelyne and Robert, the importance of which within the novel links *Nietzschéenne* to the themes of Lesueur's other fiction, in which, as Holmes has

pointed out, romance is central.²⁵ As the novel closes, the continuation of both the romantic relationship and the mentorship are marked out as impossible, Jocelyne being killed when she intervenes in a strike at the factory.

Like Yver, Lesueur is concerned with the effects on men of women's problematization of a domestic ideal of bourgeois femininity and, crucially, women's occupation of the public sphere. Holmes, who reads *Nietzschéenne*, alongside several of Lesueur's novels, as examples of the Belle Époque feminist romance, has noted that the writer's fiction is, importantly, 'contestatory of the narrow scope of female lives under patriarchy'.²⁶ It should be pointed out at this stage, however, that Lesueur's representation of her heroine's place in this sphere is in some ways less fully realized than Yver's. *Les Cervelines* depicts women excelling in professional roles and shunning marriage in favour of an alternative female destiny. In contrast, Jocelyne's position in the public world remains tenuous and uncertain, despite the very real effects of her claim to it. The success of her commercial and philanthropic project, the Cités fraternelles, is considerable, yet her ability to undertake this work depends upon Nauders as advocate and banker. Jocelyne's direct intervention in the masculine space of the Clérieux factory at the end of the novel results in her death, a conclusion that tends to suggest Lesueur's inability to imagine an independent future for her New Woman heroine.²⁷

This conservatism in *Nietzschéenne*'s female narrative is in some ways replicated in the effect that Jocelyne's transgression of the bourgeois feminine ideal has upon the

²⁵ Holmes, 'Daniel Lesueur', pp. 197-210.

²⁶ Holmes, 'Daniel Lesueur', p. 203.

²⁷ Holmes notes the death of the heroine in three of Lesueur's novels, including *Nietzschéenne*, in her discussion, and states that: 'the dénouements [...] could be read as a conservative narrative move – patriarchal order is restored – but it also figures the difficulty of reconciling female self-fulfilment with the social order' (Holmes, 'Daniel Lesueur', p. 206).

male protagonist. Jocelyne harnesses the knowledge gleaned from her rebellion to the fortification of the imperilled male subject. Having acknowledged that the sexism and misogyny that renders her socially and morally suspect props up male power over women, Jocelyne proceeds to reinforce these very structures by endorsing and reinforcing Robert's claims to mastery. It is this project of fortification, enacted by the New Woman heroine, that I propose to examine in what follows. My central premise concerning the yoking of Jocelyne's skills to Robert's struggle for mastery points to the enabling work undertaken by the rebellious female protagonist in her relationship with the male subject. It also points, as noted above, to a conservative movement of containment whereby female revolt and its effects become, ironically, a resource for the maintenance of masculine pre-eminence.

Coming to the Aid of Men

In the preface to the 1919 edition of *Nietzschéenne*, Lesueur frames the novel, retrospectively, as a kind of warning cry to what she takes to be the vulnerable French nation of 1908.²⁸ Stating that the novel, along with 1909's *Le Droit à la force*, was the product of 'un souci patriotique' (7), Lesueur presents the text as an attempt to alert France to its insufficient preparation for future trials and dangers:

[Je] sentais monter contre notre chère France le sombre nuage d'un effroyable danger. Il me semblait que nous manquions de préparation pour en affronter l'assaut. Nous croyions trop au triomphe du Droit sans la Force, et surtout sans la première, sans la plus nécessaire de toutes les forces: celle qu'on exerce sur soi-même. (7)

²⁸ Daniel Lesueur, 'Préface de l'édition de 1919', in *Nietzschéenne* (Paris: Plon, 1924), pp. 7-10. References are given after quotations in the text.

The political difficulties attaching, in 1919, to Lesueur's authorship of a novel whose title alone indicates its debt to a German philosopher are clear; the writer devotes much of the remainder of the preface to detailing her intention of drawing on Nietzsche for the good of France. Two other aspects of this post-war framing of the novel interest me, however. First is the particular claim that Lesueur makes for the role of the woman writer as guardian and teacher of the endangered nation. It is, she suggests, 'peut-être par le don d'intuition qu'on attribue volontiers aux poètes et aux femmes – peut-être par quelque assiduité d'observation' (7) that she, apparently before others, was able to detect France's inadequate preparation for subsequent events. With the superior powers of intuition bestowed upon her as both a poet and a woman comes the duty to protect and instruct, via the literary text, the national body. The woman writer, so often, even in the years after 1900, maligned as a morbid threat to the family and to the fabric of social and national life, positions herself as its guardian.

Second is the particular fault that Lesueur finds with the France of 1908. The writer's lament concerning its lack of 'préparation', 'Force' and self-mastery is, apparently, addressed to the population as a whole. Reflecting on what she admits were the modest effects of the novel on French morale, she notes that it encouraged both the 'sœurs inconnues' (9) who wrote to her after its publication and, during the war, the 'amis en bleu horizon' (9) whom she nursed.²⁹ However, the terms with which Lesueur characterizes the deficiency afflicting the French nation evoke those with which numerous contemporary commentators diagnosed the deficiencies of French men in this period. The lack of 'Force' and self-mastery which, in the preface, afflict the

²⁹ An article published in *L'Illustration* after Lesueur's death refers to the writer's charity work during World War I, including the establishment of a 'Foyer du Soldat'. It notes that Lesueur never recovered from her exertions during the conflict ('Les Livres et les écrivains: Daniel Lesueur', *L'Illustration*, 8 January 1921, Dossier Daniel Lesueur, Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand).

national body are precisely the kinds of problems frequently levelled at male bodies and minds in the years around 1900.

The Third Republic, according to a host of social commentators and writers, had set about producing a generation of men whose ‘force’ – physical and moral – had been neglected. Forth has discussed the problem of widespread anxieties around the ‘overcerebralized weakling[s]’³⁰ who populated the offices of the Third Republic, whose sedentary lifestyles and intellectual *surmenage* compromised their energy, virility and ability to exert their willpower. Such men, it was feared, were falling prey to the temptations of urban living and the pleasures of consumerism, lapsing into neurasthenia and paralysed by pathologies of the will. Forth records the emergence of a ‘culture of force’ after 1900, a new prestige attached to sporting activity and muscular male physiques, practices which were, in turn, linked to moral qualities such as courage and strength of will. Underpinning the valorization of these traits and practices, meanwhile, was a fear of the collapse of discrete masculine and feminine identities, a prospect frequently linked with the growth of feminism and the emergence of the New Woman.

Lesueur’s language in the 1919 preface, then, inflects widespread concerns about the vulnerable, deficient male subject in the years prior to 1914. Her concern, in the preface, with traits frequently coded as masculine, such as ‘force’, courage and self-control suggests that her bid to alert France to its inadequacies in 1908 is also, in some sense, a claim for the importance of a certain heroic masculine ideal to the security of the nation. It is, I want to argue here, in the service of Lesueur’s exploration of these broader cultural questions around masculinity in this period that the writer draws upon Nietzsche’s *The Will to Power* in the novel. As noted below, Jocelyne refers to this work on a number of occasions in a bid to encourage Robert’s efforts to assert himself over

³⁰ Forth, *Dreyfus Affair*, p. 205.

enemies and to master his self-doubt. The notion of the ‘will to power’ appears, in this context, to be deployed within the novel’s construction of the exercise of will(power) as an effort of overcoming of external obstacles and inner doubts and scruples that is central to being a real man.³¹

If the promotion of this heroic French masculinity is, at least implicitly, at work in Lesueur’s preface, the claims that she makes for her role as a woman writer also take on a new significance. The duty of the woman writer to act as guardian of the nation implies a duty to defend the centrality of a certain masculine ideal. Turning to the novel itself, the reader finds, in *Nietzschéenne*, a compelling narrative of a female protagonist leaping to the defence of the male subject’s right to accomplish precisely such a heroic masculinity. Where Lesueur alludes to her own acute ‘intuition’ as to the dangers facing France, her protagonist, Jocelyne, displays a preternatural ability to detect, and act upon, the secret anxieties of the outwardly powerful male protagonist, Robert Clérieux. In fact, *Nietzschéenne* manifests quite a startling subjugation of the female narrative of rebellion to the concerns of the leading male character. Lesueur’s extradiegetic, heterodiegetic narrator, like Yver’s, opens up the thoughts and responses of the major characters, occasionally interjecting to pose a question or frame the reader’s response to events.³² However, the novel is largely driven by events in Robert’s life, from industrial

³¹ Christopher E. Forth writes that, after the appropriation of Nietzsche by avant-garde French intellectuals in the 1890s, references to the philosopher were widespread in texts aimed at a broader, bourgeois readership by the first decade of the twentieth century. Forth argues that Lesueur’s *Nietzschéenne*, along with novels by well-known women writers Anna de Noailles and Gérard d’Houville that also demonstrated an interest in Nietzsche, were, ‘from an avant-garde perspective [...] examples of a commercial literature aimed more at the tastes of a broad audience than of the more cultivated consumers of pure art’ (Forth, *Zarathustra in Paris: The Nietzsche Vogue in France, 1891-1918* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2001), p. 135). Noailles’s *La Nouvelle Espérance* and d’Houville’s *L’Inconstante*, both published in 1903, are female-centred narratives dealing with women’s disillusionment with marriage. For this reason, their engagement with Nietzsche was construed by conservative critics as a way of endorsing a female individualism inimical to ideals of feminine devotion.

³² For more on Lesueur’s narrators, see Holmes, ‘Novels of Adultery’.

action at the Clérieux factory to the marital problems that emerge with the development of his relationship with Jocelyne. She, meanwhile, is depicted largely as responsive to these events. The account of her relationship with her fiancé, her disgrace and her subsequent intellectual journey appears within a dialogue between Jocelyne and Robert, the main point of which is to assist him with his problems; Jocelyne is obliged to tell her story to convince him of her good faith. The products of this female narrative, Jocelyne's wisdom as to how to manage adversity and her interest in philosophy, are yoked entirely to the male cause.

Re-making Robert

In a manner that prefigures the rest of the novel, the opening of *Nietzschéenne* belongs to Robert. The first scene, in which he attends a theatre party and meets Jocelyne for the first time, maps out the key tension between the male subject's power in the public sphere and the concealed anxieties that undermine his claims to confidence and sufficiency. Arriving late for the play, he experiences a moment of hesitation at the prospect of making a late entrance before the 'intime satisfaction' (N, 2) caused by a glimpse of his elegant figure in a mirror convinces him to continue climbing the stairs. Once in the theatre box, he is offered an opportunity to inspect Jocelyne before their introduction. Recalling Jean's pleasure in looking at Marceline from a corner of the lecture theatre, Robert enjoys the contours of Jocelyne's figure as, oblivious, she watches the play: 'du coin d'ombre où il méditait [...] il détaillait l'élégance d'un buste souple s'amincissant en une taille étroite et ronde, et cette grâce d'un joli dos' (N, 4).

These early signs of male sexual confidence and privilege contrast with the chapter's detailed exposition of male fear and inadequacy. In response to an exchange with Nauders, the powerful older banker and 'homme d'action' (N, 12), Robert begins

to think about the heavy weight of his responsibilities, and his inadequacy for the task of fulfilling them:

Comment, avec son cœur timide, inquiet de toute souffrance à infliger, hésitant, crédule, serait-il jamais le chef réel de ces trois mille ouvriers, que la mort prématurée de son père, puis son oncle, laissait sous ses ordres? Redoutable héritage. (*N*, 12)

The nexus of problems troubling Robert is mapped out here, beginning with the spectre of his highly successful father and uncle. Like Jean in Colette's *L'Entrave*, discussed later in this thesis, Robert has been required to take up his father's role in business, a task that inspires fear, anxiety and revulsion. Bound to his father by the 'redoutable héritage' represented by the factory, Robert is also constrained by the duty to protect the legacy of his own two young sons, a requirement that Jocelyne later underlines. The weight of paternal responsibility does not end with his family, however. The imperative of utilizing the strength of his employees is inextricable from the paternalistic duty of looking after their moral and material wellbeing (*N*, 13).

Sitting next to Nauders, a third paternal figure whose physical immensity serves as a marker of authority, Robert feels ill-equipped for meeting his professional challenges. What he lacks is a set of traits and capacities that, when he acquires them during the narrative, close the gulf that separates the male subject from the category of 'man'. Robert lacks the confidence and self-belief to lead and dominate others; he has prolonged a dependency on his manager, the more experienced Sorbelin, despite 'ses prérogatives officielles de maître' (*N*, 12), thus failing to claim the position of autonomy and authority that is rightfully his; he lacks the willpower that is required to manage his self-doubts and to prosecute his own wishes. The problem of willpower is of particular thematic importance to the novel's construction of masculinity. The anguish attached to Robert's weak will is central to these expository passages concerning his professional

problems: ‘Que de résolutions! Que de paroles ramassées avidement, puis brandies ensuite, cinglées en coups de fouet sur sa volonté’ (N, 12).

Robert’s introduction to Jocelyne, in the wake of such anxious reflections on his professional inadequacies, offers him the promise of rectifying these flaws. Having been evaluated as a sexual prospect by Robert, Jocelyne becomes, upon their introduction, a subject of power and knowledge. After a brief exchange on the subject of Nietzsche’s misappropriation by what Jocelyne calls ‘les faux pontifes de lettres’ (N, 22), the conversation turns to Robert. Echoing the diagnostic brilliance of Yver’s Jeanne Bœrck, Jocelyne identifies the unspoken problem at a glance. She states first that ‘Est fort qui veut. C’est la volonté qui manque le plus’ (N, 23), before going on:

Jocelyne prononça lentement:
 —Ah! oui, il vous en faut, à vous, de la force!
 —Vous savez ?...
 —Je sais... Plus que vous.
 —Est-ce possible ?
 —Pour cela, j’ai voulu vous connaître. (N, 23)

Jocelyne is able to speak, and speak *for*, the male protagonist. Robert, rather than resisting the efforts of an unknown woman to categorize the painful inadequacies that plague his life, immediately welcomes Jocelyne as a benevolent figure. This acceptance is underpinned by the epistemological advantage endowed upon the female character which, again, recalls *Les Cervelines*. The ‘divination du malade’ that places Jeanne above any male doctor at the hospital is here rendered as Jocelyne’s facility with a Nietzschean lexicon that, used as a diagnostic tool, immediately gives meaning to Robert’s dilemmas. The traits and practices that Robert lacks – those which divide him from paternal figures and which function as the markers of an heroic masculinity – are here placed under the banner of ‘force’ and ‘volonté’.

Jocelyne’s investiture with this kind of diagnostic prestige allows her to capture Robert’s interest, and he soon admits her as confidante. Her identification of Robert’s

difficulties in the opening chapter, meanwhile, inaugurates a process of mentorship in which she strives to enable his better performance of a masculinity premised on willpower, courage and mastery of others. At their second meeting, Robert makes clear his faith in her ability to help him, and elaborates further on his problems:

—Ne m’avez-vous pas promis des talismans de volonté ? Je ne suis pas un faible. Mais pire peut-être : un défiant de soi-même, un inquiet, un scrupuleux. Quand je sais bien vouloir, je vous réponds que je n’hésite pas à bien agir. Seulement...

—Seulement, vous ne savez pas vouloir.

—Du moins pas toujours.

—On fait des cures de volonté.

—Vous serez mon médecin ? (N, 104)

The allusion to Jocelyne as ‘médecin’ underlines the therapeutic element to their relationship, as well as suggesting a further link between the New Woman heroines of these two novels. This brief summary of Robert’s failings, meanwhile, links the issue of self-doubt – a failing apparently worse than actual *faiblesse* – with the problem of willpower alluded to by Jocelyne earlier. Implicating both desiring and willing, Robert’s inability to ‘vouloir’ signals the passivity of one who fails to desire and the impotence linked with the incapacity to prosecute such desires through effort of the will. Robert’s failure to impose his own will upon the world is accompanied by an inability to suppress the self-doubt that holds him back.

This exchange occurs in a complex scene in which, as well as hearing Robert’s confessions of fear and inadequacy, Jocelyne apprises him of a plot, masterminded by Sorbelin, to oust him from control of the factory. Demonstrating Jocelyne’s claims to superior knowledge over the professional male, the revelation of this plot enables her to characterize the factory as a site of conflict which requires an act of will on the part of the owner for the restoration of rightful order. Having admitted his problems of assertiveness and leadership, Robert is enjoined to confront what is now a concrete set of enemy others – Sorbelin and the recalcitrant workers:

« Maintenez haut votre cœur. Quoi qu'il arrive, quelles que soient les difficultés, vous savez ce que vous avez à faire? »
 — Et quoi donc ? » demanda-t-il [...].
 —« TENIR BON. » (N, 130)

Jocelyne's final injunction, issued as a quotation from Nietzsche's *The Will to Power*, points to the bracing of the will that is to subtend Robert's mastery of the unrest at the factory and his imposition of his wishes and authority upon his employees.

The discourse of willpower that permeates the novel suggests, as noted above, its engagement with a particular set of anxieties attaching to French men in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Forth has recorded the ways in which the bourgeois male subject's manliness in this period was closely bound up with his perceived ability to exercise his willpower to withstand both sources of moral temptation from without and the atavistic forces of sensuality or instinct from within. Discussing the imbrication of notions of masculinity with those of willpower, Forth writes that:

When confronted with modernity's many sensual temptations, a man could only remain a "man" through sheer force of will, which at the fin de siècle meant possessing a strong mind firmly seated in a healthy body. This capacity for willpower suggested an ability to maintain strict boundaries around the self that fulfilled the prophylactic function of insulating the male from external excitations while giving him a firm hold over inner passions.³³

Such conceptualizations of the centrality of 'sheer force of will' to the accomplishment of an ideal masculinity resonate with what I take to be the way in which Nietzsche's concept of the 'will to power' is deployed in the novel, as a volitional enactment of the will in which a conscious, unified self subjugates both internal forces of doubt and fear, and external threats. Jocelyne's recommendation to Robert that he fortify and exercise his willpower becomes the very ground of his re-constructed masculinity.

³³ Forth, *Dreyfus Affair*, p. 117.

Jocelyne's intervention in Robert's life effects what is, for the male protagonist, an exhilarating change. Inspired by her recommendations, Robert dispatches Sorbelin, defuses a strike fomented by another problematic male character, the foreman Herseaux, and establishes a regime of regulation and information-gathering over his employees. The threats posed by traitorous male colleagues and the unknowable, engulfing crowd have, in line with Jocelyne's recommendations, been mastered and controlled by the bourgeois factory boss. Late in the novel, Robert reflects on the work that Jocelyne has accomplished in fortifying him for these struggles:

Qu'était-il, voici quelques mois à peine, lorsqu'il l'avait rencontrée? Un enfant timide, tenu en lisières, trahi sans le savoir, près d'être réduit à néant. Et aujourd'hui?... Un homme. Un homme agissant par lui-même, dirigeant les autres. Un homme qui avait pris conscience de sa force, de son jugement, de sa clairvoyance. Un homme qui commandait, qui réussissait. Un maître. Un victorieux.
Il levait le front. Il s'ébrouait d'orgueil, de joie virile. Il vantait son œuvre, parce que c'était l'œuvre de Jocelyne. (N, 256)

This late passage also makes explicit that gender imperatives have been at stake in Jocelyne's project all along: her work is now complete insofar as Robert has accomplished a masterful, rational masculinity.

Robert's exultant reflections on his newfound masculine confidence mark his secure inscription in a binary gender order. They signal the reparation of the gap that has hitherto existed between his maleness and his capacity to perform culturally, psychically and socially, as a man. His reflections illuminate the fact that gender is not merely a natural effect of the sexed body; its accomplishment requires a performance that marks the body as 'masculine' rather than feminine. As Butler writes:

The articulation "I feel like a woman" by a female or "I feel like a man" by a male presupposes that in neither case is the claim meaninglessly redundant. Although it might appear unproblematic *to be* a given anatomy [...], the experience of a gendered psychic disposition or cultural identity is considered an achievement. [...] This achievement requires a differentiation from the opposite

gender. Hence one is one's gender to the extent that one is not the other gender ...³⁴

For Robert, the accomplishment of this apparently secure masculine identity is, therefore, premised on the mastery of both his childlike earlier self, and, more implicitly, the femininity or feminization that has hitherto haunted him, both externally – in the form of the factory crowds – and internally, in his passivity and fearfulness.

Supporting the Masculine Cause

The terms in which Robert's pride is articulated, however, point to the illusory completeness of this differentiation from the feminine. Looking back on the process through which he becomes a man, he acknowledges that this accomplishment is of a woman's making: 'il vantait son œuvre, parce que c'était l'œuvre de Jocelyne'. The achievements of the powerful and autonomous male character are also the achievements of the female other. In one sense, this can be read as an acknowledgement of the debt that he owes to her timely, but temporally circumscribed, intervention in his life. However, it may also be read as an acknowledgement of a more profound and sustained dependency that underpins his claims to be 'un homme agissant par lui-même'. In the same scene in which Robert's heroic masculinity is announced, he identifies Jocelyne as the site and guarantor of those traits that signal its accomplishment. Hearing that Jocelyne – to whom Robert has now confessed his love – wishes to end their relationship, he makes this dependency explicit:

—La puissance, la volonté, m'abandonneront, si vous vous éloignez de moi, Jocelyne. [...] Je ne serai plus rien sans vous, je le sens. Mon œuvre en pâtira. Mes fils aussi. (N, 264-265)

This acknowledgement of Jocelyne's role in Robert's performance of masculine duty makes clear the role that she plays; the weight of male privilege and responsibility,

³⁴ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, pp. 29-30.

symbolized by the paternal legacy that weighs so heavily upon Robert and which he will hand to his own sons, is here displaced to Jocelyne. This displacement of responsibility offers a strong echo of the process through which Paul wishes to pass his paternal duty to Jeanne in Yver's novel.

Where in *Les Cervelines*, men's willingness to acknowledge the powerful female subject in this way is offered as a sign of perversion and failure, here it occurs at precisely the moment that the male character avows himself, finally, to be a real man. For Robert, this is a dependency that bolsters and strengthens his ability to perform a heroic masculinity and is thus less a concession or renunciation than the prolongation of an attachment that guarantees his ideal gendering. Robert's masculinity is founded upon, and sustained by, a paradox of dependent self-sufficiency.

The notion that the female subject in some sense enables such a performance of heroic masculinity is certainly not unique to the encounter between the bourgeois male and the transgressive heroine that Lesueur constructs here. Both novels offer examples of female characters who, in their resolute respect for the spatial division between the masculine public sphere and the feminine home, are seen to promote men's achievements. In *Les Cervelines*, Paul relies upon Henriette Tisserel's attention to the minutiae of his home life. In *Nietzscheenne*, Robert's wife, Lucienne, takes up this role. However, as in *Les Cervelines*, Lesueur's narrative is characterized by the male protagonist's turn away from this ideal femininity. The progress of Robert's masculinization goes hand in hand with a loosening of his loyalties to Lucienne and the solid bourgeois family life that he leads at the beginning of the novel. Jocelyne's efforts to re-make the bourgeois male for the responsibilities of the workplace create fissures in the marital relationship constructed before her intervention in his life. At stake here is Robert's disillusionment with the model of complementary genders and domesticated femininity that his hitherto happy marriage embodies. Having experienced the salutary

effect of Jocelyne's New Woman competence, Lucienne's ignorant vulnerability holds less appeal. As Holmes puts it: 'the bird-brained, doll-like Lucienne [...] is contrasted to the competent, independent Jocelyne'.³⁵ If the novel, in tracing Robert's adulterous passion for Jocelyne, rehearses one of the central themes of Lesueur's fiction, it also, like *Les Cervelines*, poses a challenge to gender complementarity as the root of heterosexual attraction. The male subject falls in love with a woman who knows, and performs in, the masculine public world as well, if not better, than he and who nurtures his masculinity through means other than embodying a complementary femininity.

Jocelyne's capacity to nurture Robert's masculinity is founded in part upon her knowledge of the practices and spaces more usually performed and occupied by the professional man. In response to her disgrace, Jocelyne chooses to abandon any effort to conform to the modes of behaviour demanded of the young, unmarried *bourgeoise*. Rather, she enacts what she refers to as a 'revanche' over her social disgrace: the cultivation of resolute autonomy, control of emotional and sensual responses, the refusal of heterosexual love as the source of meaning for the female subject, and leadership of commercial and philanthropic activity. The latter takes on particular significance for Robert because it is Jocelyne's activities in the public sphere that provide her both with a network of acquaintances who keep her informed of developments at his factory, and, more generally, the experience of industrial relations that enables her to advise him about management techniques (*N*, 167-168; 199-201). The disruption proposed by Jocelyne's rejection of the bourgeois ideal is in fact greeted as a profoundly enabling movement (for men) of the female subject into the masculine world.

³⁵ Holmes, 'Daniel Lesueur', p. 207.

Jocelyne's revolt, her refusal to accept the shame heaped upon the disgraced *jeune fille*, becomes a kind of resource for Robert. In the key scene in which Jocelyne both discloses her past and enjoins Robert to confront his enemies boldly, the struggling factory boss is asked to construe the fear and suffering attached to Jocelyne's exclusion from society as comparable to his own terror before the perils and responsibilities at the factory. Robert's admission of inadequate willpower in the face of adversity (N, 103) is, for Jocelyne, equivalent to her own timidity following her exclusion from society: 'moi aussi, [...] j'ai été faible' (N, 104). Here Jocelyne's long subsequent account of her relationships with Sorbelin and the deceased fiancé becomes, for the female character, less the confession of a sexual transgression and more the mapping out of a set of social and moral problems that, like Robert's, initially inspired terror, but which, with the help of Nietzsche, she taught herself to master. The willpower recommended to Robert is the willpower upon which Jocelyne bases her rebellion:

— « Vous savez ma vie, le secret de toute ma vie. J'ai tenu bon. Je tiens bon.
— Et moi aussi, je tiendrai bon! s'écria Clérieux. » (N, 121)

This mimetic exchange, which occurs as Jocelyne sends Robert off to confront Sorbelin, involves the injunction that he copy her. The male subject, it is suggested, is to become more masculine via imitation of the female rebel.

The imitative project of Robert's masculinity is, therefore, complex, and does not proceed solely through identification with, and imitation of, the father figures who go before him. However, this fluidity of gender signifiers and identifications across and between male and female subjects, while serving as an implicit critique of gender essentialisms and of the conventions circumscribing gender roles and relations, does not translate to any significant levelling of hierarchies of gendered power in the text. In fact, *Nietzschéenne* pervasively naturalizes male claims to privilege and authority: the yoking of Jocelyne's rebellion to the aim of consolidating Robert's control of self, family and

factory suggests that female revolt attains true meaning and value, paradoxically, when it is enacted in the service of an already privileged male subject. Just as Marceline Rhonans leaves Jean Cécile with the injunction to make himself into a dominant husband and father, Lesueur's female rebel is called upon to acknowledge and cultivate a male masculinity that, in more or less explicit ways, reproduces the female subjection that Jocelyne wishes to reject and problematize. That Jocelyne is in some sense sacrificed to the maintenance of the status quo, meanwhile, is most pointedly suggested in her final act: she leaps in front of Robert's vulnerable body as he addresses a group of angry workers at the factory. When he is fired at, it is Jocelyne, rather than Robert, who takes the bullet.

Les Cervelines and *Nietzschéenne* complicate accounts of the New Woman as a threatening figure for bourgeois men. Both novels depict fearful, troubled male protagonists, yet their encounters with rebellious female characters are not marked solely by terror or hostility. The professionalism, competence and authority of Yver's *cerveline* protagonists and Lesueur's Jocelyne, while contravening models of domesticated, passive femininity, are in many ways embraced by men. Such New Woman performances permit the articulation of fear, anxiety and inadequacy, attributes that the male subject is conventionally enjoined to repudiate. Despite this apparently subversive re-negotiation of gender relations, both novels work to uphold more familiar hierarchical gender arrangements. Men's love for the *cerveline*, with its concomitant acknowledgement of masculine insufficiency and inferiority, is eventually delegitimized. Jocelyne, meanwhile, is from the very start concerned with repairing the split that divides Robert from the powerful paternal model that terrorizes him at the opening of *Nietzschéenne*.

In the next chapter, I explore two more encounters between fearful male subjects and rebellious female protagonists. If the privileged scene of masculine anxiety

in *Les Cervelines* and *Nietzschéenne* is the workplace, Marni and Delarue-Mardrus shift the action to romantic relationships, offering portraits of seductive young men whose multiple amorous adventures expose the male subject to experiences of fear and loss of agency. Alongside *femmes fatales* who reprise that central fin-de-siècle male fantasy of the castrating woman, the novels feature rebellious female protagonists who, like Marceline and Jocelyne, are prepared to support and endorse ideals of heroic, authoritative masculinity. However, the objects of their attention, Marni's Pierre Tisserand and Delarue-Mardrus's Armand Mainteternes, prove rather more recalcitrant even than Jean Cécile.

Chapter 2

Anxious Seducers: Jeanne Marni's *Pierre Tisserand* (1907) and Lucie Delarue-Mardrus's *Douce moitié* (1913)

My reading of Jeanne Marni's *Pierre Tisserand* and Lucie Delarue-Mardrus's *Douce moitié* focuses on male characters whose relationship with powerful, authoritative masculinities is tortuous and problematic. Both texts explore what Nicholas White, discussing Zola's *Pot-Bouille*, calls the 'sexual circulation'¹ of a central male protagonist; in both, serial seduction is closely bound up with the male protagonist's experience of fear and disempowerment. Marni's eponymous hero is an antipathetic Parisian writer who betrays his married lover, while Delarue-Mardrus depicts Armand Mainteternes, a struggling artist who embarks on a series of extra-marital affairs while fruitlessly pursuing the woman he loves. I argue in what follows that both novels question the equation of prolific seduction and virility. What is suggested, rather, is that the mobility of desire that leads the seducer from one love object to the next becomes a marker of failed approximation to a masculinity premised upon self-control, authority, paternal responsibility and commitment to professional ambition. At stake, then, are similar masculine ideals to those discussed in the last chapter: *Pierre Tisserand* and *Douce moitié* attest further to the forms of rejection, refusal and failed identification that separate male subjects from these ideals.

The role of female characters in these narratives of masculine anxiety is complex and multivalent. Both Marni and Delarue-Mardrus undermine their male protagonist's claims to mastery through sexual conquest by inverting the positions of male seducer

¹ Nicholas White, *The Family in Crisis in Late Nineteenth-Century French Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 70.

and female seduced. Pierre and Armand become objects of aggressive female desire that escapes their control and overrides their agency. The trope of inversion is deployed, in these scenarios, to re-script the heterosexual encounter as an arena of anxiety and passivity for male subjects. Female sexuality tends, in these encounters, to represent an acquisitive, castrating force that, while exposing the vulnerabilities of men, also positions the desiring woman as pathological, unethical and dangerous.

Alongside such *femme fatale* figures, however, both novels depict female characters who, like the female protagonists discussed in chapter 1, offer a challenge to prevailing gender arrangements by rejecting conventional feminine destinies. This rejection is, in both cases, founded upon the construction of heterosexuality and its concomitant gender positions as inimical to female autonomy and achievement. Marni's circus performer, Berthe Robin, understands male sexuality as the subjugation of the female subject and, avoiding heterosexual romance, cultivates an autonomous life of work and friendship. In *Douce moitié*, the widow and art patron Judith Langlade is the only woman who displays any ability to resist Armand's charms. Following her early career as an artist's model and the subsequent death of her husband, she devotes herself to advancing the work of aspiring artists. As with Lesueur's Jocelyne, this public role supplants love within the female life. What interests me in both instances is the way in which these competent and autonomous women are installed as figures of ethical and professional authority in relation to the male protagonists. This authority translates, in both novels, to women's taking up of a privileged role in illuminating the problems of masculine identity that plague both Pierre Tisserand and Armand Mainteternes.

Despite the parallels between the two novels, *Pierre Tisserand* and *Douce moitié* invite very different readings of the anxious seducer. Marni's novel was cited by a number of contemporary critics who, echoing Loliée's 'Comme elles nous jugent!', remarked upon the writer's ferocious treatment of men. Marni elicits the reader's

sympathy for her suffering female protagonists, casting Pierre as a selfish narcissist who seeks to exploit the social and moral constraints operating on women and female sexuality for his own pleasure. It is, meanwhile, the resolutely frank Berthe who emerges as the text's privileged source of knowledge about men and the most perspicacious critic of Pierre. Berthe indicts Pierre's morality through a de-authorization of his claims to the category of real masculinity, an identity embodied by another male protagonist, the animal tamer Dortmund. In *Douce moitié*, conversely, Armand becomes the object of pathos. Delarue-Mardrus constructs her protagonist as a beleaguered male subject surrounded by crass, materialistic women incapable of appreciating his art. The valorization of female autonomy that operates in Marni's text through Berthe's narrative is also absent from *Douce moitié*; Judith's work, constructed as an empty quest for public honour, is framed as one more incidence of the novel's degraded femininities.

1. *Pierre Tisserand: Misandry and Masculine Anxiety*

Jeanne Marni (Jeanne Marnière, 1854-1910) began her literary career in the 1880s. Marni's first novel, *La Femme de Silva*, appeared in 1887. In the years that followed, Marni published a second novel, *L'Amour coupable* (1889), before going on to win fame through her highly successful dialogues. Her first work in this shorter genre, a collaboration with Maurice Donnay entitled *Dialogues des courtisanes*, was published in *La Vie parisienne*; later series appeared in *Le Journal*. By 1899, she had won considerable acclaim in the genre, as Frédéric Loliée's laudatory study of her life and work attests. Departing from the rather combative tone he had adopted when discussing women's representations of men in 'Comme elles nous jugent!', Loliée asserted Marni's supremacy in the dialogue: 'nul n'aura manifesté au même degré d'excellence que Marni

l'art d'enfermer toute une histoire dans la trame serrée d'un dialogue et de faire toucher, d'un seul trait, la profondeur d'une âme'.²

From 1897, Marni took up a prominent place in the constellation of female writers and feminist activists, including Lesueur and Tinayre, involved in *La Fronde*. In fact, three generations of Marni's family contributed to *La Fronde*. Her mother, the novelist Manoël de Grandfort, wrote for the newspaper, while her daughter, Emmy Fournier, was *secrétaire de rédaction*. When Marni died in 1910, Marguerite Durand spoke at her funeral, recalling that the writer 'fut l'une des premières collaboratrices de *La Fronde*. Elle fut l'une de celles qui voulurent bien appuyer de l'autorité de leur nom déjà connu, l'œuvre encore inconnue'.³ After 1900, Marni, who, like Durand, was an actress prior to her literary career, turned to theatrical writing before going on to publish the trilogy of which *Pierre Tisserand* is the second novel.

The three novels of this trilogy, *Le Livre d'une amoureuse* (1904), *Pierre Tisserand* (1907), and *Souffrir* (1909), centre on the lives and relationships of Claire La Plaine, a young *bourgeoise* married to a much older businessman, and her lover Pierre, an aspiring writer.⁴ Marni charts this romance from its origins in the first novel, through Claire's proposed divorce, the financial ruin and suicide of her husband and, finally, Pierre's decision to abandon her in order to marry her step-daughter Henriette La Plaine. *Pierre Tisserand* opens with the aftermath of Claire's husband's ruin, and ends with the

² Frédéric Loliée, 'Madame J. Marni et son œuvre', *La Revue des revues*, 1 January 1899, pp. 84-96 (p. 85).

³ Speech reproduced in a commemorative pamphlet entitled *Une mémoire féminine: hommage à Jeanne Marni* ([Paris?]: [n. pub.], 1910), pp. 18-20 (pp. 18-19). A copy is held at the Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand.

⁴ Lesly Bessière notes that all three novels were serialized in *Le Journal*. See 'Les Romancières françaises, 1870-1900: première approche générale illustrée par l'exemple de Jeanne Marni' (unpublished master's thesis, Université de Toulouse II, 2007), p. 122.

engagement of Pierre and Henriette. The novel follows the vicissitudes of Pierre's attachment to Claire. Periods of passionate devotion are interspersed with boredom, banal sexual encounters, persistent attempts to seduce the circus performer Berthe Robin and, finally, his romance with Henriette. This last attachment ostensibly marks the end of Pierre's Don Juan narrative; Pierre considers marriage as a domestication that will end his seducer's career. The unravelling of this ending is already hinted at as *Pierre Tisserand* closes, however, and *Souffrir* recounts the disastrous marriage between Pierre and Henriette. Among the three novels, *Pierre Tisserand*, as the title suggests, follows Marni's antipathetic hero most closely, and it is for this reason that I have chosen it for analysis here.

Marni and Men

While many forgotten female writers of the Belle Époque have begun to reclaim a measure of attention from feminist critics concerned with mapping out the literary traces of the period's gender politics and upheavals, Marni has largely escaped notice.⁵ Rachilde excepted, much of the interest in French women's fiction of the Belle Époque centres on those novelists educated in the wake of the 1880 Sée law on girls' education who began to publish their work around the turn of the twentieth century. The perception of a generational gap between Marni and her younger contemporaries served as marker of difference even in 1907. The March issue of *La Vie heureuse* reproduced the text of a lecture given by Tinayre on the subject of 'L'Amour Moderne peint par les

⁵ See Waelti-Walters, *Feminist Novelists*, for a very brief biography (p. 189) and a short discussion of *Pierre Tisserand* and *Souffrir* (pp. 123-124). Marni's novels, Waelti-Walters argues, are an indictment of the restrictions governing women's ability to make informed choices about men and marriage. The innocent Henriette, engaged to Pierre by the end of *Pierre Tisserand*, 'is offered no other young man with whom she might compare the hero and has no real experience on which to base her judgment' (p. 124). For additional biographical information and analysis of representations of women in Marni's work, see Bessièrè.

femmes'. While admiring *Pierre Tisserand*, Tinayre notes that Marni's novel presents the outdated figure of the 'sentimentale', 'la femme née pour souffrir'. Tinayre goes on to argue that more contemporary representations of women's attitude to love and sexuality are to be found in the 'féministes' and 'émancipées' who figure in her own work and in that of Réval, Tony d'Ulmès and Camille Marbo.⁶ My own argument is that *Pierre Tisserand* offers, in Berthe Robin, a portrait of a female rebel who, in resisting the subjugating effects of male sexuality and valorizing her own autonomy, has much in common with Tinayre's *émancipée*. While eschewing the more explicit thematization of New Womanhood or feminism that is evident in the fiction of some of her fellow writers, Marni's was nonetheless a prominent voice of female resistance in this period. The recuperation of this voice enriches understandings of women's writing and its concern with questions of gender and sexuality in this period.

In considering this voice, however, I focus on Marni's construction of men and masculinity. It was, in fact, the writer's representation of men that occupied a number of contemporary critics of her work. In a review that followed the publication of *Souffrir*, Jules Bois wrote that Marni was « misandre » in her depiction of men in her trilogy. While he found the principle female characters, Claire and Henriette, to be 'deux femmes exquis, dévouées, bonnes et belles', the central male protagonist was a 'délicieuse canaille' and guilty of all kinds of perfidy and inconstancy.⁷ This marked contrast between the virtuousness of the heroines and the turpitude of the hero also elicited comment from Bertaut. He argued that Marni displayed a 'cynisme ostentatoire' in her representations of men, while her female characters, whatever their faults, were constructed as victims deserving of sympathy. In Marni's work, the male subject was 'un

⁶ Marcelle Tinayre, 'L'Amour moderne peint par les femmes', *La Vie heureuse*, March 1907.

⁷ Jules Bois, 'Quatre romans de femmes sur les femmes', *Les Annales politiques et littéraires*, 13 February 1910, p. 160.

être nuisible, plus disposé à faire souffrir la femme qu'à l'aimer'.⁸ Her female characters, in contrast, had 'toutes les apparences d'avoir été victimes de quelqu'un ou de quelque chose'.⁹

More interesting than the comments themselves are the meanings that such critics attached to the appearance of antipathetic men in a female-authored text. The sharp delineation of morality and immorality along gender lines, including the portrayal of female characters as martyrs to villainous men, might, for example, have been read as evidence of Marni's debt to certain conventions of the sentimental novel. This connection is also suggested by Tinayre's allusion to Marni's heroines as 'sentimentale[s]'.¹⁰ Bois, however, offered a different commentary on the connection between Marni's unsympathetic male characters and her status as woman writer. The critic, developing a similar line of argument to that deployed in 'Comme elles nous jugent!' ten years earlier, argued that the disparity between the moral and ethical qualities of male and female characters in Marni's trilogy was evidence of a growing movement

⁸ Bertaut, p. 115.

⁹ Bertaut, p. 116.

¹⁰ Marc Angenot refers to Marni's *Amour coupable* in 'Des romans pour les femmes: un secteur du discours social en 1889', *Études littéraires*, 16 (1983), 317-350. The critic writes of the continuity of themes and topos across sentimental novels from the 'distingué' to the 'populaire' in this period, including the recurring figures of the abandoned child and the treatment of marital or maternal martyrdom. The numerous humiliations suffered by Claire La Plaine at the hands of both her husband and Pierre clearly correspond to this convention. Marni's narrator, meanwhile, in idealizing the devoted Claire and describing her pain in excruciating detail, invites the affective readerly response associated with the sentimental novel. Angenot's conception of the ideological function of these novels for their female readers also indicates Marni's nod to this tradition. Such texts, Angenot argues, offer a 'pédagogie de masochisme' (p. 335) in teaching that women's self-sacrifice before the needs and desires of others constitutes the only available reconciliation with the status quo for oppressed female subjects. It is precisely this kind of sacrifice that Claire finally cultivates when, at the end of *Pierre Tisserand*, she confronts her lover's engagement to her stepdaughter. I would suggest, however, that the character of Berthe Robin signals Marni's conceptualization of a different female response to women's oppressed status.

whereby women writers were beginning to avenge the misogyny of their male colleagues. Marni's 'misandry' was thus a female counter-attack to misogynist male-authored representations of women. Bois asserted that the origins of this retaliatory misandry lay in the era of George Sand, but that contemporary women writers were fully realizing the project: 'aujourd'hui, nous voyons, au rebours du temps passé, se préparer une majorité de romancières, qui nous rendent la pareille'.¹¹

Bois's argument placed Marni and her fellow female writers of the Belle Époque within a narrative of gender warfare in which contemporary women were taking the upper hand. Unlike the writer of 'Comme elles nous jugent!', however, Bois celebrated this development. In a tribute published after Marni's death, he wrote:

Cette trilogie restera comme un document sur les cruautés souvent involontaires des poètes-amants et sur l'âpre vision qu'en fixent, frénétiques, les amazones modernes, leurs rivales. [...] Les femmes sont vengées deux fois : par la démonstration du prodigieux talent de l'une d'elles et par la satire de nos nonchalances et de nos trahisons... Nous rendons les armes, puisque nous sommes doublement vaincus...¹²

Pierre's callousness, serial seductions, his career in journalism and the rather undeserved literary success that falls into his lap as the novel closes indicate that the novel owes a debt to Maupassant's *Bel-Ami* (1885). However, while Maupassant's narrator largely withholds explicitly moralistic interpretations of his antipathetic character, Marni's narrator censures Pierre and other reprehensible characters, thus establishing a clear moral framework within which to read the novel. This framing of

¹¹ Bois, 'Quatre romans', p. 160.

¹² *Hommage à Jeanne Marni*, p. 38. Bois's perspective can be understood with reference to his feminist politics. The critic attended the 1896 Congrès féministe in Paris. In the same year, he published *L'Ève nouvelle*, in which he analyses the history of women's oppression and the possibilities for female emancipation.

events is, moreover, informed by a critique of the effects of male power and sexuality upon women. A salient example of this occurs during an illicit rendez-vous between Pierre and Claire where the latter, distraught at having been obliged to lie to her step-daughter, embraces her lover convulsively. Marni's narrator underlines Pierre's erroneous assessment of the meaning of this gesture:

Pierre, devant la frénésie de cette caresse, songea :
 « Les femmes sont toutes les mêmes. Les mauvais procédés exacerbent leur passion. Si j'avais été exact, l'autre jour, si elle ne m'avait pas attendu en vain [...] elle serait bien moins ardente ! »
 Et il se trompait. Il n'entraînait rien de malsain dans cette exaltation fiévreuse qui agitait Claire, c'était, tout au contraire, une aspiration de communion morale [...] ! Les hommes les plus fins comprennent rarement ces tensions extrêmes de l'âme féminine. (*PT*, 172-173)

The narrator's commentary on Claire's failed quest for 'communion morale' locates the problem in Pierre's insensitivity to the complexities of women's experience of love and sexuality. His error, in this commentary, becomes a more general failure on men's part to understand the 'tensions extrêmes de l'âme féminine'. Pierre's original sweeping judgement about women - 'Les femmes sont toutes les mêmes' - is therefore replaced by an opposing statement about the failings of the male sex. Faced with Pierre's manifest inability to empathize with Claire, it is the narrator's judgement that the reader is invited to endorse.

In thinking about the construction of masculinity in *Pierre Tisserand*, it is important to consider the novel's concern with exposing the vulnerabilities and deficiencies that haunt the eponymous hero. Marni's depiction of an unethical figure who exploits the privileges conferred upon bourgeois men in a patriarchal culture should not be confused with any assumption that the writer portrays a secure, omnipotent male subject. Much of the novel's humour is, in fact, derived from the illumination of the secret fears and insecurities that underlie Pierre's apparent confidence. The persistent insecurity that attaches to this figure is, meanwhile, intimately

bound up with his problematic relationship to a configuration of masculine ideals that are valorized in Marni's text. Pierre fails to approximate to a masculinity premised on authority, courage, sexual fidelity, honesty and guardianship of women. This gendered ideal encompasses a set of moral and ethical traits, particularly with respect to men's treatment of women. In this context, Pierre's iniquities – notably sexual voraciousness and dishonesty – are not only moral or ethical problems. They also become entangled, in Marni's novel, with Pierre's tortuous relationship with masculine ideals.

Berthe Robin and Ideal Masculinity

In *Berthe Robin*, Marni installs a figure of female rebellion at the heart of her narrative. Like all the female rebels examined in this study, Berthe privileges autonomy and questions the male right to confer value and meaning on the female life through marriage or, more broadly, heterosexual relationships. Echoing the views of Yver's *cervelines*, Berthe's revolt against the subjugation of women that inheres in heterosexual love takes the form of a withdrawal from these relationships altogether. Her life is structured around her pleasure in her work as a circus performer and in friendship. Like that of Jeanne Bœrck, Berthe's existence is, as Marni's narrator comments, 'celle d'une jeune fille aux mœurs très pures, sévères, même' (*PT*, 61).

The choice of this ascetic life, with its valorization of female independence and suspicion of men, is rooted in the events of Berthe's adolescence. When she is thirteen, Berthe's mother dies, leaving her to the care of her bureaucrat father, Anicet. Such is the latter's grief at the death of his wife, however, that, he turns to absinthe and loses his post. Berthe is subject to her father's crazed assaults:

Non seulement, il lui fallut soigner, consoler son père, mais elle dut aussi, en de certaines heures, se défendre contre lui... Le misérable oubliait qu'elle était sa fille, et, dans son aberration, essayait de la violenter.

Ce furent des luttes hideuses qui la laissaient exténuée, hagarde, avec la haine et la terreur du mâle, que les désirs inconscients d'un fou lui révélaient ! (*PT*, 66)

The effect of Berthe's early experience of expressions of male sexuality as an uncontrolled and violent assault on the female body is compounded by the fact that this experience also represents her father's dereliction of his duty towards her.

Armed with this evidence of failed paternal duty, along with further traumatizing experiences gained while living under the care of her schoolteacher, Berthe concludes that she must attain independence in order to avoid further abuse. It is to the world of the circus that she turns. This represents both a re-connection with the maternal and a *déclassement*: prior to her marriage with Berthe's bourgeois father, her mother was also a circus performer. For Berthe, this return to her mother's roots represents a social marginalization that is at times turned against her. Pierre, taking her to dine at a restaurant populated by his bourgeois friends, is exasperated by her lack of conformity with the feminine norms of this milieu, notably her disarmingly frank opinions; he is embarrassed to be seen with 'une femme de cirque, une saltimbanque, à l'allure garçonnière, presque équivoque' (*PT*, 57).

Berthe's class transgression in joining the circus rehabilitates the paternal role. The directors of the Cirque Scheffer, who agree to employ her out of respect for the memory of her mother, provide the protection that her own father failed to offer (*PT*, 73). However, her repudiation of heterosexuality (and of sexuality *tout court*) is permanent. The rejection of the relations of heterosexual love that dominate other women's lives confers upon her a particular authority and perspicacity with respect to male turpitude and the more insidious effects of male domination of the social and sexual order. Early in the novel, Marni's narrator describes Berthe's rented rooms and,

within them, the books that indicate ‘une culture assez raffinée’ (*PT*, 61). One item in particular is highlighted:

Un livre d’Alfred de Vigny, posé sur une table, s’ouvrait à la page 203, marquée par un signet.
Berthe Robin avait souligné, d’un trait de crayon, cette pensée:
« Après avoir bien réfléchi sur la destinée des femmes dans tous les temps et chez toutes les nations, j’ai fini par penser que tout homme devrait dire à chaque femme, au lieu de : Bonjour : Pardon ! Car les plus forts ont fait la loi. » (*PT*, 61)

Berthe’s annotation of Vigny’s text signals her precise conceptualization of the oppression of women that operates in her patriarchal society. The injustices inflicted upon her – the ‘martyre’ (*PT*, 66) of her adolescence – are thus connected to a broader structural problem of male domination, the effects of which are played out again in the torment of Claire and Henriette at Pierre’s hands. Berthe’s highlighting of Vigny’s words points, *en abîme*, to Marni’s positioning of her own text in a longer tradition of criticism of male oppression of women. If it is the female character who re-marks the original male-authored text, it is Marni as woman writer who continues this tradition with *Pierre Tisserand*.

This sensitivity to the larger social structures ensuring women’s oppression is mirrored in the authority that Marni’s novel invests in Berthe as a commentator on Pierre. Berthe is the only female character who proves both impervious to Pierre’s charms and sensitive to the effects of his iniquities. Cognisant of Pierre’s attractiveness, her admiration is always tempered by her awareness of the pain he inflicts: ‘« Il n’est vraiment pas bête [...]. Mais que je plains la femme dont il est aimé ! »’ (*PT*, 75). In contrast, Claire and Henriette, repeatedly deceived and betrayed by Pierre, suffer for their naivety and faith in him. The particular authority that Berthe possesses with respect to Pierre is further indicated by the correlation between the opinions that she expresses about him and the judgements offered by Marni’s narrator. Expanding on her pity for any woman in love with Pierre, she highlights his shallow, impulsive nature:

— Il est amoureux comme il peut l'être, momentanément, superficiellement.
[...] Il me fait toujours penser à une fleur sans racines. Il n'y a rien de solide en
lui. (*PT*, 77)

As well as alluding to the inconstancy that repeatedly wounds Claire, Berthe's judgement hints at Pierre's lack of ideal masculinity. Capricious, weak-willed and likened to a flower, he is aligned, in this description, with traits more commonly coded as feminine. This judgement is confirmed soon afterwards when Pierre impulsively begins the relationship with Claire again. After he has hastily declared that he still loves her, following an earlier abandonment, Marni's narrator interjects to echo Berthe's words:

En ce moment, il était sincère.
Le danger terrible de ces êtres impulsifs et légers, c'est, qu'en certaines heures d'excitation cérébrale ou sensuelle, une bonne foi, momentanée, leur prête un accent irrésistible de persuasion. (*PT*, 88)

Berthe's assessment thus receives endorsement from the omniscient narrator, reinforcing her authority as a female critical voice in the novel.

In her role as privileged commentator on men and male power, Berthe is central to the articulation of the novel's ideal masculinity. For, despite her repudiation of heterosexuality and problematization of men's exploitation of women, she does not reject the notion of masculine guardianship of women altogether. In fact, she gradually re-idealizes a model of benignly powerful, protective masculinity. This is a process that initially operates via exclusion: Pierre, the primary object of Berthe's censure, falls outside of this ideal. Early in the novel, Pierre meets Berthe in the street. Despite being on the way to see Claire, he asks Berthe frankly if she will agree to become his mistress. Meeting with refusal, Pierre laughingly asks her why she will not consent. She responds:

vous ne devez pas être beau en amour! [...] Le visage inconnu, celui dont vous n'êtes pas le maître, celui dont vous ne dirigez pas les ficelles, le visage que, seules, peuvent contempler les femmes qui vous appartiennent, ce visage-là! ... doit être vilain ! (*PT*, 28-29)

Like the other women in the novel, Berthe is conscious of Pierre's physical attractiveness; he is, she notes, 'un garçon exquis' (*PT*, 29). However, Berthe conjectures an ugliness in him that only appears after he has successfully seduced. As the dialogue continues, Berthe speculates on what this ugliness might mean. The 'visage vilain' of the seducer, she proposes, denotes a sexual brutishness that is a kind of compensatory virility:

J'ai seulement remarqué que les hommes frivoles, et vous êtes frivole... [...] ont, dans le geste amoureux, des déchaînements de brutes. On dirait qu'ils se dédommagent ainsi de leur veulerie morale ; c'est leur façon, à eux, d'être virils. La seule ! (*PT*, 29)

The ugliness that Berthe attributes to Pierre is a marker of the sexual aggression that is, itself, a substitute for other kinds of 'virilité'. That this is a poor substitute for more 'real' virile traits is, meanwhile, suggested in her description of Pierre as 'frivole' and in her accusation of moral spinelessness. It is precisely because Marni's male protagonist is lacking in weightier, more substantial, masculine attributes that he invests so heavily in sex. Pierre the prolific seducer, Berthe suggests, is not truly a man.

Although he attempts to laugh at what he calls Berthe's 'si désobligeant diagnostic' (*PT*, 29), Pierre worries about precisely this problem. Confident of his ability to seduce any woman he pleases, he is recurrently inadequate when it comes to displaying other forms of manly prowess. In the novel's opening chapter, for example, he agonizes over his lack of physical courage as he lies in bed recovering from a tiny sword wound sustained in a duel with his best friend Sigismond Papière. The two friends have fought the duel over Pierre's affair with Sigismond's lover, Monique Perle. Even prior to the confrontation itself, the episode has been humiliating for Pierre. He recalls, with distaste, 'la hâte grotesque qu'il avait mise à se vêtir, sous les injures de Papière' (*PT*, 6) on being caught by his friend, as well as 'ses exaspérantes démarches pour l'aboutissement d'un duel' (*PT*, 6). Having seduced his best friend's mistress, Pierre

is terrified of the consequences, particularly when he is required, after being caught *en flagrant délit*, to defend himself on the duelling ground. The most acute anxiety attaches to Pierre's memory of his behaviour during the duel:

« Je ne suis pas brave, se dit-il avec ennui, et je tiens à ma peau d'une façon choquante... absurde ! Pourvu que personne ne se soit aperçu de mon trac ? » Aussitôt, il essaya de se persuader de sa parfaite bonne tenue sur le terrain. [...] Mais il revit l'œil étonné d'un des témoins de Papière, sa bouche aux coins tombants, ses sourcils relevés... et il se souvint, aussi, de Maxime Dorciel qui l'assistait. Physionomie inquiète, bouleversée, où il entraît beaucoup plus de terreur de voir s'enfuir son client, que de crainte qu'il ne fût blessé. (*PT*, 6)

Pierre acknowledges to himself that he is not 'brave'. Lacking this most desirable masculine attribute, he can only seek to convince himself of his 'bonne tenue': that his fear was not visible to the other men around him. Alone in his own home and no longer under pressure to maintain the act, Pierre admits the truth. In showing himself to be a coward, Pierre has inadvertently revealed his inadequate masculinity before the other men.

Pierre's anxious reflections on his failure to display physical valour in the duel illustrate the coercive operations of heroic masculinity as an enforced ideal. Despite his revulsion at the prospect of taking part, Pierre is obliged, according to conventions of classed and gendered behaviour, to perform this act of ritualized masculine bravery, the significance of which in early Third Republic culture has, as noted, been explored by Nye in *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor*. The coercion runs, moreover, to a prohibition on any display of reluctance, on the exposure of the coercive aspects of participation. Pierre's anxiety stems from the fact that he knows that his reluctance was visible. For Pierre, heroic masculinity is necessarily an act; indeed, it is a tortuous charade in which he must pretend to embrace traits and practices that are both alien and terrifying.

Pierre's uneasiness also stems from the unflattering comparison that he establishes between himself and Papière. Seen through his friend's eyes, Sigismond

performs perfectly in the duel: ‘n’avoir pas de nerfs! [...] Être une brute, une simple brute, comme Papière. Voilà qui est enviable’ (*PT*, 7). Papière does not appear to experience the duel as an enforced exercise, undertaken against his will. Interestingly, where the term ‘brute’ is used by Berthe to refer to Pierre’s uncontrolled or animal-like sexuality – a quality that places him outside the category of the real man – Papière’s brute-like qualities in the duel signal his consummate masculinity for Pierre. Sigismond is apparently devoid of those unmanly nerves that hamper his friend, effortlessly approximating to the courageous ideal that eludes Pierre. The painful comparison that Marni’s hero sets up points to the operation of gender as fantasy. Papière, it might be conjectured, is subject to the constraints of masculine behaviour in their contextual specificity; he, too, is obliged to take part in the duel. Yet he appears to find it easy and natural. Pierre sees only an apparently perfect embodiment of masculinity, and his perception of personal inadequacy is rendered only more acute.

Pierre’s avowal of his failed approximation to the strong, martial ideal seemingly embodied by Papière echoes Robert Clérieux’s admission of the gulf separating his timid self from the authoritative figures of his father, uncle and Nauders in *Nietzschéenne*. Both novels, in fact, open with men’s private reflections on their inadequacy and failure in relation to these ideals. Yet the manner in which this failed masculine approximation is mobilized and interpreted in Marni’s novel, particularly by her female rebel, differs markedly from Lesueur’s scenario. Both Berthe and Lesueur’s Jocelyne articulate the secret insecurities that plague the male protagonists. Jocelyne voices Robert’s secret fears when she first meets him at the theatre. When Berthe and Pierre meet in the street, a similar process occurs: Berthe articulates the concealed inadequacy that Pierre worries about when he is alone. Yet where, in *Nietzschéenne*, the female rebel is devoted to repairing the break that splits the anxious male subject from this powerful ideal, Marni’s female protagonist simply exposes Pierre’s failure to measure up. *Nietzschéenne* proposes

that Robert can, with Jocelyne's help, embody the powerful masculinity of his father and uncle; Marni's text asserts that Pierre is permanently lacking.

Despite the emphasis on Pierre's inadequacy and upon the deleterious effects of men's sexual domination of women, Marni's novel, through Berthe, does endorse an ideal of powerful masculinity premised on courage, fidelity and male guardianship of women. This ideal masculinity is embodied by the German performer Dortmund, a fellow animal tamer at the Cirque Scheffer. The significance of this character is made clear via Berthe's assertion to Pierre that Dortmund is 'un brave homme et un homme brave; le seul homme pour lequel j'ai une estime absolue' (*PT*, 53). There are interesting subtexts to Marni's construction of Dortmund as the most admirable man in *Pierre Tisserand*. First, his nationality plays on the dread of a strengthened Germany that haunted the French cultural imagination throughout much of the early Third Republic. Constant comparison with Germany in the final decades of the nineteenth century was such that, as Nye writes, 'Germany had become a necessary dialectical element in any assessment of French power'.¹³ The association of Germany with economic strength and a growing population provoked a sense of acute anxiety in France, where the question of *dénatalité* was perceived by many to be a developing crisis in this period, one that implied a lack of virility among French men. Second, in locating the embodiment of ideal masculinity in the working-class circus performer, Marni hints at the deficiencies of bourgeois men alluded to in chapter 1: it is the physically active, courageous male subject who embodies masculinity as both a corporeal and moral ideal, rather than the sedentary, promiscuous and cowardly *bourgeois*.

The brief passages dealing with Dortmund highlight the privileged place that physical courage holds in this idealized version of masculinity. Pierre, curious about the

¹³ Nye, p. 78.

animal tamer after seeing him backstage at the circus, hears Berthe describe the extravagant physical courage that his act, which involves being locked in a cage with lions, panthers, tigers, leopards, hyenas and bears, demands: ‘il les fait tous travailler comme des caniches’ (*PT*, 52), she remarks. While embodying this ideal of courage, Dortmund’s actual body is lacking. Berthe regales Pierre with a list of the injuries Dortmund has incurred: ‘il a deux doigts de moins, un bras cassé, l’épaule démise, une hanche arrachée, une jambe profondément labourée par les crocs d’une panthère’ (*PT*, 52). Dortmund’s extensive injuries contrast sharply with the minuscule wound that causes Pierre to take to his bed after the duel. The animal tamer’s disregard for the literal physical cost of his act also serves as a commentary on Pierre’s somehow un-masculine desire to maintain corporeal intactness when he avows ‘je tiens à ma peau d’une façon choquante... absurde !’ after the duel. In the comparison that Marni’s text establishes between the two men, bodily lack signifies, ironically, phallic plenitude. Pierre’s desire for completeness, his desire to guard against the penetration of a sword wound or the loss of a body part, compromises his claim to this phallic masculinity.

Having learned of the extraordinary popularity of Dortmund’s act, Pierre’s primary concern is to ascertain whether he is a hit with women (*PT*, 52). Sexual success is thus confirmed as Pierre’s privileged signifier of masculinity. Yet the radically different attitudes of the two men are exposed by Berthe’s reply. For, although – much to Pierre’s envy – Dortmund is also extraordinarily popular with women, his response to the many sexual opportunities offered to him is different to Pierre’s prolific seduction: ‘[Dortmund] est marié, il aime sa femme, et il n’y répond pas’ (*PT*, 53). The animal tamer’s heterosexuality encompasses the kind of controlled desire of which Pierre is incapable. Dortmund does not need to invest heavily in displays of sexual prowess, precisely because his masculinity does not rest precariously upon them.

Wounding the Seducer

Berthe posits that the only arena in which Pierre exhibits virility is sex. She speculates that his ‘déchaînements de brute’ serve a compensatory function in relation to the real masculinity that he otherwise lacks. Following the issue of this early assessment, however, Marni’s novel gradually reveals the sexual arena as another site in which Pierre is made to experience deficiency and vulnerability. Again, Berthe is instrumental in exposing this deficiency.

Unlike the other women whom Pierre encounters in the novel, Berthe refuses to be recuperated into his preferred schema of male possession and female gift of self. Her repudiation of heterosexuality permits her to expose the limits of Pierre’s powers of seduction. A key incident in Berthe’s defeat of Pierre’s expectation of sexual conquest is his attendance at one of her snake-charming performances. As he enters the hippodrome where the show is being held, the narrator describes the curves of Berthe’s body in her tight-fitting leotard: ‘le haut du corps, largement décolleté, offrait un buste plein, d’une grâce délicieuse’ (*PT*, 50). The focalization of this descriptive passage is ambiguous; it may be internal or external. However, Pierre’s responses to the spectacle of Berthe’s body are then made clearer:

Immobile, pâle un peu, ses yeux, presque clos, laissant filtrer, à peine, une lueur mince et verdâtre, [...] elle attendait l’enlacement d’un énorme python, qui, avec une lenteur lourde, s’enroulait autour d’elle, tandis que, colliers vivants, sur sa poitrine blanche, deux petits serpents frémissaient.
« La jolie fille ! pensa Pierre. Quelle grâce voluptueuse et cependant pudique ; elle s’abandonne, à ces répugnantes bêtes, comme une vierge enamourée. » (*PT*, 50)

Pierre reads this spectacle as the female subject’s desire for sexual submission. Berthe’s agency as charmer is recuperated as passive abandonment to the snakes, whose slow ‘enlacement’ of her body figures as the conquest of the *vierge enamourée* by the assumed

male lover. Pierre delights in the show because his reading seems to presage Berthe's imminent capitulation to his desire.

Berthe's permanent refusal of any such abandonment de-authorizes Pierre's reading, however. Following the performance, Pierre visits Berthe backstage, and she allows him to take her out for dinner. On their journey home, he attempts to prosecute his assumed rights over her:

il lui embrassa la bouche, voracement; mais aussitôt, il poussa un cri de douleur; Berthe Robin l'avait mordu. [...] Sa lèvre saignait. Il prit son mouchoir, éteignit le sang qui coulait et demeura immobile, cependant que Mlle Robin, en personne qui ne craint pas d'être poursuivie, s'en allait tranquillement. (*PT*, 59-60)

Berthe's bite marks the limit of Pierre's capacity to overcome female resistance to his desire. It also occurs at precisely the moment that Pierre exhibits what Berthe has earlier identified as his compensatory virility: his sexual voraciousness. It is by asserting his aggressive desire that Pierre attempts to overcome Berthe's resistance, and yet the act of doing so reveals not his sexual omnipotence, but the limits of his power over the unwilling woman. The price of his coercion of Berthe is, as he later puts it, 'un morceau de chair' (*PT*, 148), a piece of flesh bitten from his lip. This missing piece of flesh recalls Dortmund's lost digits, the corporeal fragmentation that, signifying his physical courage, serve as a marker of his unimpaired masculinity. For Pierre, there is no such benefit to the loss. The sexual voraciousness that signals his deficient masculinity merely becomes, in the encounter with Berthe, an unfulfilled longing for a woman who neither needs nor wants his desire.

Berthe does not represent a version of the *femme fatale* whose desire threatens to castrate the male subject. Rather, the removal of the 'morceau de chair' is a defence mechanism that works against male sexual aggression. However, the re-scripting of the sexual encounter as a scenario of loss for the erstwhile seducer also proceeds, in Marni's

novel, via Pierre's affair with a female character who appears to him in the light of a fearful sexual predator. Already juggling his relationship with Claire and his pursuit of Berthe, Pierre embarks on an affair with Colette Harveley, the wife of a well-known doctor. Unlike Berthe, whose perspicacity and integrity ensure her sympathetic portrayal, Colette is aligned with those characters in the novel whose moral, often sexual, misdemeanours provide much of the novel's at times risqué comedy. Colette's affairs lead her into a series of predicaments, including an episode of blackmail involving a former lover, a *garçon de cage* at the Cirque Scheffer. Her serial infidelities and, in particular, her attempted seduction of Dortmund, incur the deep disapproval of Berthe.

When Colette turns her amorous attentions to Pierre, she prevails upon him to concede to her advances in a manner which unsettles his control over his varied love life. The precise events of the seduction are recounted in a dialogue between Pierre and Claire, in which he confesses:

Mme Harveley a cambriolé ma porte et ma personne [...] je me défendis longtemps et je ne cédaï que devant des arguments, méprisables, certes, mais péremptaires ! Je cédaï sans trouble, sans plaisir, et surtout sans fierté ! (PT, 192)

The image of Colette's illicit plundering of Pierre's home and body clearly inverts the conventional gender positions engaged in Pierre's other scenes of seduction, which are largely premised on his active desire and female gift of self. Desire and agency have shifted to the female character, and it is Pierre who concedes his body to her. The mode of narration deployed here, Pierre recounting events in direct speech to Claire, casts doubt upon the veracity of his account; his insistence upon Colette's *cambriolage* may be read as a deceitful denial of responsibility for events. However, that the encounter with Colette is characterized by anxiety and fear for Pierre is suggested again as the consequences of the affair develop. Receiving reiterated expressions of sexual interest

from Colette, Pierre is terrified and bewildered. Of particular concern is a letter from her which contains a ‘défilé de rappels érotiques et une théorie de promesses voluptueuses d’une stupéfiante impudicité’ (*PT*, 210). The female subject, much to Pierre’s disgust and anxiety, displays the sexual and verbal powers that have hitherto been his province. The danger posed, not only by Colette’s unconcealed desire, but also by her startling verbal facility, possibly matching the ‘opulence verbale’ (*PT*, 201) he claims elsewhere for himself, cannot be faced. Pierre, so disturbed by both Colette’s pursuit of him and by Claire’s response to news of the affair – she falls gravely ill – is unable to complete his article for the phallically-named *La Flèche* newspaper, and runs away to Cannes.

The brief affair leaves Pierre panic-stricken and verbally impotent. These losses figure as forms of symbolic castration that ensue from Colette’s ‘cambriolage’. Read through Pierre’s account and his subsequent responses to Colette, she appears as a thief of his virility, suggesting an overlap with the decadent *femme fatale* whose desire is, as Charles Bernheimer has argued, a ‘desire to castrate’.¹⁴ The motivation for this wish for dismemberment, as conceived within the decadent imagination, is the female subject’s wish to alter her own ‘castrated’ state: ‘Herodias-Salome wants what she lacks’.¹⁵ As Bernheimer has noted, Freud’s theory of sexual difference here overlaps with (male) fin-de-siècle fantasies of the castrating woman because, for Freud, castration – the position of lacking the wholeness belonging solely to the male subject – is ‘the proper definition

¹⁴ Charles Bernheimer, ‘Fetishism and Decadence: Salome’s Severed Heads’, in *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*, ed. by Emily Apter and William Pietz (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 62-83 (p. 67).

¹⁵ Bernheimer, p. 67.

of woman's difference'.¹⁶ Femininity is defined as phallic lack against the phallic plenitude of masculinity.

The notion that the encounter with Colette represents a kind of castration is also suggested by another aspect of Pierre's response. Before leaving Paris for Cannes, Pierre rapidly throws some items into a suitcase:

Fébrile, il entassait dans sa valise [...] une enveloppe qui contenaient, avec les poésies de Mme La Plaine, son portrait ; la photographie de Berthe Robin, sans dédicace, celle-là ; et aussi, il ne put expliquer pourquoi, puisqu'il la fuyait, qu'il l'exécrait, un petit ruban vieux rose, détaché de l'épaulette de Mme Harveley. « Pour le ton qui est joli, sans doute, » s'excusa-t-il. (*PT*, 212-213)

Still panic-stricken at the consequences of the affair with Colette, Pierre assuages his fear with two images of desired women, Claire and Berthe. The availability of these female portraits to his visual possession goes some way, it is suggested, to restoring masculine sexual supremacy. In the case of Berthe, in particular, this visual possession offers a gratification that has been denied to Pierre in the flesh. Colette, however, is represented in Pierre's luggage not by a substitute image but by an item that has a more obviously metonymical connection to the woman in question. His retention of Colette under any guise is presented as a puzzle: Pierre purports to loathe her, and yet wishes, for reasons that he is unable to explain, to take her with him in the form of a fragment of clothing. The motive that he does put forward, the 'joli ton' of the ribbon, is clearly provisional; Marni's narrator, meanwhile, offers no explication of precisely what is at stake, and the suggestion is that Pierre himself does not quite understand it.

The ribbon may also be read as taking on the value of a fetish, which, in Freud's formulation, emerges for the male subject as a response to the sight of the mother's castration and, veiling this phallic absence, protects him from the prospect of suffering

¹⁶ Bernheimer, p. 65.

the same fate. The fetish, Freud writes, ‘remains a token of triumph over the threat of castration and a protection against it’.¹⁷ It is apposite to note that Colette’s seduction of Pierre, as related in his account to Claire, is assisted by what he terms Colette’s ‘pince monseigneur’, ‘des exhibitions de dessous transparents’ (*PT*, 192). The evocation of Colette’s display of this transparent garment suggests that, in a very literal sense, Pierre is forced to confront Colette’s ‘castration’, the phallic absence that defines femininity and against which Freud’s fetishist protects himself. In this case, Pierre’s terror at her subsequent pursuit of him might suggest that he fears that it is this state of lack that she threatens to visit upon him. If the ribbon from her shoulder strap does serve as fetish, its presence in Pierre’s luggage allows him to deny, or at least manage, the threat of castration. Set alongside the two other visual representations of women, the ribbon allows him *not* to see Colette in what would be a repetition of the original, terrifying sight.

The effects of Pierre’s encounter with Colette resonate through the later stages of *Pierre Tisserand*. Upon arrival in Cannes, Pierre embarks upon a flirtation with Henriette La Plaine, and their romance rapidly leads to an engagement. There is a clear connection between Pierre’s experience with Colette and his newfound interest in marriage. It is as Pierre peruses the ‘phraséologie érotique’ (*PT*, 222) of Colette’s ongoing correspondence in a garden in Cannes that Henriette first appears before him, ‘dans un costume très simple de serge blanche’ (*PT*, 222). Marriage to Henriette represents the possibility of expelling threatening female desire. Henriette is attractive because, as an innocent *jeune fille*, her desires can reliably be shaped by, and subjugated to, her husband. Pierre, venerating her ‘robe blanche en laine, dont le contact lui avait

¹⁷ Sigmund Freud, ‘Fetishism’, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. by James Strachey, 24 vols (London: Vintage, 2001), XXI, pp. 147-157 (p. 154).

rappelé la sensation mystique de l'hostie contre sa lèvre, le jour de sa première communion' (*PT*, 276), experiences the gratification of knowing that the terror provoked by Colette is unlikely to threaten him again.

If marriage represents the mechanism through which Pierre will henceforth circumscribe and control the operations of female desire, it is also closely bound up with the questions of gender that trouble him throughout the novel. Pointing again to the notion that his affair with Colette constitutes a symbolic castration, it is in the aftermath of his flight from Paris that he reflects explicitly on his masculinity. In a letter to Claire, he writes:

je suis [...] un être bizarre, un détraqué de sensibilité, poète un peu, et fille effroyablement, terriblement, maladivement fille !
Alors je me soigne, je fais des exercices de volonté, pour entraîner cette faculté de mon intelligence qui existe à peine, tant elle est chancelante, ou aisément submergeable !
Je me donne des tâches, des corvées musculaires ou cérébrales... (*PT*, 252)

The engagement of a discourse of pathology is not unique in the novel. Pierre diagnoses his failings in this manner on a number of other occasions. However, the particularly gendered inflection of this passage is specific to the end of the novel. Pierre, in a more or less ironic tone, presents himself as a weak-willed *fille*, a deviant male subject. The terrifying affair with Colette brings about Pierre's acknowledgement that, far from constituting the only evidence of his virility, his prolific sexual adventures are yet another signifier of feminization. His concession to Colette, as the end of the quotation above suggests, is a failure of the will, itself, as already noted in my discussion of *Nietzschéenne*, a privileged masculine faculty in this period. Indeed, the programme of fortification outlined above, in which the will is to be strengthened through physical and mental exercise, very much echoes the discourses of willpower and masculinity in Lesueur's novel.

The prospect that, by the end of the novel, Pierre will finally approximate to the ideal masculinity adumbrated by Berthe is also suggested by the manner in which he articulates the relationship between marriage and gender. Pierre is never more *fille* than in his liaison with Colette, which ends, humiliatingly for Pierre, with Mme Harveley offering to give him money to stay with her in Paris. Marriage, in contrast, promises to make him into a man. He reflects:

« Je ne serai plus un amant, peut-être!... Je deviens un homme, avec des projets d'avenir, des préoccupations de travail, des ambitions de gloire, et aussi avec un besoin de paix intérieure, de régularité...de ménage...Parfaitement! De ménage! avec Henriette, qui est la femme nécessaire à la tranquillité de mon cerveau. » (*PT*, 277)

Marriage, then, allows Pierre to imagine his approximation to something approaching an ideal bourgeois masculinity, secured by a devoted wife. The restless desire that led him to the disastrous affair with Colette is to be quietened by the routine of domesticity and commitment to professional duty.

Marni constructs this epiphany as one more instance of Pierre's failed approximation to the category of *homme*. Indeed, his efforts to attain this position through marriage and fantasies of fidelity and guardianship of Henriette are presented as a kind of posturing that conceals the real recalcitrance that lies beneath. For example, as Pierre reflects on the engagement to Henriette, he is walking through Paris. A pretty *modiste* passes. Tempted to flirt with her, Pierre recalls Henriette's image, and desists, congratulating himself on his efforts:

« Je m'améliore, je m'épure, il n'y a pas à en douter! [...] Henriette va transformer mon être moral, faire de moi un garçon sérieux, susceptible de tenir sa parole, de résister à ses fantaisies... »
Malgré ça, un restant de vieil homme le fit encore se retourner. Mais la jolie fille avait disparu. (*PT*, 275)

Marni's narrator invites the reader to accept Pierre's fundamental difference from the ideal that he purports to embody, to construe him as inherently and permanently deviant in relation to the masculinity valorized in the novel. His expressed wish to embody this masculinity is destined to be short-lived and chimerical precisely because it is mere posturing. It cannot alter the fundamental truth about his gendered being, that he does not possess those qualities that make a man.

Read within a Butlerian framework, the notion that Pierre is inherently recalcitrant with respect to these ideals is subject to critique. Conceptualizing gender as a performative production rather than a substantive reality, Butler writes that 'words, acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core'¹⁸; gender is always, and necessarily, the product of enforced posturing. My argument is, however, that Marni's novel upholds and mobilizes the division between real and failed or inauthentic men, categorizing Pierre the seducer as a failure. At stake in this reinscription of true and false is a political point: a female-authored construction of gender in which 'real' masculinity, while in many ways highly traditional, has at its heart what Marni presents as ethical behaviour towards women, notably through sexual fidelity.

2. *Douce moitié: A Beleaguered Man*

Like Marni, Lucie Delarue-Mardrus (1874-1945) was a prolific writer whose work, in a career spanning four decades, encompassed poetry, drama and fiction.¹⁹ As Collado

¹⁸ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 173.

¹⁹ For an account of Delarue-Mardrus's life, see Hélène Plat's biography, *Lucie Delarue-Mardrus: une femme de lettres des années folles* (Paris: Grasset, 1994). See also Lucie Delarue-Mardrus, *Mes mémoires* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938).

notes, there are parallels between Delarue-Mardrus's literary beginnings and Colette's more famous debut²⁰: both were daughters of the provincial bourgeoisie and both married men with established literary connections who, in various ways, fostered their careers. Delarue-Mardrus's husband, Joseph-Charles Mardrus, was instrumental in assisting with the publication of her early poems in *La Revue blanche*. A number of plays followed, including, in 1907, *Sapho désespérée*. Like Colette, Delarue-Mardrus was a well-known figure in Paris of the early twentieth century, winning fame through her writing and maintaining a rather glamorous public image via her appearance in beautiful photo shoots in magazines such as *Femina*.

Delarue-Mardrus's first published fiction, a series of short stories, appeared in *Le Journal*. Much later, Delarue-Mardrus recalled that these early pieces were 'pleins d'archanges et de sirènes... des histoires impossibles. Le résultat fut magnifique : les lecteurs désabonnaient en masse'.²¹ In 1908, Delarue-Mardrus's first novel, *Marie, fille-mère*, the story of a Norman farm girl, appeared. It was followed by approximately forty more novels over the course of Delarue-Mardrus's career.²² Indeed, it was her fiction that, despite an apparently inauspicious début, eventually garnered most public interest and admiration.²³ The critic Sirieyx de Villers noted in the 1920s that: 'si Lucie Delarue-Mardrus est peu lue comme poète, en revanche sa prose appartient au public. [...] Avec

²⁰ Collado, pp. 89-91.

²¹ Quoted in Janine Bouissounouse, 'Leurs débuts, femmes écrivains: Lucie Delarue-Mardrus', *Nouvelles littéraires*, 26 October 1935, Dossier Lucie Delarue-Mardrus, Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand.

²² Pauline Newman-Gordon, 'Lucie Delarue-Mardrus', in *French Women Writers*, 2nd edn, ed. by Eva Martin Sartori and Dorothy Wynne Zimmerman (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1994 [1991]), pp. 108-120 (p. 109).

²³ Newman-Gordon (p. 116) notes that the comparative lack of recognition of her poetry was a source of lifelong disappointment to Delarue-Mardrus.

des romans elle a conquis la première place à côté de Colette dans la littérature féminine'.²⁴

Recent scholarly interest in Delarue-Mardrus's fiction centres on the writer's exploration of gender and sexuality, in particular her constructions of female subjectivity. Collado has analysed *La Monnaie de singe* (1912), which charts the adolescence of Alfreda, a young girl who is brought up in North Africa, travels to Paris and returns home, disillusioned, to marry her childhood friend. Collado notes that the novel explores some of the writer's 'thèmes de prédilection', including 'la révolte contre les contraintes imposées à la femme, la solitude, la séduction, l'homme semeur de troubles'.²⁵ Similar concerns emerge in Mesch's reading of *Marie, fille-mère*. Mesch positions *Marie, fille-mère* within a naturalist tradition, arguing that its author both draws on, and re-works, naturalist conceptualizations of instinct as the driver of human and sexual behaviour. The novel, which recounts the rape, pregnancy, marriage and death of its central protagonist Marie, 'insists upon the animal bases of humanity'.²⁶ However, Mesch asserts, Delarue-Mardrus, contravening naturalist convention, deploys a mode of narration that elicits the reader's sympathy for the female subject as the victim of nature's forces:

Even as Delarue-Mardrus embraces a positivistic outlook and subscribes to a theory of instincts, her writing refuses the pretense of objectivity normally assumed in naturalist prose. [...] Her narration embraces sentiment and pathos, infusing these new elements into a scientific discourse...²⁷

²⁴ Sirieyx de Villers, *Lucie Delarue-Mardrus* (Paris: Sansot, 1923), p. 25.

²⁵ Collado, p. 185.

²⁶ Mesch, p. 105.

²⁷ Mesch, p. 103.

Delarue-Mardrus's novel, the critic argues, displays a sensitivity to, and sympathy with, aspects of female experience rarely articulated within male-dominated medical and scientific discourses of the early twentieth century. Despite Delarue-Mardrus's refusal to identify herself as a feminist, Mesch contends, 'the feminist label [is] appropriate in its modern usage'.²⁸

Splendid Isolation: Delarue-Mardrus's Hero

By contrast, little attention has been devoted to Delarue-Mardrus's explorations of masculinity and male subjectivity in her fiction in the years prior to 1914. A number of her novels of this period, including *Douce moitié*, are constructed around a central male character, indicating that Delarue-Mardrus was concerned with these questions, however.²⁹ Like *Pierre Tisserand*, *Douce moitié* follows the numerous sexual liaisons of its male protagonist. Struggling artist Armand Mainteternes is an inadequate breadwinner, an inattentive father, and a serial adulterer. However, while similar qualities make Pierre the villain of Marni's trilogy, Delarue-Mardrus's text invites the reader's sympathy for Armand. He is presented, often comically, as an idealistic, romantic man isolated within a network of domineering women.

Constantly subject to female criticism and derision for his many failings, Armand is wholly lacking in male allies. Armand's precarious financial position means that he is dependent on his wife, Julie, and her female-dominated family, including Julie's sister, Adèle, and her rich aunt Janine Durand. Powerful paternal figures, meanwhile, are absent. His own father is dead, and Maritz, Julie's father, presents a

²⁸ Mesch, p. 100.

²⁹ The other male-centred novels of this period are *L'Acharnée* (1910), *Tout l'amour* (1911) and *Un cancre* (1914).

picture of cowed, defeated manhood: ‘La vue de son beau-père opprimé, muet, obéissant et plat, le révoltait et l’inquiétait pour son propre avenir’ (*DM*, 226). In part two of the novel, Julie inherits a fortune from Janine, and the whole family, Julie’s mother and sister included, invest in a property, Beau-Moulin, in the countryside outside Paris. Outnumbered, with ‘trois Julie sur le dos’ (*DM*, 221), Armand takes refuge in the converted windmill that has become his new studio:

Une grande maison au centre d’un grand jardin; et, tout à côté, un ancien moulin à vent, transformé en charmant atelier, et dressant dans le pré son jeu d’ailes contradictoires, inutiles, appuyées au lierre des murs arrondis. (*DM*, 219)

The redundant, malfunctioning blades underline Armand’s wretchedly weak position in the family. The windmill itself, however, becomes a symbol of phallic resistance to the crowd of encroaching women. Indeed, the scenario at Beau-Moulin recalls, in a much lighter tone, Rachilde’s lighthouse keepers fighting the engulfing femininity of the *mer/mère* in *La Tour d’amour* (1899), the writer’s horrifying tale of embattled masculinity.³⁰

Armand’s meeting with the wealthy art patron Judith Langlade promises to change his life. Her salutary influence is two-fold. First, Armand, having given up on romantic passion following his marriage, falls in love with Judith, and spends most of the novel plotting an escape from his unhappy domestic life into her arms. Second, Judith immediately recognizes Armand’s talent and sets about advancing his career. She transforms Armand into a desiring male subject in pursuit of a beloved woman, as well as offering him the prospect of overturning his domestic subordination by transforming him into a wealthier, more professionally successful man. What emerges from his

³⁰ See Robert Ziegler, ‘The Message from the Lighthouse: Rachilde’s *La Tour d’amour*’, *Romance Quarterly*, 39 (1992), 159-165; Melanie Hawthorne, ‘To the Lighthouse: Fictions of Masculine Identity in Rachilde’s *La Tour d’amour*’, *L’Esprit créateur*, 32 (1992), 41-51.

encounter with Judith, however, is a repetition of Armand's embrace of passivity and the confirmation of a lifetime of subservience to his wife.

This is a novel concerned with the male subject's failure to approximate to heroic, authoritative masculine ideals: Armand is comically passive in the face of expressions of female desire, subordinate to the direction of his wife and her female relatives, and is unable to summon anything other than revulsion when, at Judith's instigation, he is confronted with a powerful male role model. Insofar as it stages this passive masculinity, and indeed the failure of female efforts to re-make its male protagonist in a more powerful image, *Douce moitié* authorizes an aspect of male subjectivity that is both raised and foreclosed in *Les Cervelines*. Like Armand, Jean and Paul evince a desire to subordinate themselves to the authority of women and to reject the call to guardianship and domination of a family made to the bourgeois male. Unlike Armand, they are not permitted to do so.

Yet the unsettling of gender hierarchies that this construction of a weak, passive male protagonist suggests is not as radical as it might appear. Delarue-Mardrus's subaltern male is, in various ways, elevated above the women around him. While the novel is thematically concerned with overbearing women, female voices and perspectives are almost wholly absent from *Douce moitié*. Focalization shifts repeatedly between external and internal modes, yet Armand alone is deployed as a character-focalizer, lending his perspective a unique importance in the novel and inviting sympathy with his long-suffering yet uniquely valuable status. Female characters are focalized from without, thus excluding sustained exploration of female subjectivity. Women are associated with avarice, crass materialism and comedic snobbery. In Julie's case, when she is poor, she despises Armand's rich female clients; when she inherits wealth, she makes ridiculous efforts to emulate them. Even Judith, who I discuss further below, is implicated in the novel's devalorization of female subjects: her unconventional

life, unlike that of Berthe Robin, is constructed as a narrow-minded *arrivisme*. Female bodies, particularly their signs of ageing, are often portrayed as pitiful, while Armand's enduring physical beauty makes him the novel's youthful cynosure. For a novel concerned with a male seducer, meanwhile, uncontrolled sexual desire is constructed as a female problem. The expression of female desire repeatedly distracts Armand from his work and is at the root of many of his dilemmas.

Armand alone is the novel's locus of aesthetic sensibility, talent and generosity. As an artist, he transcends the stupidity and insensitivity associated with most of the women in *Douce moitié*, approximating to a kind of godlike status. In the novel's opening chapter, as Armand works on a Parisian sunset scene, Delarue-Mardrus's narrator glosses the significance of his task:

Peindre, c'est, en quelque sorte, recommencer la création de la nature. Une transe anime celui qui tente cette décevante tâche. [...] Avec des yeux qui regardent, avec sa main qui pose les touches, il prend possession du mystère des formes, des couleurs, de la lumière. Il se sent dieu. (*DM*, 6-7)

Given Delarue-Mardrus's otherwise rather hapless protagonist, it is tempting to read this early passage as an ironic comment on the self-importance of the artist. Yet such grandiose constructions of the artist's task appear, apparently seriously, elsewhere in the novel (*DM*, 203) and Armand is repeatedly presented as a highly gifted painter rather than a deluded man.

Through such passages, it becomes clear that Armand's apparently subaltern status, evidenced by the vulnerability that makes him a prey to female desire and to his authoritarian wife, constitutes a different way of yoking maleness and power. Armand performs a kind of persecuted, marginalized yet visionary masculinity that evokes the concept of the Romantic artist as both outsider and recreator of the world in his image. The male artist alone transcends the banalities of life and, while he adopts typically

feminine-coded traits such as sympathy and sentimentality, this appropriation does not fundamentally alter gender hierarchies. The feminine is valorized when performed by a male subject, while the female, embodied both by Julie and by Armand's series of insatiable lovers, is degraded and ridiculed.³¹

A Man Possessed

Delarue-Mardrus re-writes the narrative of serial seduction as male conquest of the female other as one of male failure, dispossession and objectification. Key to this re-writing is the central irony that Armand's romantic pursuit of his adored Judith is repeatedly interrupted by the character's banal sexual encounters with other women. This sexual circulation suggests that the novel can be positioned in relation to the late nineteenth-century narratives of seduction, such as *Bel-Ami* and Zola's *Pot-Bouille*, examined by White. The 'Don Juan narrative', White states, 'provides by its multiplication of the scene of seduction a syntagmatic demystification of the unique amorous moment'.³² However, in a manner which links *Douce moitié* to her other, more earnest fictions of this period, Delarue-Mardrus's novel never quite destroys the illusion

³¹ Christine Battersby has argued that Romantic concepts of artistic creativity were premised on the adoption of feminine traits such as sympathy and emotion, yet insisted on the construction of creative power as a uniquely male gift. See *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics* (London: The Women's Press, 1994), pp. 49-60. In *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), Rita Felski writes of a similar kind of appropriation in her discussion of the ways in which late nineteenth-century decadent writers such as Huysmans and Wilde adopted an aesthetics of style and surface coded as feminine, while still repudiating the female body. 'In at least some of the texts of early modernism,' Felski writes, 'the resistive power of feminine artifice is predicated upon a radical disavowal of and disassociation from the "natural" body of woman' (p. 92).

³² White, p. 85.

that Armand's yearning for the 'unique amorous moment' – a constantly deferred union with Judith – is a marker of his sentimental refinement and sensitivity.

Two of Armand's affairs involve women close to Judith: her typist, Marguerite Piedfort, and her friend, the princesse de Varileff, whose portrait he paints. These sexual adventures, unlike those of *Bel-Ami*, bring neither monetary nor professional rewards. Similarly, these liaisons do not attest to a quest for control or domination on Armand's part, an overturning of his marital subordination through sexual conquest. In fact, Delarue-Mardrus's text presents such encounters as the most salient instances of Armand's ineptitude and passivity. The affair with Marguerite, for example, is initially motivated by pity. Armand sympathizes with the lowly Marguerite, whom he first meets at a garden party at Judith's house, reflecting that 'elle n'était qu'une dactylographe, rien du tout' (*DM*, 91). When he confers a consolation kiss upon the impoverished typist, however, she responds in a manner that Armand does not anticipate. As the pair travel back to Paris together in Judith's car, she seizes him: 'elle se jetait sur lui, dans l'ombre de la voiture, comme pour l'attaquer' (*DM*, 92).

Armand imagines a timid young woman who will be grateful for any attention paid to her. However, Delarue-Mardrus presents the typist as a fiercely desiring female subject who is unafraid to pursue the man she wants. In some ways, Marguerite, a single girl living in Paris and working to support herself, may be aligned with such New Woman protagonists as Josanne Valentin, the heroine of Tinayre's *La Rebelle*, who claim a right to independence and to the sexual freedoms that the period's double standards generally denied to women. Mirroring the novel's treatment of Judith, discussed below, *Douce moitié* does not explore Marguerite's life or work. Rather, she is portrayed solely in terms of her relationship with Armand. To Delarue-Mardrus's hero, she represents a set of romantic and sexual expectations that are deeply oppressive and yet which, having embarked upon the affair, he is too afraid to flee. The couple spends two days together

at a hotel in the countryside. While Marguerite enjoys the bucolic setting and the romance of escaping Paris with her lover, Armand feels trapped. This feeling reaches its peak as he contemplates their first night together:

Plus l'heure s'avavançait, moins il s'appriivoisait. [...] Lorsqu'ils montèrent enfin dans la chambre au lit ramagé, tandis que le cœur de l'ouvrière commençait à battre trop fort, Armand eut le sentiment d'une corvée qu'il lui fallait maintenant accomplir. (*DM*, 120)

On the second night, Armand lies awake, 'un peu grelottant, assez inquiet', in constant dread of 'quelque transport de tendresse' (*DM*, 122) emanating from Marguerite, all the while wishing he were back in the conjugal bed where Julie would at least leave him alone.

When Judith introduces Armand to the princesse, he rapidly and reluctantly becomes involved in another liaison. Having agreed that he will paint her portrait, Armand awaits her one afternoon at his apartment. The princesse arrives late, having spent several hours shopping for bargains in cheap local boutiques. As a prelude to their sitting, she produces her purchase, an antique snuffbox, before turning her attention to her next acquisition: 'se rapprochant d'un pas, elle se mit à dévisager Armand' (*DM*, 160). The Mainteternes home is, for the richer woman, simply the premises of another *brocanteur*, housing delicious objects that are more desirable for being undiscovered and undervalued. No sooner has Julie left the apartment than the princesse seizes the coveted object:

la princesse marcha sur Armand, le prit par les épaules et l'embrassa sur la bouche. Il n'eut pas le temps de se récrier, de s'étonner, de se défendre. Enveloppé, poussé, bousculé parmi des frôlements d'étoffes riches, des cliquetis de perles, des bouffées de santal, il tomba sur le vieux divan.... (*DM*, 161)

Any effort at self-defence on Armand's part is stifled by rich fabric, jewels and perfume, the signifiers of both the princesse's wealth, and, more broadly, of femininity as display. The seduction, juxtaposed with the shopping trip, meanwhile, recall late-nineteenth-

century constructions of the voracious female consumer and her threat to masculine authority. Felski has argued that in Zola's *Au bonheur des dames* (1883), the 'erotically driven nature of female consumption'³³ underpins the novel's depictions of the female shopper. Felski notes that while this consumption appears to be managed by men for profit, the intensely desiring female consumer also threatened to escape male control and indeed to trouble gender hierarchies. Discussing a sales day scene in the novel, she writes of 'the nervous and isolated men squeezed among the compress of excited female bodies [...]. Masculinity is hemmed in and restrained from all sides by female passion'.³⁴

In this very brief account of the moment of seduction, the affair is presented as a *fait accompli*: Delarue-Mardrus's narrator notes Armand's inability to resist, but his more precise reaction is not recorded until after the event. While much of the narrative is focalized by the male protagonist, and his responses to events are elsewhere explored at length, here they are absent. Male subjectivity, as well as agency, dissolves in the *princesse's* scented, enveloping embrace. Having acquired Armand, the *princesse* is 'enchantée' (*DM*, 162), and immediately asks him to visit her the next day to start the portrait. His lack of sexual desire for the *princesse* is compounded by his lack of ambition; his liaison with this rich woman is not a calculated career move, it is the product of economic vulnerability and fear of Julie's response should he lose the commission. There is not even any sense in which Armand anticipates turning the seduction to economic advantage. His immediate thought, after falling victim to his seducer, is that 'la *princesse* abuserait des circonstances pour ne jamais lui payer ce portrait' (*DM*, 162).

³³ Felski, p. 69.

³⁴ Felski, p. 73.

The assumption of Armand's sexual availability also operates in Armand's next affair, again the model for a portrait, his wealthy neighbour Mme de Nouvières. The repeated topos whereby the female model assumes access to the body of the male painter performs an ironic commentary on a more conventional slippage between the male artist's visual and sexual possession of the female model. Armand commences the work in an entirely professional manner, yet quickly becomes aware that, like every other woman he meets, Mme de Nouvières is captivated by him. Like her predecessors Marguerite and the princesse, she expresses her desire with a gesture that Armand experiences as a kind of attack: 'elle était contre lui, le tenant énergiquement aux bras, comme pour le faire prisonnier' (*DM*, 292). Armand is, once more, the captive of the desiring female subject.

The affair with Mme de Nouvières, like all the others, is damaging insofar as it derails the creative project – the portrait, despite Armand's enthusiasm, is never finished – and prevents him from concentrating his attention upon the pursuit of Judith: 'cette présence féminine l'empêchait de penser à fond, de s'absorber dans le supplice d'évoquer l'intangible Judith' (*DM*, 294). Female desire is a peril that the embattled male subject simply cannot evade or resist:

Il ne pouvait pas, à son âge et avec son tempérament, voir devant lui, sans en être ému, palpiter cette femme, bête électrique qui voulait et qui ne voulait pas [...] honnête et perverse, provocante et rétractée, martyrisée et froide, ce monstre, oui, ce monstre féminin dont les yeux immenses couleur d'eau fixaient toujours le vide, pour ne pas révéler leur regard coupable. (*DM*, 290)

The characterization of Mme de Nouvières and of women more generally in this passage indicates Armand's recurrent perception of the female subject as sexual threat and temptation. Indeed, the construction of 'la femme' in this passage, with its polarities of 'honnête' and 'perverse' evokes the virgin/whore binary of misogyny. Moreover, if the 'monstre' of female desire renders the male subject passive, Armand retains the

privilege of human subjectivity. Mme de Nouvières is a ‘bête électrique’, likened to an animal, but also perhaps, through the reference to electricity, to an insentient machine, both categories against which the male subject comes to represent humanity and reason.

Like Marni’s novel, Delarue-Mardrus’s text traces the male subject’s ultimate retreat from sexual circulation and the effects of the desiring, consuming women. In *Pierre Tisserand*, the hero’s flight from seduction is prompted by his encounter with Colette, and is enacted through his engagement to the innocent Henriette La Plaine. Pierre reinstates an illusory male mastery over female desire and its castrating effects, feeling that he casts off his experience of passivity and vulnerability by marrying Henriette. Armand returns to the conjugal relationship, re-affirming his commitment to Julie as *Douce moitié* closes. This move does not signal an attempt to overcome the vulnerability that characterizes his extra-marital affairs. While the bond with Julie serves, like Pierre’s engagement, as a kind of defence against the effects of the novel’s *femme fatale* figures, the marital relationship is presented, comically, as an alternative form of submission to female power. Having given up hope of romance with Judith, Armand definitively wards off the other women by subjecting himself to Julie’s authority once and for all:

— Ecoute-moi bien, Armand ! [...] Je suis une femme de devoir.... Je ne te quitterai plus d’une heure, maintenant !
 Il releva le front, désespéré, soumis et peureux, regarda dans les yeux [...] sa mégère honnête [...] il murmura, vaincu par la destinée :
 — Merci, Julie ! (DM, 365)

Judith’s Failed Rescue

The opening chapter of *Pierre Tisserand* stages women’s mockery of the male subject in distress. Pierre’s former lover, Monique Perle, as well as his mother, arrive to inspect

and laugh at the tiny injury that he has sustained in the duel with Papière. In contrast, *Douce moitié* resembles *Nietzschéenne* insofar as its opening scenes point to the imminent rescue of the male subject by an authoritative and sympathetic woman. Delarue-Mardrus's hero is, as her novel opens, painting the Parisian sunset in the company of his wife and daughter. In keeping with her lack of artistic sensibility, Julie ignores Armand's wish to keep working and sets off angrily for home. As Armand makes his own way across the Pont de la Tournelle, he meets Judith for the first time. Like Armand, she is enjoying the sunset over Paris. Their shared visual appreciation of the city, in contrast with Julie's disinterest, presages the kind of spiritual bond shared by Robert and Jocelyne in *Nietzschéenne*. As they begin to talk, Judith, noticing the canvas Armand is carrying, compliments him, assuring him of his talent (*DM*, 18). Just as Robert is struck by the unusual confidence of Jocelyne as she successfully diagnoses his secret fears, Armand becomes aware of the 'mélange fait de sans-gêne et d'autorité' (*DM*, 19) that characterizes Judith's attitude towards his work. Identifying herself as the founder of Le Foyer des Jeunes Peintres, she intimates that she would like to promote Armand's career, hands him her card and instructs him to visit.

This early meeting inaugurates a process in which, as in *Nietzschéenne*, the female protagonist makes sustained efforts to advance the cause of the struggling male subject. Like Jocelyne, Judith is wealthy, independent and unwilling to place love at the centre of her life, preferring to invest her efforts in work. Judith, like Lesueur's female protagonist, yokes her efforts to the cause of the male subject. The motivational speeches and managerial advice dispensed in *Nietzschéenne* become, in *Douce moitié*, commissions, introductions and repeated assurances of Armand's genius. The specifically gendered aspects of Judith's bolstering of Armand's confidence are initially implicit. However, it is when she provides Armand with a note of introduction for Jacques Langelot, 'le vieux *cher maître* président du « Salon Doré »' (*DM*, 171), that it

becomes clear that Judith, no less than Jocelyne, is trying to make a man of the fearful male subject.

In a novel that draws much comedy from male isolation, encounters between men are few and far between. It is ironic, then, that in an early physical sketch of Armand, he is described as having '[d]es yeux faits pour regarder loyalement les yeux des hommes' (*DM*, 5). Like the blades of the windmill at Beau-Moulin, Armand's loyal eyes are, practically speaking, redundant. The meeting with Langelot constitutes, in this regard, an unusual opportunity for Armand to experience a bond with another man and its potentially empowering effects. In effect, Judith's role is to orchestrate the male homosocial encounter, to overturn Armand's passivity and failure by giving him an entry to what Delarue-Mardrus elsewhere calls 'la corporation masculine'.³⁵ Judith's introduction promises to install a powerful paternal role model in Armand's life, and to establish a relation of identification between 'father' and 'son' that would transform Armand from passive, inept object of female scorn to a more successful, wealthier, master in-the-making.

Upon arrival at the older man's apartment, Armand mistakes the bedroom for the studio, and walks in on a half-dressed Langelot at his mirror. Armand is dismayed at the error, yet Langelot is unconcerned, inviting his guest to remain in the room as he contemplates himself in the glass, and, indeed, encouraging the younger man, with a peremptory 'grogement' (*DM*, 175) to inspect his person. Delarue-Mardrus's narrator describes the figure at the mirror:

dévêtu, le maître fait figure de vieux mendiant. Un dos de soixante-dix ans reste voûté malgré des efforts de redressement ; les deux os des jambes s'arquent, au-

³⁵ Lucie Delarue-Mardrus, *Tout l'amour* (Paris: Tallandier, 1940 [1911]), p. 70. I consider male homosocial bonds, via Sedgwick's highly influential study, in the next chapter.

dessus des orteils accidentés ; sur le crâne chauve et plat s'ébouriffe en biais une mèche blanche. (*DM*, 175)

The painter is, then, in a state of physical decline. His body is stooped; the single lock of white hair draws attention to the baldness of his head. The effect of a lost physical potency is symbolically reinforced by the comparison of this fêted artist to a 'vieux mendiant'. Langelot perceives something very different, however:

Tout à coup, voici qu'il pince entre deux doigts le large ruban rouge pendant sur le linge, et qu'il s'écrie, triomphant, prenant à témoin Armand :

—Hein ?... C'est ça qui vous finit un homme !

Armand n'a pu retenir cette réplique ironique : « En effet !... » Mais vite, pour que le maître ne s'aperçoive de rien, il bredouille compliments et félicitations.

(*DM*, 175-176)

Langelot, beholding his decrepit body adorned with the red ribbon of the Légion d'honneur, is triumphant at the very completeness of the man that he sees before him.

Langelot's perception is not simply that the Légion d'honneur has confirmed his artistic greatness, but also that the award has made him into the finished masculine article. This significance is emphasized by the manner in which the ribbon itself is displayed: Langelot wears it over a white 'liquette' (*DM*, 174), with no other item of clothing to detract from the centrality of 'le large ruban rouge pendant sur le linge'. The ribbon is quite enough to make Langelot feel dressed, suggesting that the prestige it symbolizes supplements its material inadequacy with respect to covering the body. Yet Armand refuses to endorse Langelot's perception that he is dressed by prestige alone. For the younger man, then, the situation is something akin to the emperor's new clothes. The fact that the narrator, in sympathy with Armand, dwells on the nakedness of Langelot, tends to lend credence to his view that the *commandeur's* perception is erroneous or deluded: the red ribbon does not cover Langelot's lack of clothes or the physical and perceptual weaknesses apprehended by Armand. The representation of the Légion d'honneur, both as an award and as a length of red ribbon, is one of

overinvestment, an overinvestment that is brought into relief by Armand as disbelieving witness. The ribbon is thus established as a kind of fetish; it allows Langelot to deny the markers of weakness and impotence that Armand is so quick to perceive.³⁶ The younger man's perception also perhaps highlights the ambiguity that inhabits Langelot's confident assertion that it is the red ribbon 'qui vous finit un homme'. Rather than signalling the finished or complete man, the award, for Armand, *finishes* a man by blinding him to his impotence.

As in *Pierre Tisserand*, a ribbon is evoked in what turns out, for Armand at least, to be a scene of masculine anxiety. For the consequence of Armand's failure of belief is a terrifying questioning of the very foundations of Langelot's authority. Leaving the apartment, Armand experiences a sense of profound disillusionment with a whole system of power:

« Voilà donc ce que c'est qu'un maître, un homme, comme on dit, *arrivé* ! Le pauvre, avec son crâne nu, son vieux dos, ses jambes faibles !... Arriver ! Arriver à quoi ? A mourir, oui ! Ce n'est pas sa pièce de ruban qui le retiendra sur le bord de la fosse !... Alors ?... Est-ce à cela que j'aspire, moi qui commence à faire des démarches ? » (*DM*, 176)

The rules governing artistic success, and, more broadly, the male subject's approximation to the category of *homme arrivé* by ascending the ranks of his profession, appear to the younger artist to be flawed. Continuing on his journey home, Armand

³⁶ The Légion d'honneur's status as a marker of public prestige had long been the subject of mockery. See, for example, Maupassant's short story 'Décoré!' in Maupassant, *Contes et nouvelles*, ed. by Louis Forestier, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1974-1979), I, 1065-1070, which first appeared in *Gil Blas* on 13 November 1883. The political sensitivities attached to women writers mocking the award were, however, made obvious when, in 1908, a rumour began to circulate in the French press that Tinayre was to be awarded the Légion d'honneur. Tinayre had a light-hearted letter published in *Le Temps*, in which she joked that she would prefer a string of pearls to the red ribbon. An outpouring of criticism followed, and Tinayre was eventually denied the award. For an account of this incident, see Mesch, pp. 96-97. Tama Lea Engelking reports that Delarue-Mardrus, meanwhile, was largely uninterested in awards and that she refused the Légion d'honneur three times (Engelking, "L'Ange et les Pervers": Lucie Delarue-Mardrus's Ambivalent Poetic Identity?, *Romance Quarterly*, 39 (1992), 451-466 (p. 464, note 6)).

reflects further on the illusory nature of loyalty and identification among men. Aware of his own hidden contempt for Langelot, Armand recognizes that the admiration of aspiring young men for the *homme arrivé*, no less than the successful man's self-belief, is a collective fiction. The potency and prestige of the powerful masculinity ostensibly embodied by Langelot relies upon this shared repudiation of the facts of male weakness and mortality.

As planned, the encounter that Judith arranges between the two men prompts Armand to imagine himself in the older man's position. Yet rather than filling him with ambition and desire for success, the prospect of emulating Langelot's self-delusion fills Armand with disgust:

« Ah! les plus jeunes, les futurs artistes, ceux qui ne sont encore, actuellement, que des petits garçons au lycée... comme j'ai peur de ceux-là !... Je connais si bien par moi-même la force de mépris qu'on a pour les vieux chéris du public ! »
(*DM*, 177-178)

The refusal of a certain model of inter-generational masculine identification signals a proleptic breakdown of the bonds of masculine power and privilege that the meeting between the two men was orchestrated to forge. Instead, Armand contemplates the renunciation of his own participation in this quest for power, and embraces the very subordinate positions that he is being encouraged to repudiate:

« Etre, d'une part, un peintre inconnu; de l'autre, un amoureux repoussé, serait-ce cela le bonheur ?... Est-ce maintenant, tandis que je souffre tant, que je suis heureux ?... » (*DM*, 178)

Rather than submitting to what he perceives to be a system of collective fiction and self-delusion, Armand gives up on the pursuit of this ideal, embracing failure and symbolic castration.

The exposure of Langelot's self-delusion in this key scene between men suggests Delarue-Mardrus's concern with mocking the claims of powerful, public masculinities

and their reproduction through father/son identification. I would argue that her critique of patriarchal power is limited, however. Delarue-Mardrus's male protagonist embraces his status as unknown painter, spurned lover and subjugated husband. Yet he is still elevated and, indeed, aggrandized. Perspicacity concerning the world's degradations, and the purer consolations of artistic creativity, are still the province of the male subject. Armand retreats to his windmill to paint.

The disastrous encounter with Langelot also marks Armand's refusal to endorse the female rebel's project of making him in a more powerful image. Lesueur's hero draws upon the experience and insights of the New Woman heroine in order to approximate to the category of real man. In *Douce moitié*, the rebellious female subject once again yokes her efforts to the bolstering of masculine confidence and the promotion of the male subject's right to public success and authority. However, if Armand rejects the paternal bond with Langelot, he also refuses to endorse and admire Judith as guardian of his career. Armand's love for Judith, unlike Robert's attachment to Jocelyne, does not embrace and encompass the female subject's status as public actor, patron and protector. He is uninterested in her skills and activities, and spends his time wishing that she would embody a more conventionally feminine position, loving him rather than promoting his success:

Toujours sa figure de bienfaitrice à tous les tournants de ta pensée! Tu meurs d'envie de sa bouche, de son baiser, de son étreinte; et, dès qu'elle t'apparaît, c'est sous un aspect protecteur. Tu es son obligé [...] et tu lui en veux avec un si mâle orgueil! (*DM*, 186)

Armand's failure to valorize Judith's public activities is consistent with the slight and derisive treatment that her unconventional life receives in *Douce moitié*. Indeed, my inclusion of her among the rebellious female characters in this thesis relies upon a willingness to discern connections between Judith and other, more valorized, female protagonists elsewhere in this thesis, and to read against the investments of Delarue-Mardrus's narrator. Judith is externally focalized throughout and her history is discussed

explicitly only once, and in condemnatory fashion, towards the end of the novel. Desperate to find out more about her during a period of cooling in their friendship, Armand recruits the help of a friend, Mme Dolent, who introduces him to Judith's former governess, Mlle Rouyer. It is Mlle Rouyer who offers the novel's only commentary on Judith's past life, describing, in a long and disapproving speech (*DM*, 334-336), a ruthlessly ambitious former model who, having married a well-known artist, sets about concealing her humble origins and infiltrating the upper echelons of Parisian society. Widowed, Judith continues her project, refusing to compromise her reputation with love affairs, and devoting herself to her work in the name of winning official honours.

It is, in fact, the red ribbon of the Légion d'honneur, the very sign of Langelot's delusion and vanity, which is reported to motivate her (*DM*, 336). *Douce moitié*, as well as upholding conventional gender hierarchies via the elevation of Armand above the degraded female lives around him, may also be read as staging a failed female revolt narrative. This failure is multi-faceted: Judith fails to mentor Armand and fails, eventually, to elude his charms. Their romance is ultimately stymied, appropriately, by a late misunderstanding resulting from Armand's tangled love life. More fundamentally, however, Judith and her obsession with the red ribbon figure as Delarue-Mardrus's discrediting of female occupation of the public sphere in this period and of the female subject's effort to evade heterosexuality as the meaning of her life. In this she functions as further evidence of Collado's contention that, while Delarue-Mardrus's fiction of this period is clearly concerned with discussing women's powerlessness, she does not elaborate successful versions of revolt. Collado writes that, '[s]i les textes insistent sur

l'idée que les femmes ont un destin tragique, l'auteure ne propose pas d'alternatives à la situation dénoncée'.³⁷

The encounter between the female rebel and the male protagonist in *Pierre Tisserand* and *Douce moitié* opens up to scrutiny each text's mapping of masculinity and its problems. It is Berthe Robin, rebel against her bourgeois roots and against heterosexuality, who frames Pierre's intense interest in sexual pursuit as a kind of ersatz virility, a compensatory gesture designed to mask his inability to approximate to real masculinity. Like Jocelyne Monestier, Berthe speaks the hidden anxieties that plague the bourgeois male, using them, in Marni's novel, to condemn him rather than to come to his rescue. If Pierre is castigated, Berthe proposes in Dortmund a revalorized, still powerful, masculinity as the ideal to which Pierre will never approximate.

In *Douce moitié*, Delarue-Mardrus constructs a male protagonist who is weak and in thrall to powerful women. However, Armand is nonetheless fêted and endorsed by Delarue-Mardrus's narrator for his aesthetic sensibility and rejection of the markers of public success and prestige. *Douce moitié* stages a failed version of Jocelyne's rescue, offering in largely unsympathetic terms a resolutely autonomous woman, single and suspicious of love as the centre of the female life, who once again yokes her efforts to the cause of the talented male subject. Where Lesueur vindicates Jocelyne as a sexual outlaw, Delarue-Mardrus constructs Judith's rebellion as a degraded quest for empty public honour. The defining moment in Judith's failed project to re-make Armand as a more powerful master or *homme arrivé* is the novel's one salient encounter between men, the disastrous meeting between Armand and Langelot. Armand's retreat from male homosocial bonds is premised on his conception of such relationships as being founded

³⁷ Collado, p. 99.

on collective delusion. It is to the question of bonds between men, and the role of the female rebel in their construction, that I turn in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Triangular Shackles: Masculinity, Male Homosociality and the Female Rebel in Marcelle Tinayre's *La Maison du péché* (1902) and Colette's *L'Entrave* (1913)

In the last chapter, relationships between men emerged, in various ways, as sites of anxiety. In *Pierre Tisserand*, the duel with Sigismond Papière prompts Pierre's anguished reflections on his lack of true manliness in comparison to his 'brute' of an opponent, and upon his reluctance to perform the rites of bourgeois masculinity. Armand Mainteternes, meanwhile, is a lone male subject, lacking the support of other men in his daily battles with overbearing and critical women. The precise significance of Armand's isolation does not become clear, however, until Delarue-Mardrus's protagonist is offered the opportunity to forge a bond of identification with a powerful man; Armand experiences a sense of profound revulsion at the sight of the *homme arrivé* and at the prospect of emulating him. Unlike Pierre, who continues, always unsuccessfully, to cultivate at least the appearance of the ideal bourgeois male, Armand accepts his solitude and failure.

Chapter 3 explores the forms and effects of bonds between men in Tinayre's *La Maison du péché* and Colette's *L'Entrave*. I shift the discussion away from the anxiety and revulsion discussed above towards a consideration of the male homosocial relationship as a mechanism through which masculinities are reproduced and male power secured. In keeping with this study's central concern with the encounter between rebellious women and male subjects, I am particularly interested in the way in which Tinayre and Colette imagine the relationship between male bonds and the female subject. Both novels have at their centre a female protagonist who transgresses the ideals of bourgeois femininity. Tinayre's Fanny Manolé, an irreligious widowed artist, embarks upon a

doomed affair with the devout Augustin de Chanteprie, and brings upon herself the censure of an intensely misogynist Catholic Church. In *L'Entrave*, Colette recounts the development of the relationship between Renée Néré, also the protagonist of *La Vagabonde* (1910), and the rich *bourgeois*, Jean. I suggest that both novels are characterized by male efforts to recuperate the rebellious female subject into a position of domestication and male ownership via the heterosexual relationship. The accomplishment of this re-positioning, meanwhile, is in various ways effected or authorized by the workings of a bond between men that, in implicating a second male protagonist, triangulates the heterosexual couple.

In her highly influential study, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*,¹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick examines what she takes to be a congruence between male-dominated erotic triangles (in which two men vie for one woman) and the larger patriarchal structures through which women are oppressed and masculine hegemony reproduced. Sedgwick argues that such erotic triangles offer parallels with the exchange of women between men that Gayle Rubin, reading Claude Lévi-Strauss, terms 'the traffic in women'.² Drawing on these conceptualizations of the male-dominated erotic triangle as a 'graphic schema'³ of patriarchal power, I point to its specific significance in *La Maison du péché* and *L'Entrave*. In each case the novel's central heterosexual relationship is triangulated by the interventions of a second male figure, thus forming a rival bond between men that, in different ways, controls, constrains, or determines the contours of, the heterosexual relationship. Excluded from the more powerful male

¹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

² Gayle Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex', in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. by Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), pp. 157-210.

³ Sedgwick, p. 21.

relationship, the female subject is instead adopted or recuperated as an object of exchange for the sustenance of the privileged bond between men.

Sedgwick's study interrogates what is at stake in the bond that links two male rivals. Drawing on René Girard's reflections in *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque*, Sedgwick notes that the bond linking the two rivals or 'active' members of the triangle may be 'even stronger, more heavily determinant of actions and choices, than anything in the bond between either of the lovers and the beloved'.⁴ From here emerges the question of how far the intensity of this bond of rivalry between men in fact unsettles the distinction between identification and desire. Sedgwick investigates the historically variable manner in which what she terms 'male homosocial desire' – referring to the range of attachments and shared interests that bind men together in patriarchal cultures – relates to the homosexual. My reading of Tinayre and Colette in this chapter attempts to engage with some of these insights by scrutinizing relations of rivalry, identification and desire in the novels. I explore, for example, the bonds of tutelage and friendship between central male characters in both texts, noting the instability of relations of identification and desire that inhabit such bonds. I also note that, while both texts offer versions of heterosexual 'traffic in women', the gender positions within the erotic triangle are subject to re-interpretation. For example, in a move that accentuates the threat posed by the rebellious female subject to masculine supremacy, in Tinayre's novel, sexual rivalry between men is displaced to the struggle between male mentor and female lover for possession of the younger male figure.⁵

⁴ Sedgwick, p. 21.

⁵ Reeser has discussed the mutability of the model of the erotic triangle constituted by two male rivals competing for one female object. He argues that 'it might make sense to say that it is not the model's existence in itself that is so important in thinking about constructs of masculinity and the ways in which masculinity functions through detours of desire. Rather, the very transformation or permutation of the model reveals as much about gender, sexuality, masculinity, and power as the model on its own static terms' (Reeser, *Masculinities*, p. 64).

1. *La Maison du péché* : Objects of Faith

Marcelle Tinayre (née Chasteau, 1872-1948) was born to a bourgeois family in Tulle. Encouraged to write and study, Tinayre, like Yver, began her literary career at an early age, publishing her first short story at the age of 14.⁶ In 1888, she took, and passed, the baccalauréat, before marrying in the same year. Her first novel, *Avant l'amour*, appeared in 1897 with Mercure de France, the publishing house founded in 1894 by Rachilde's husband Alfred Vallette. In the years after 1900, most of Tinayre's abundant fictional output was published by Calmann-Lévy. As well as writing fiction, Tinayre was an active journalist and *chroniqueuse*, producing many articles for *La Fronde*, where she met and became friends with Delarue-Mardrus.⁷ Later, she went on to write a regular column for *Le Journal* under the pseudonym Madeleine Mirande.

If Tinayre was a prolific and commercially successful writer in the years between 1900 and 1914, many critics singled out *La Maison du péché* as her finest work of this period. In a slightly sardonic chapter about Tinayre in his 1911 study of contemporary women writers, Ernest Tissot reflected on her lucrative career, calling her 'le phénix de la librairie parisienne'⁸ and noting that her novels had paid for the property outside Paris where she resided with her husband, her 'prince consort'.⁹ Turning to her fiction, Tissot lamented 'la perpétuelle réédition de la même histoire d'adultère'.¹⁰ For Tissot, *La*

⁶ Detailed biographical information about Tinayre can be found in France Grenaudier-Klijn, *Une littérature de circonstances: texte, hors-texte et ambiguïté générique à travers quatre romans de Marcelle Tinayre* (Bern: Lang, 2004) and Alain Quélla-Villéger, *Belles et rebelles: le roman vrai des Chateau-Tinayre* (Bordeaux: Aubéron, 2000).

⁷ Quélla-Villéger, p. 240.

⁸ Ernest Tissot, *Nouvelles princesses de lettres* (Lausanne : Payot, [1911]), p. 160.

⁹ Tissot, p. 177.

¹⁰ Tissot, p. 162

Maison du péché was, however, worthy of extravagant praise; he termed it ‘un pur chef d’œuvre’, adding that it was the ‘gloire d’une carrière qui compte, hélas! ... plus d’un péché... littéraire!’.¹¹

La Maison du péché, which first appeared in *La Revue de Paris* in early 1902, recounts the story of the young Catholic Augustin de Chanteprie, tracing his strict upbringing at the Chanteprie family home at Hautfort, outside Paris, his doomed affair with the widowed artist, Fanny Manolé, and, following the end of their relationship, his painful, grief-stricken death. Rivalling Fanny for Augustin’s loyalty is Élie Forgerus, the young man’s preceptor, whose role as surrogate father, teacher, and moral guardian sustains his involvement in Augustin’s life throughout the novel. Fanatically religious and virulently misogynist, Forgerus inculcates an intense suspicion of women in his pupil, conflating the feminine with Eve’s degraded sexuality. The preceptor-pupil bond finally wins out, Forgerus persuading Augustin to renounce Fanny in the name of faith, a move which Tinayre’s novel presents as a kind of crime against nature.

This male-centred text is atypical among Tinayre’s novels of this period, most of which are primarily concerned with young female protagonists. Recent critical interest in her work reflects this pattern, focusing on feminist discourse, constructions of the New Woman and themes of female professionalization in Third Republic France, notably in *La Rebelle*, in which Tinayre’s protagonist is a journalist who identifies herself as a *femme nouvelle*.¹² The thematic affiliation between *La Maison du péché* and Tinayre’s other novels of the period lies in the construction of Fanny as an independent woman who challenges the demands of bourgeois femininity, both with regard to her professional activity and where sexual morality is concerned. A number of Tinayre’s novels explore

¹¹ Tissot, pp. 143-144.

¹² Readings of *La Rebelle* appear in Rogers, *Career Stories*; Holmes, *Romance and Readership*; Grenaudier-Klijn; Collado.

women's negotiation of sexual relationships and challenge the constraints of the social and moral codes governing female sexuality in this period. Fanny, like Josanne in *La Rebelle*, defends her right to pursue love and sex outside marriage.

In her reading of the novel, Mesch positions *La Maison du péché* within a naturalist tradition, suggesting that it constitutes a version of the Zolian experimental novel in which Tinayre criticizes the misogyny that inheres in naturalist and Catholic discourses of sexuality.¹³ Tinayre, Mesch suggests, is concerned with pointing out the ways in which the fear and hatred of women that inhere in discursive constructions of female sexuality in particular are harmful for both women and men, leading to the demonization and exploitation of Fanny and to Augustin's guilt-ridden death.¹⁴ In paying close attention to the effects of discourses operating around sexuality, Mesch's reading is very much concerned with power asymmetries drawn along gender lines, and, by implication, with forms of masculine domination. In Tinayre's novel, she argues, the female subject is revealed as 'the object of discourse and not its speaker'.¹⁵ However, Mesch's reading is not primarily concerned with the novel's depiction of men. Or, more precisely, it does not engage in detail with what the novel has to say about male subjectivity, or about what is at stake in the transactions between men, in particular as they relate to the control and exchange of women. It is to these questions that I now turn in my own reading of *La Maison du péché*.

¹³ Mesch, p. 86.

¹⁴ Mesch, p. 95.

¹⁵ Mesch, p. 90.

Excluding the Feminine

The opening chapters of Tinayre's novel trace the narrative of Augustin's Catholic education and passage from childhood to his early twenties. The Chanteprie family home is a stronghold of strict Catholicism. Resisting the tolerant, modernizing impulses of the clergy in Hautfort and beyond, Augustin's mother, Thérèse-Angélique, and his preceptor, Forgerus, adhere to the rigorous self-denial of the hero's namesake, St Augustine. Their religious practice is also characterized by a respect for the Jansenist traditions of the Chanteprie family. The theme of Jansenism, a Catholic revolt movement with its roots in the teachings of the seventeenth-century Dutch bishop and theologian Cornelius Jansen, serves as an index both of the archaism of the Chanteprie family, and of the uncompromising nature of its religious beliefs and practice; one of the key tenets of Jansenism, drawn from St Augustine, was the belief that Catholics had no power over their own salvation.¹⁶

Under the direction of Forgerus, the formation of the young Catholic male is predicated upon a radical rejection of forms of feminine influence over the child, and upon the construction of an all-male community. The preceptor arrives in France from Beirut, having left behind the Catholic college that he founded there with a colleague, l'abbé de Grandville. As soon as Augustin's education is complete, Forgerus returns there. The college figures as a utopian elsewhere in the novel, a newly-founded community of men outside the borders of a France associated with increasing secularization, feminization and degradation. Upon arrival at Hautfort, he establishes another single-sex community, taking up residence with his new student in a dilapidated house on the Chanteprie estate. Women are excluded from this site of male study and prayer. Augustin is no longer to live under the same roof as his mother, and Forgerus

¹⁶ See William Doyle, *Jansenism: Catholic Resistance to Authority from the Reformation to the French Revolution* (London: Macmillan, 2000).

forbids his pupil from spending time with the family's servant Jacquine and with the devout family friend Cariste Courdimanche, whose 'gâteaux sucrés' and 'historiettes pieuses' (*MP*, 36-37) are offensive to the preceptor.

Thérèse-Angélique, concurring with Forgerus's approach, consigns Augustin to the preceptor's care, declaring that 'la femme ne sait pas élever l'homme' (*MP*, 11). Forgerus's appearance in Hautfort, in exiling Augustin from the maternal home and body, institutes the paternal prohibition on the mother as object of the son's intense desire, and cultivates, through all-male education and prayer, a closer identification between 'father' and son. The importance of this process is heightened by the absence of Augustin's father, a sickly young man who died shortly after his son's birth. The notion that the reproduction of masculinity depends upon paternal-filial identification, a point discussed later in my reading of Colette's novel, here requires the intervention of Forgerus as surrogate father figure.

In *La Maison du péché*, the removal of the boy from relationships with women is not only premised on the aim of cultivating his identification with other men. The feminine is here both refused as a site of identification and closely associated with sin and degradation. The feminine represents a threat not only to the boy's accomplishment of a successful masculinity, but also menaces his moral probity. Forgerus conflates the feminine with Eve's degraded sexuality. Women function as bearers of the sin that threatens to lead the Christian male to his destruction. The implication of this conflation is a barring of women from partnership in the exalted Catholic bonds linking men and God. Sin, corporeality and sexuality are assigned to the female subject, distancing even the most virtuous Catholic woman from God. For example, Thérèse-Angélique, complicit with Forgerus in her identification of femininity with sexuality and destruction, eventually blames herself for Augustin's sinful relationship with Fanny: 'Hélas! j'ai été femme, et j'ai été mère...Ce qui sort de la boue retourne à la boue : le fils

de la femme retourne à la femme' (*MP*, 309). Mesch, commenting on Thérèse-Angélique's lament, writes: 'the use of the passé composé for "j'ai été femme" suggests that religious virtue is incompatible with femininity: it is achieved after having been a wife and a mother'.¹⁷ Yet even when her son is an adult, Augustin's mother feels bound to take the responsibility for his moral fall.

The preceptor attempts to erase the primary role of the mother in the creation of the male subject and to institute a male bond that will supersede and suppress this formative influence. The physical and moral supplanting of the maternal/feminine influence over the young child extends to the elaboration of a narrative of male, spiritual autogenesis, allowing for the repudiation of the role of both the body and the feminine in the making of men. Erasing the biological ties linking Augustin to his mother, Forgerus reflects that his pupil 'était devenu le fils bien-aimé de son esprit' (*MP*, 36), recreated by his new master. Dismissing the mother's role, he appropriates the creative function and the object of creation for himself: 'passionné pour son œuvre, Elie souhaite tenir Augustin dans sa main, le former à sa guise... La mère elle-même parut s'effacer' (*MP*, 36-37).

Forgerus's paternal creation of Augustin is authorized with reference to God, the spiritual father-son relationship that he cultivates with Augustin replicating the exalted bond that links the devout Catholic male to God and Christ. Hence Forgerus's tutelage of Augustin is itself informed by the preceptor's role as servant of God:

« Seigneur, priait Forgerus ... Le jardinier taille la jeune plante, la redresse, l'assujettit au tuteur [...] mais ce n'est pas lui qui fait germer la graine, et monter la sève, et s'ouvrir la fleur ... Ménagez à la frêle plante humaine la pluie et le vent, le soleil et l'ombre. Je travaillerai pour elle ; elle fleurira pour vous. » (*MP*, 29)

¹⁷ Mesch, p. 87.

Thus the closed relation of preceptor and pupil is forged within a more elevated allegiance to another powerful male, God figured as 'Seigneur'. Forgerus's prayer, meanwhile, adds another layer to his own narrative of masculine autogenesis by positing God as holder of the generative power over the young Augustin, a divine life source that, aided by Forgerus as male earthly guardian, circumvents the maternal body.

The circumvention of the feminine attests to Forgerus's ideal of constructing masculinity and its reproduction as an autonomous and self-grounding system in which the male subject is freed from dependency on the maternal and upon femininity. Yet this ideal of the incontrovertible otherness and exteriority of the feminine, rather than being a *fait accompli*, is in fact only achieved through repeated acts of vilification and expulsion. The recurrent imagery of the feminine as an enemy that menaces the male subject, 'l'impure Ennemie [qui] viendrait rôder autour de cette âme en fleur...' (*MP*, 36), suggests the ongoing vigilance that is required to repel it. This reiterative project is undertaken by Forgerus on behalf of Augustin when he is a child; once he is an adult, it is a task that the younger man is expected to accomplish for himself. Thus, the moulding of a man is not, in fact, a temporally circumscribed process, but rather the inculcation in the male child of a set of necessary defensive acts. Tinayre's account of masculinity points, in Butler's terms, to gender as a doing rather than a being,¹⁸ enacted through the repeated re-inscription of a boundary between an ostensibly closed system of masculinity and an exterior identified as feminine. The claims to autonomy from a debased femininity are thus undercut by a radical dependency; masculinity is only constructed against, and in relationship to, the feminine.

¹⁸ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 33.

Recuperating Women

Despite Forgerus's idealization of a male community that expels women altogether, the novel interrogates the role of women and heterosexual relationships in the securing and consolidation of the primacy of male bonds. Women, through sanctioned forms of heterosexuality, are appropriated and deployed in order to sustain the valorized all-male bond. Therefore, while Tinayre's novel can be characterized as a doomed heterosexual love story, the text in fact explores the ways in which the heterosexual relationship is always enmeshed in a male homosocial relationship that takes precedence over it.

The conceptualization of marriage as the control and disposal of the female subject in line with male interest is outlined in a letter from Forgerus to Augustin. The preceptor, having left his post at Hautfort to return to Beirut, has been apprised of the proposed marriage between his pupil and a young Parisian Catholic, Eulalie Loiselier. The necessary subordination of the marital bond to the more exalted aim of nurturing Augustin's relationship with God is made clear. Marital devotion must constitute another way of loving God:

prenez garde d'aimer la créature autant que Dieu, ou de ne point l'aimer en Dieu. Redoutez ces ruses de tendresse féminine, ces jalousies, ces prières, qui, sous couleur d'amitié conjugale, incitent l'homme à une espèce d'idolâtrie non moins criminelle que celle des païens ... Aimez votre femme et n'adorez que Dieu.
(*MP*, 63-64)

Forgerus's view of women as the embodiment of a dreaded sexuality finds expression in his instruction that Augustin resist the deceitful 'ruses' of feminine devotion; marriage is viewed as a version of the 'combat mystérieux' (*MP*, 63) that pits the pure Catholic male against woman *as* sex. The husband's domination of the dangerous wife within this marital struggle holds the promise, however, of morally elevating him and bringing him closer to God. Forgerus prays ardently that Augustin's marriage 'accroisse [ses] mérites en assurant [son] bonheur' (*MP*, 64).

The woman's role in this transaction is to serve as a vehicle of moral evil who allows the husband, through his proper governance and salvation of her, to consolidate his privileged relationship to the Lord. She figures as an object of exchange, the husband delivering up a morally submissive wife to God, and receiving his own blessing in return. As Forgerus goes on: 'saisissez cette âme avec une sainte violence: triomphez d'elle pour la sauver, emportez-la par les chemins de l'éternelle vérité jusqu'à la vie éternelle' (*MP*, 64). Loving a woman is a way of perpetuating a bond of implicitly male love, the heterosexual bond enmeshed in, and subject to, the spiritual (male) relationship with God: 'l'aimer *en* Dieu' (*MP*, 63; emphasis mine). The marriage plot is here outlined as a mechanism of control elaborated by men, for men, and in which the woman's desire is both indicted as a problem and refused as a factor in the forging of the contract; Eulalie's wishes are never at stake.

The construction of Augustin's prospective wife as a token whose proper use will ensure his own favoured position in relation to God recalls the structures of male homosociality and exchange outlined by a number of feminist theorists of patriarchal power, including Rubin and Irigaray. In an influential essay, Rubin analyses the implications of Lévi-Strauss's contention that the exchange of women among groups of men is fundamental to the emergence of kinship systems and hence to human society. Inscribed in this process of exchange are distinct asymmetries with respect to the role and power of men and women. As Rubin remarks:

If it is women who are being transacted, then it is the men who give and take them who are linked, the woman being a conduit of exchange rather than a partner to it... If women are the gifts, then it is men who are the exchange partners. And it is the partners, not the presents, upon whom reciprocal exchange confers its quasi-mystical powers of social linkage.¹⁹

¹⁹ Rubin, p. 174.

The exclusion of women from such partnerships is theorized elsewhere by Irigaray as a masculine monopoly on systems of social, sexual and economic exchange that she terms *hom(m)o-sexualité*.²⁰

The plans that Forgerus makes for Augustin's marriage to Eulalie never come to fruition. Plain Mlle Loiselier cannot compete with Fanny, who arrives in Hautfort just as the courtship process has begun. Yet the terms of the conjugal bond outlined by the preceptor – male policing of female sexuality and the husband's salvation of the wife in the name of his own relationship with God – are replicated in Augustin's relationship with Fanny. Here, the husband's battle to master the wife's dangerous sexuality takes the form of Augustin's attempts to convert Fanny to Catholicism. Again, the shape of the heterosexual relationship, or more properly, the woman's position in it, are negotiated between men. Forgerus's role as philosopher of marriage is here taken by Augustin's friend, the priest Vitalis. It is the priest who, like Forgerus before him, alerts Augustin to the problem of heterosexual desire, and proposes a way of managing it:

Je crois donc faire mon devoir, non pas seulement de prêtre, mais d'ami, en vous aidant à prendre conscience d'un amour qui naît... C'est un monstre qu'il faut tirer à la lumière, qu'il faut regarder en face pour le dompter ou l'anéantir....
(MP, 117)

Vitalis, like Forgerus, construes sexual desire as an enemy that must be mastered; like the preceptor, he sites sexual danger in the female body. Just as sexual desire is likened to a 'monstre' to be tamed, so, later in the same conversation, Vitalis refers to women as 'animaux' (MP, 117), another category outside of the human, in order to warn Augustin of the perils that await him. The same terms, it can be recalled, are deployed in a very different context in *Douce moitié*, as Delarue-Mardrus's narrator adumbrates Armand's inability to resist the 'monstre' of female desire. For Tinayre's Catholic men, the way to

²⁰ See 'Le Marché des femmes' (pp. 165-185) and 'Des marchandises entre elles' (pp. 187-193) in Luce Irigaray, *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Minuit, 1977).

tame this nascent sexual desire is to channel it into ‘un amour chaste et noble qui a le mariage pour fin’ (*MP*, 115), a practice that, once again, amounts to the shackling of woman as vehicle of sexuality. Vitalis both inaugurates the central heterosexual relationship by articulating Augustin’s inchoate feelings towards Fanny as love, and sets the terms within which this relationship can take place: within the same marital structure defined earlier by Forgerus, in the service of exalted Catholic male bonds. However, in Fanny’s case, this requires conversion to Catholicism.

Within the framework established by the two men, the formation of a legitimate relationship between Augustin and Fanny is inextricably bound up with the project of her conversion. The initiation of Fanny’s religious education, for example, occurs during a visit that Augustin and Vitalis make to her house, in which Augustin joins his as yet unavowed courtship to the priest’s pastoral duties. As in *L’Entrave*, discussed below, the scene of triangular seduction involves two men occupying a designated female space. Where Masseur and Jean intrude upon Renée’s refuge, her hotel room, here the two male characters arrive uninvited at Fanny’s house, a property bought by her godmother as ‘un refuge assuré’ (*MP*, 50) in which Fanny might work to progress her career. The two men intrude upon a maternal and creative space, in order to test her religious faith, and, finding it to be lacking, they seek to correct her recalcitrance by drawing her into Catholicism.

As in *L’Entrave*, this invasion, in inaugurating the central heterosexual bond, begins the process of undermining the female subject’s independence. Having embarked upon the relationship with Augustin, Fanny’s art is sidelined as she focuses her efforts on the relationship. In a later scene at an exhibit at which Fanny’s work is on show, some of her male artist friends discuss, in her absence, Fanny’s attitudes to work and love. While admiring her work, the men discredit her as an artist by positing that her interests, as a woman, necessarily lie elsewhere:

Elle serait une véritable artiste ... si elle pouvait envoyer l'amour au diable.
[...] Les femmes seront toujours des artistes médiocres : leur fonction, à elles,
leur génie, leur bonheur, c'est l'amour... (MP, 254)

Tinayre exposes the dilemma of the female artist's position in this discussion between men; the woman's primary interest in love will override her artistic capabilities, however great they might be. While Tinayre herself combined marriage and family life with prolific literary production and much acclaim, her interrogation of this conceit *en abîme* only endorses the words of men. For Fanny's desires, ambitions and ideas as an artist, as opposed to a lover, are never voiced in the novel, even if, in this scene, they are a subject of debate between men.

Returning to the pastoral visit, the two men intimate that Fanny's ignorance of religion constitutes a spiritual poverty. Vitalis having gently broached the subject of religion, it falls to Augustin to counter her claims to 'une ignorance heureuse' (MP, 105) with an impassioned speech:

Et vous, suspendue sur l'abîme, dans les ténèbres, sans autre lumière qu'une
raison vacillante et prête à s'éteindre, vous osez vous prétendre heureuse... (MP,
106)

Fanny's endorsement of Augustin's pronouncement through the subsequent admission that 'Je ne suis pas heureuse' (MP, 107) marks the turn from confident un-belief to a recognition of herself in the image of spiritual poverty that Augustin constructs. This ready admission, as later becomes apparent, however, derives from the grafting of religious lack onto what Fanny takes to be a more important lack: the lack of a romantic partner. This inaugural move in the project of Fanny's conversion is followed quickly by mutual declarations of love between Augustin and Fanny, and by the delivery of the latter to a more experienced agent of conversion, the aptly-named priest of Hautfort, l'abbé Le Tourneur. It is the efforts of another second man, the confessor, to determine the fate of Augustin and Fanny's relationship.

Initially anxious to please Augustin, Fanny willingly listens to le Tourneur's instruction. Aside from the specifically religious teaching, she is also asked to acknowledge her necessary subordination in the male-dominated hierarchy of Catholicism, and her inferior access to the truths shared among men. Fanny, recounting Le Tourneur's views to Vitalis, reflects bitterly that, for Le Tourneur, 'On peut, on doit discuter avec un homme ; à une femme, on doit imposer les idées, despotiquement' (*MP*, 155). Fanny's early enthusiasm for Catholicism rapidly dissolves; her dialogues with Le Tourneur descend into 'duels acharnés où le prêtre et la femme se battaient à coups de noms célèbres' (*MP*, 155) as they evoke great atheists and great Catholics as support for their opposing perspectives.

Fanny's unwillingness to take up the role offered to her by Catholic teaching creates a conflict between the claims of the male-dominated hierarchy upon Augustin and the demands of the heterosexual relationship that she wishes to establish with him. Effectively, Fanny refuses the role of token offered to her in the particular configuration of male-dominated exchange elaborated and idealized by Forgerus. While this arrangement, as discussed above, harnesses a problematic female sexuality for the sustenance of exalted bonds between men, Fanny articulates alternative claims to her own sexuality, based on her privileging of love unconstrained by Catholic teaching. The neat meshing of male primacy and sanctioned heterosexuality adumbrated by the preceptor when he lays out the terms of Augustin's marriage to Eulalie thus breaks down. This revolt against Le Tourneur is not, however, a prelude to a reconfigured heterosexual relationship or indeed to Fanny's reassertion of autonomy. Fanny, having refused to submit to the role allotted to the female subject by Catholicism, is expelled from Augustin's life altogether. When this occurs, late in Tinayre's novel, there is no celebration of female autonomy, but rather a confirmation that love is very much the meaning of Fanny's existence: 'écrasée, maintenant, silencieuse, elle ne bouge plus...

[...] Ses yeux vacillent, noyés de ténèbres, et le désir de la mort emplît son cœur'

(*MP*, 344). Left alone in her Parisian studio, Fanny experiences the loss as a kind of death sentence, while the privileged bonds between men remain intact.

Rivalry and Heterosexual Love

If Fanny's efforts to prise Augustin from Forgerus's control are doomed to failure, this failure is presented not solely as a fruitless challenge to paternal authority, but also as the resolution of a love triangle in which she unsuccessfully vies with the preceptor. Prior to Forgerus's return to Hautfort from Beirut, a journey he makes to end the relationship between Fanny and his student, Fanny embarks upon a quest to win Augustin to her belief in the primacy of sexual passion and her disregard for religious doctrine:

doucement, sournoisement, refaisant en sens inverse la même manœuvre qu'Augustin avait tentée sur son âme, elle rêva de conquérir celui qui ne l'avait point conquise, de convertir le chrétien farouche à la seule religion de la vie... (*MP*, 169-170).

Fanny's avowed wish for possession of Augustin constitutes a reiteration of the terms of the preceptor's own desires towards his pupil. Meditating on their relationship early in the novel, Forgerus is also described as seeking to possess Augustin: '[Forgerus] se donna tout entier à son pupille pour le posséder tout entier ... Et désormais, sans réserve, le disciple appartient au maître' (*MP*, 36-37). These overlapping images of conquest and possession hint that the opposing claims of lover and tutor in some sense constitute an erotic rivalry, albeit one that is never avowed as such.

Having convinced Augustin that he must renounce his lover, Forgerus sets off for Paris to deliver the news to Fanny. During this dialogue, when Fanny charges Forgerus with being unable to understand her relationship with Augustin because he has never loved, the preceptor replies: 'je n'ai jamais aimé que Dieu, son Église, et Augustin de Chanteprie' (*MP*, 340). His statement is, in one sense, subtended by an implicit discrepancy concerning the love to which the rivals refer. Fanny speaks of romantic

love, Forgerus of a chaste devotion linking the father figure and teacher with his student. In fact, this male attachment is, for Forgerus, elevated precisely by its construction against a sexuality exclusively aligned with women. Yet the parallel images of possession, and the intense rivalry, tend towards the blurring of the categories of erotic/non-erotic that Forgerus so anxiously polices. Fanny's dream of the sexual conquest of Augustin, meanwhile, is suggestive of the female protagonist's appropriation of a conventionally masculine conceptualization of the heterosexual relation. The rivalry between Fanny and Forgerus, therefore, also suggests the mutability of the masculine/feminine, active/passive positions in Sedgwick's paradigmatic male-dominated triad, in which two men struggle over one woman.²¹

Tinayre constructs Forgerus as the representative of a system of bonds between men that idealizes the refusal of heterosexuality but, failing refusal, permits it only in highly circumscribed terms: heterosexuality construed as male control of the feared and hated female body in the service of God. The novel's criticism of these bonds, however, is founded upon a kind of oppositional move whereby heterosexual love – understood, in secular terms, as a transcendent force giving meaning to life – is both naturalized and presented as the basis of the most valuable social and spiritual relationship. Forgerus's ruination of Augustin's participation in heterosexual relationships on these secular terms is presented both as the perpetuation of a falsehood – his name evokes forgery – and as a kind of perversion of the male subject. As Fanny remarks to the preceptor:

²¹ Tinayre's novel offers other revisions of the male-dominated triangle. For example, complex bonds of love and loyalty link Augustin, his servant Jacqueline, and Fanny, to whom Jacqueline rapidly becomes devoted. Late in the novel, Fanny and Jacqueline unsuccessfully conspire to remove Augustin from the stifling religiosity of Hautfort, joined both in devotion to him and in their suspicion of Catholicism's restrictions on sex and love. The alliance between Jacqueline and Fanny points to an alternative economy of sexual power in the novel, an economy in which women's subjugation within the patriarchal Catholic hierarchy is perhaps open to re-negotiation. It is an escape route proposed to, and refused by, Augustin, an alternative configuration of allegiances that he rejects in favour of male Catholic loyalties.

Vous avez pu manier l'esprit d'un enfant, lui montrer partout le vice, salir dans sa pensée la femme et l'amour ! [...] D'un homme, vous avez fait un moine, un halluciné, un infirme, incapable de vivre et d'aimer. (*MP*, 335)

The stymieing of Augustin's ability to take part in heterosexual exchange is viewed as a perversion of the naturalized desires that attach to the category of 'homme' in the name of a corrupt ascetic ideal.

Forgerus's 'false' position outside a naturalized order of heterosexual desire is presented as the result of inexperience. The preceptor's status as a lay teacher rather than a priest allows him to span the clerical and secular worlds, yet his path through life has taken him from one male enclave to the next: 'M. Forgerus avait passé du collège au séminaire, et du séminaire au collège' (*MP*, 30). He has, meanwhile, culled his limited knowledge of love from books: 'il n'avait rien su des passions que par les livres, et n'avait rien aimé avec excès que la théologie et les belles-lettres' (*MP*, 30). The repudiation of heterosexual desire is thus rooted in an educational lacuna whose deleterious effects are passed from teacher to pupil.

Tinayre's novel works, however, to illustrate the value of experience and to underline Forgerus's 'corrupted' state by inducting him into heterosexual desire. As the preceptor delivers the news of the final rupture with Augustin, he initially listens coldly to Fanny's outrage at his success in dividing the couple. However, Forgerus witnesses a change in her attitude when Fanny begins to realize the permanence of the break:

Muette, elle saisit les mains de Forgerus : — et, à cette minute, le geste de la suppliante, l'admirable éloquence de son regard fixe et de sa bouche entr'ouverte, atteignirent à la beauté plus qu'humaine que les artistes ont entrevue et réalisée quelquefois. [...] Pour la première fois, devant une femme, il fut homme, attendri, charmé, presque vaincu... (*MP*, 340)

Forgerus's enforcement of his set of sexual proscriptions almost founders through his own novel experience of sexual desire and pity for Fanny. The female subject is offered up as a peculiarly affecting object whose value is pathetic, erotic and above all eloquent concerning a sexual order in which 'femme' and 'homme' are joined in mutual desire.

Forgerus is almost convinced of the fundamental correctness of authorizing heterosexual love when he, at long last, takes up the position of powerful, desiring heterosexual male subject, when he becomes an ‘homme’ faced with a beautiful and submissive woman. While this moment, in suggesting his susceptibility to heterosexual desire, hints at an alternative set of loyalties for Forgerus, it is notable that the gender hierarchies remain. Tinayre stages the heterosexual temptation, for the preceptor, as a different version of masculine authority over the female subject; Fanny is only desirable at this moment of supplication. This is consistent with the recurrent construction, in Tinayre’s work, with heterosexuality as necessarily premised on feminine submission, even in the case of her most rebellious female characters.

Forgerus’s failure to concede to the attractions of heterosexuality indicates, within the terms of Tinayre’s novel, that he is too mired in his own doctrine to recognize the purported naturalness of the order of sexual desire and power that he so briefly experiences. Forgerus is for religion against nature:

il ne se demanda pas s’il avait le droit de les séparer, ces deux âmes, et s’il n’avait pas commis une sorte de crime contre la nature, en violentant la conscience d’Augustin, en substituant sa propre volonté à la volonté du jeune homme. L’idée qu’Augustin et Fanny devaient seuls, d’un plein accord, libres de toute influence étrangère, disposer de leurs personnes et de leur destinée, cette idée subversive et choquante n’effleura même pas l’esprit de M. Forgerus. (*MP*, 339)

This interjection, a rare instance in which Tinayre’s narrator takes up an explicitly judgemental position concerning the actions of her characters, serves as an explicit instruction to the reader to construe Forgerus’s decision as criminal and perverse. This guidance underlines the specific ideological investments of Tinayre’s novel: Forgerus is a target of criticism not only because of his misogyny but also because the particular structure of masculine domination that he advocates is incompatible with the text’s premise that romantic heterosexual love is both natural and inherently valuable, even if, as noted, it is also pervasively aligned with forms of masculine domination of women.

Forgerus's suppression of his feelings for Fanny, and successful destruction of her relationship with Augustin, signals the triumph of the preceptor's 'false' set of laws and proscriptions and the defeat of the natural and good. The novel's indictment of such an outcome is later made clear via the narrator's glossing of Augustin's wordless reproach as he looks around at his mother and her friends from his deathbed:

Il n'avait plus de paroles... Son regard seul vivait encore, son regard conscient, lucide, chargé de rancune farouche. Et ce regard [...] semblait dire :
« Qu'avez-vous fait de moi ? » (MP, 401)

Tinayre constructs the encounter between Forgerus and Fanny, and, more specifically, Forgerus's experience of desire for Fanny, as a particularly significant moment in the narrative: it is the moment when Augustin, and the ideal of romantic heterosexual love, might be saved, ironically, by the teacher submitting to something akin to an education.

2. L'Entrave: Double Binds

Colette's (Gabrielle Sidonie Colette, 1873-1954) life is more familiar than that of any of the other writers discussed in this study, and has been a subject of enduring fascination for critics and biographers.²² Born in Burgundy, Colette married the writer Henri Gauthier-Villars, known as Willy, in 1893, and moved to Paris. Colette soon numbered among the writers who produced copy for Willy to publish under his own name. This copy included, most notably, the famous *Claudine* novels, beginning in 1900 with *Claudine à l'école*. Their success brought the young Colette into the public eye, her celebrity nurtured by Willy's marketing campaigns, for which Colette would often dress up as her heroine on and off stage. The couple separated in 1906, after which Colette embarked upon a career as a music hall performer, and continued as a journalist and

²² Among many studies see Michèle Sarde, *Colette, libre et entravée* (Paris: Stock, 1978) and Judith Thurman, *Secrets of the Flesh: A Life of Colette* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999).

fiction writer, initially adopting the penname Colette Willy. Many of Colette's texts, including *La Vagabonde* and *L'Entrave*, display parallels with her own life, and she recurrently demonstrates a complex, often playful approach to the relationship between fiction and autobiography.

Lawrence Schehr recently remarked that, 'starting with the *Claudine* series and continuing through much of her writing, Colette's protagonists are almost invariably women and her explorations of the feminine sit at the heart of her writing'.²³ *L'Entrave*, a novel dealing with a woman's struggle to balance love, desire and personal freedom, narrated by its heroine, in many ways conforms to the pattern identified by Schehr. However, I read in this female-centred novel an echo of the forms of male exclusion and subjugation of the female subject analysed above in *La Maison du péché*. Colette's protagonist and narrator is Renée Néré, formerly, as recounted in *La Vagabonde*, a music hall performer, and now, three years on, a moderately wealthy *rentière*. Renée is leading a more leisurely life, and is portrayed, as *L'Entrave* opens, spending idle days in Nice in the company of a small group of friends. The first chapter of the novel deals with Renée's sighting of her former lover, Maxime Dufferein-Chautel, on the Promenade des Anglais. Max, now married and with a child, does not notice Renée, who is forced, by this chance encounter, to reflect on her decision to reject his proposal of marriage in favour of continued *vagabondage*. Renée's solitude in this opening section of the novel is broken when she begins a relationship with Jean, one of her companions, doing so on the principle that they are linked by mutual desire and nothing more. When they return to Paris, Renée moves into Jean's house, and the viability of desire as a foundation for the relationship is tested. Jean's declarations of love meet with Renée's continued reticence

²³ Lawrence R. Schehr, 'Colette and Androcentrism', in *Entre Hommes: French and Francophone Masculinities in Culture and Theory*, ed. by Todd W. Reeser and Lewis Carl Seifert (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008), pp. 158-178 (p. 158).

and silence, a failure to reciprocate his commitment that drives the couple apart. It is only when Renée agrees, finally, to return Jean's love, that the relationship achieves stability and permanence, the novel ending with Renée's reflections on their reunited life together.

Insofar as it deals with the 'shackling' of Renée, and thus reverses the conclusion of *La Vagabonde*, *L'Entrave* has provoked some disappointment among feminist critics. The source of frustration lies in the way in which Renée's admission of her love for Jean is closely identified with the reinforcement of asymmetrical power relations between the female and male characters in the novel. The reunion of the couple at the end of the novel is premised on Renée's gift of herself to Jean – 'c'était mon âme que je lui donnais' (E, 463) – and upon her renunciation of the freedoms associated with solitude and independence. Renée construes Jean as having taken up the role of 'l'aveide vagabond' (E, 463) that she has given up in order to be with him. Joan Hinde Stewart writes that: 'From a feminist standpoint, indeed from a human one, [the novel's] thesis is sad; it returns Renée from a fragile independence to conventionally happy bondage'.²⁴

In Tinayre's novel, male characters and their actions are accounted for in rich, complex, explanatory narratives encompassing the social, the hereditary, and the psychological. Departing from this realist-naturalist practice, Colette's male protagonists in *L'Entrave* have more fragmented life stories, more obscure motivations and more enigmatic relationships with each other. This is, in part, the result of the novel's homodiegetic narration; Renée as character-narrator does not possess the apparent omniscience of Tinayre's heterodiegetic narrator. However, it is also rooted in Colette's privileging of an alternative representational grammar, one based upon the corporeality of the male character. If biographical or psychological detail concerning the central male

²⁴ Joan Hinde Stewart, *Colette* (Boston: Twayne, 1983), pp. 48-49.

characters, Jean and Masseur, is sparse, their bodies, movements and gestures are privileged. Marcelle Biolley-Godino cites *L'Entrave* extensively in her study of 'l'homme-objet' in Colette's work. Underlining the insistent physicality of her descriptions of men, Biolley-Godino writes: '[Colette] ne dit pas: « il est tendre, il est intelligent », mais « il a la bouche sensuelle, l'œil de velours»... et, alors qu'on peut conférer à un héros une existence originale en insistant sur ses motivations profondes, [Colette] choisit de la lui conférer en insistant sur son apparence extérieure'.²⁵

Biolley-Godino's argument that Colette institutes '[une] véritable révolution du regard'²⁶ is based not only on her privileging of the physical over the moral and psychic when writing men, but also on the writer's offering of a female optic on the male subject that tends to position men as objects of desire. Male characters are treated as aesthetic or erotic objects to be appraised, enjoyed and consumed by women. Examining the most detailed physical description of Jean given in *L'Entrave*, for example, Biolley-Godino points out that Colette's 'sémantique du regard' dictates that Renée is consistently the subject of the verbs – “je distingue”, “je l'effleure, je tourne autour” – while Jean ‘reste voué à sa passivité de chose vue’.²⁷ Subtending Biolley-Godino's point is that, within this alternative specular economy, the 'homme-objet', occupying what is conventionally coded as a feminine position of passivity, is denuded of autonomy and rendered subaltern.

While acknowledging the importance of Biolley-Godino's intervention, my reading, rather than focusing on the disempowerment and feminization of the male protagonist, insists rather that *L'Entrave* offers a compelling narrative of the often

²⁵ Biolley-Godino, p. 32.

²⁶ Biolley-Godino, p. 10.

²⁷ Biolley-Godino, pp. 19-20.

coercive workings of male power through the male homosocial bond, and of its subjugating and exclusionary effects on the female protagonist. My point is that the questioning of conventional gender positions implied by the textual strategies identified by Biolley-Godino occurs within a narrative dealing with the enforcement of traditional hierarchies of gendered power and with the primacy of bonds between men. In seeking to map out these privileged bonds and their coercive effects, my reading departs from those of previous feminist critics which problematize Renée's 'shackling' but do not dwell at any length on the transactions and shared interests of men that subtend it.

Fathers and Sons

L'Entrave opens with the single female protagonist bearing witness to a scene of impeccable bourgeois family life. Renée sees her former lover, Max, on the Promenade des Anglais in Nice. Max, abandoned by Renée three years previously, is on holiday, accompanied by 'un enfant tout frais' and 'une femme en fourrures et en plumes' (*E*, 328), the family group serving as a forcible reminder to the narrator of what her life might have been. Max, Renée notes, is so close to her that she is able to take in physical details such as 'ses longs cils durs, et sa cravate sanglée comme pour la vie' (*E*, 327), a proximity that engenders a kind of retrospective panic as to the 'geste que j'aurais pu faire' (*E*, 327). The opening passage serves to link *L'Entrave* with *La Vagabonde*, but also reinforces the temporal lapse between the two texts. Max has become a *père de famille*, and while, at the end of the first novel, she rejects his offer of marriage, along with the wealth and status he wishes to bestow upon her, she now feels humbled: 'il m'humiliait, son air d'avoir fait fortune' (*E*, 328).

The familial tableau works to establish a compelling set of gender relations and ideals early in the text. Max is positioned at the centre of the group, flanked by wife and child, who serve, in Renée's reading, as signifiers of his wealth and power. 'Sa femme et

son enfant', she remarks, 'il les affichait comme des denrées neuves qu'il eût achetées place Masséna' (*E*, 328). Both figure as newly-purchased commodities, the lavish clothing of Mme Dufferein-Chautel pointing further to her status as ornament and sign of her husband's wealth. Among the other 'choses nouvelles' (*E*, 328) that Renée notices along with wife and child, is 'une canne que je ne lui connaissais pas' (*E*, 328), an item serving perhaps as a symbol of this newfound phallic power.²⁸ Alone in her hotel room, Renée fantasises about the Dufferein-Chautel marriage, recalling the 'tranquillité irresponsable, un peu bestiale' (*E*, 330) of Max's wife, a characterization that prefigures her own concession to Jean's authority later in the text. Renée imagines Max himself as the all-powerful head of the household: 'Monsieur répond à tout, je le parie...'
(*E*, 330).

Renée's feelings of inadequacy when confronted with the Dufferein-Chautel family, her 'mauvaise honte de pauvre' (*E*, 329), signal her failure to fit within this configuration of gender roles. Faced with the bourgeois husband, wife and child, she perceives herself as lacking status, meaning and value. Max, should he see her, she reflects, would look at her, and think: 'c'est tout?' (*E*, 329). This encounter sets the scene for the novel's central drama, the development of a relationship that will replicate, in many ways, the positions taken by Max and his wife in this opening scene. Jean, like Max, will confer value on Renée, while she will become a sign of his power and status. Although the central relationship in *L'Entrave* does not wholly replicate the bourgeois family glimpsed in its opening pages – Renée and Jean do not marry, and are not portrayed with a child – both characters in many ways align themselves with the ideal

²⁸ For discussion of the semiotics of bourgeois men's dress, particularly in the context of late nineteenth-century portraiture, see Tamar Garb, *Bodies of Modernity: Figure and Flesh in Fin-de-Siècle France* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), pp. 35-38.

offered in this first scene.²⁹ The final scene of the novel can be read as analogous to this opening tableau. Renée and Jean are on holiday by the sea in Brittany, Renée watching adoringly as Jean, ‘anxieux de posséder, en ses brèves vacances, toutes les heures de ce pays qu’il aime’ (*E*, 463), hunts birds on the cliffs while she, ‘ralentie, adoucie’ (*E*, 463), privileging his needs and pleasures above her own, waits patiently at the house for him to return. Critics of the novel have discussed the ways in which it tracks Renée’s path towards this acceptance of domestication. However, the opening tableau of Max as bourgeois *père de famille* also points to a masculine narrative that emerges in the novel, that of Renée’s lover Jean.

Often in very allusive terms, the novel recounts the transformation of Jean from an idle man of leisure to a hard-working banker. At the beginning of the novel, Jean is spending his time with May, his then lover, and his friend Masseau in hotels in the south of France and Switzerland. Having abandoned May in order to pursue Renée, Jean travels back to Paris with her. Thereafter, his attempts at establishing a relationship with the hesitant Renée are accompanied by the increasingly onerous demands of filial duty. The illness of Jean’s father causes him to be called to his family’s side with growing frequency, and, by the end of the novel, he has taken over his father’s position at the bank, an assumption of the paternal mantle that he accomplishes not without reluctance. As he remarks to Renée: ‘je travaille, maintenant. Mon père ne pourra plus jamais retourner au bureau. Je n’ai pas encore l’habitude, ni le goût du travail, moi... C’est une manière de pensum’ (*E*, 458). This narrative thus traces the end of Jean’s irresponsibility and profligacy and his assumption of an explicitly patriarchal role.

²⁹ Critics and biographers of Colette have discussed the links between art and life in relation to *L’Entrave*; the composition of the novel followed the beginning of Colette’s relationship with Henry de Jouvenel, who went on to become her second husband, and coincided with her pregnancy and the birth of her daughter. See, for example, Thurman, pp. 248-250.

The particular significance of this role, the guardianship, we can assume, of the family fortune, is implied by earlier references to Jean's diletantism. May, rancorous after her break-up with Jean, comments that 'Monsieur s'est ruiné un petit peu dans l'automobile, un petit peu dans la finance, et dans la politique' (*E*, 415). Later, Masseur, more sympathetic, informs Renée that Jean's failure to commit himself to a career is a source of embarrassment, Jean having been 'un peu humilié d'avoir touché à tout et de ne s'être attaché à rien' (*E*, 434). The shame attached to this wasted energy and capital hints towards Jean's unease at failing to conform to a specifically bourgeois masculinity premised on identification with the father, hard work and the accumulation of wealth.

Indeed, paternal identification and the reproduction of the distributions of power in the bourgeois family are central to Colette's construction of the masculinity of the leading male protagonist. The imperative towards identification with the father is most clearly illustrated in the expectation that Jean will take up his father's position at the office when the older man retires. Jean's reluctance does not, apparently, signify any intention to refuse. Indeed, the authority of his father, a figure whose only presence in the novel is derived from allusions by other characters, is forcefully suggested by the sobriquet given to him by his son: 'l'Autocrate'. This playful nicknaming both marks the limit of Jean's rebellion and re-inscribes the unquestionable power of the father.³⁰ Renée

³⁰ What this nicknaming also masks, however, is the name that Jean and his father share: Colette's leading male does not have a surname. Colette's exclusion of the father's name might be understood as a playful treatment of the signifier of paternal authority. This repeats in the mode of omission the gentle mockery of Max's surname in *La Vagabonde* (in Colette, *Œuvres*, ed. by Claude Pichois, 4 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), I, 1065-1236; subsequently abbreviated to 'V', with further references given after quotations in the text). Renée initially forgets Max's surname and thinks of him as, variously, 'Thureau-Dangin, Dujardin-Beaumetz, ou Duguay-Trouin' (*V*, 1104). Later, Max, quickly known as 'le Grand-Serin', admits exasperatedly: 'Je le sais que j'ai un nom ridicule, un nom de député, d'industriel ou de directeur du Comptoir d'escompte! ce n'est pas ma faute!' (*V*, 1143). The failure to name Jean might also be taken as a version of what Lynne Huffer, in *Another Colette: The Question of Gendered Writing* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), reads as the rendering of the father in the mode of absence and castration, as 'a textual presence-as-absence', in her analysis of *Sido* (p. 54). In *L'Entrave*, the

is frequently left alone while Jean obeys his father's summons, and is merely called upon to condole with Jean over the necessity of respecting this primary bond:

- Va-t'en, vite, Jean!
 —Oui, mais je veux que tu me plains.
 —Parce que?
 —Parce que je dîne chez l'Autocrate! (*E*, 424)

The subordinate place of Jean's dead mother, meanwhile, is signified by the slight contempt with which he speaks of her: 'il dit: « C'était l'année de la mort de ma pauvre bonne femme de mère », sur le ton d'un gentil mépris, et il ajoute par badinage: « On fait toujours un peu mourir sa mère de chagrin !...»' (*E*, 399). The 'badinage' functions as a citation of a convention – the dismissal of the mother – that Jean takes to be entirely unquestionable. Renée, less willing to accept his attitude, reflects that, 'j'aurais pu lui répondre: « Non, pas moi! » rien que pour voir son air d'étonnement' (*E*, 399). The reproduction of these roles and relations, meanwhile, is also presented in the novel as entirely natural and inevitable. Masseau, attempting to explain Jean to Renée, in an effort to nurture their relationship, states: 'il s'agit d'un garçon assez simple en somme, orgueilleux de naissance, despote par education, parce qu'il a toujours vu maman trembler devant papa...'*'* (*E*, 434). For Masseau, there is, then, no mystery. Jean is 'simple' precisely because he is conventionally bourgeois. He has learned to emulate his father and to mimic, as though natural and ineluctable, the paternal domination of women.

Turning more specifically to Jean's relationship with Renée, it might then be suggested that what subtends the central heterosexual relationship in *L'Entrave* is the imperative to reproduce a version of the gender and power relations that obtain in the marriage of Jean's parents. Jean is portrayed as making sustained efforts to establish

narrative appears to install patriarchal power securely, yet its linguistic guarantee, the father's name, is absent.

intimacy with, and to elicit commitment from, the recalcitrant Renée. Quickly declaring his love for her, Jean invites Renée to share his home. Meanwhile, he throws himself into plans for refurbishment: ‘je suis touchée de le voir tout à coup quitter le déjeuner et gravir le premier étage, un mètre à la main’ (E, 410). The concern with decorating the interior of his home to coincide with Renée’s arrival suggests a parallel between ‘l’installation du lit nouveau et du tapis couleur de souris argentée’ (E, 410) as aesthetic objects and the installation of Renée in the same capacity. This parallel is rendered more acute by Jean’s anxious enforcement of the boundary between public and interior spaces, the division between public and private roles in the relationship pointing towards the couple’s conformity with the idealized spatial organization and division of labour associated with bourgeois marriage. Renée is expected, once she moves into his house, to inhabit an exclusively domestic sphere. When she decides to go out to restaurants alone, he is shocked: ‘« On ne va pas là toute seule! » s’exclamait Jean. « On ne se donne pas exprès, quand on est une femme comme toi, et qu’on a un amant comme moi, l’air de courir les boîtes à choucroute ! »’ (E, 426).

Renée’s appearance in her former ‘réfectoires habituels’ (E, 426) now compromises Jean. She has been appropriated as a sign of Jean’s social status and importance in a manner that recalls the function of Mme Dufferein-Chautel at the beginning of the novel. Such efforts are also presented as constituting a break with the past. When Renée expresses surprise at his strictness, given her knowledge of his attitudes towards May, he retorts: ‘« May ne vivait pas avec moi. Et puis May, c’était May, et toi, c’est toi. »’ (E, 426). Renée is aware that his intentions are serious because he takes the trouble to evince a certain ‘dédain’ (E, 399) for her former profession. As Chantal Paisant puts it, ‘Jean, tyran domestique, s’applique à gommer [le passé] de Renée pour la convier dans sa famille’.³¹ The anxieties that operate around Renée’s

³¹ Chantal Paisant, ‘La Lice amoureuse’, *Europe*, 631 (1981), 41-51 (p. 47).

profession and past life also recall Augustin's ill-concealed disgust at the processes of public exhibition and display that characterize Fanny's professional activities in Paris, and his bewilderment at the multiplicity of social relationships – all cultivated outside the family or the interior – that form the fabric of her life in Paris.

At this point it is important to re-emphasize the allusive and fragmented nature of the masculine story in Colette's novel. To reconstruct these strands of the narrative as evidence of Jean's personal and professional trajectory is to read against the themes and questions that are privileged by the narrator, themes and questions that revolve principally around Renée's negotiation of desire and the bonds of love. The focalization of Jean from without, meanwhile, leads to the gaps in intellectual, emotional or psychic detail that are identified by Biolley-Godino; the novel does not allow for detailed consideration of Jean's motivations. Similarly, the relationship between the two main male characters, Jean and Masseur, remains, in many respects, obscure. While this chapter looks at some of the forms and effects of male power in the novel, detail concerning this central friendship is sparse. Renée's early curiosity about Masseur, whom she meets in Nice, is greeted only with May's vague response: 'est-ce que je sais? C'est un vieux type, comme ça, un colonial' (*E*, 340). Further elaboration does not materialize.

These silences may be read in different ways. First, as Schehr noted, Colette's work demonstrates a consistent interest in female subjectivity and sexuality. The concern with Renée in *L'Entrave*, in some degree to the exclusion of male characters, is a choice that does not necessarily need to be critically questioned. However, the apparently close yet also enigmatic friendship between Jean and Masseur might also be read as an acknowledgement of the barring of the female subject from both knowledge of, and partnership in, the bonds between men. May, for example, is portrayed as object of shared contempt for Jean and Masseur, and as hopelessly confused by their humour.

Exasperated by a joke made at her expense, she berates Jean: ‘vrai, j’en suis encore à me demander ce que vous avez de rare, toi et lui!’ (E, 341). May will, moreover, be rather ruthlessly manipulated by Masseur, on behalf of Jean, when he plots to end their relationship. Renée, while comprehending the contempt of the two men in a way that May does not, is herself subject to their manipulation in ways that rely upon her exclusion from forms of knowledge shared by the male characters. Indeed, by the end of the novel, Renée’s superiority over the ignorant May is explicitly rejected by Masseur, who, calling her ‘femme-comme-May’ (E, 453), directs her actions towards Jean. With this in mind, I will now look more closely at Colette’s treatment of bonds between men, forms of male coercion, and their impact upon Renée.

Triangular Encounters

The third point in Colette’s central triangle is Masseur, Jean’s friend. Critics of *L’Entrave* have not overlooked the significance of this character, acknowledging the instrumental role that Masseur plays in the formation and nurturance of Renée and Jean’s relationship. Elaine Marks, for example, notes that it is the ‘curious’ Masseur, ‘opium-smoking friend of Renée’s potential lover, Jean’, who ‘creates the “no-exit” situations, who leads Renée and Jean to each other’.³² It is Masseur, rather than Jean, who perceives that the two would make a ‘couple uni’ (E, 455), who orchestrates the break-

³² Elaine Marks, *Colette* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1960), p. 96. In *Mes apprentissages*, Colette notes that she modelled Masseur on her friend, the writer Paul Masson. Masseur’s description of himself as a ‘rejeton anémié d’une race qui fournit au monde les Lemice-Terrieux’ (E, 361) refers to one of Masson’s pseudonyms, recorded in *Mes apprentissages* as ‘Lemice-Térieux’. Colette’s biographical sketch of Masson emphasizes his love of puns, word games, and the destabilization of categories of truth, traits that are shared by the fictional Masseur. She recounts, for example, Masson’s habit of creating fictitious Bibliothèque Nationale catalogue records, a practice that formed part of a larger pattern of obfuscation and mystification: ‘tout ce qu’il nous laissait voir n’était que vaine apparence, et destiné à créer, à entretenir l’erreur’ (Colette, *Mes apprentissages*, in *Œuvres*, ed. by Claude Pichois, 4 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1984-2001), III, 981-1076 (pp. 1009-1010)).

up of Jean's relationship with May, and who elicits his friend's first expressions of desire for Renée, a strategy discussed further below. Renée's early encounters with Jean are, in fact, encounters with both men, Masseau serving as messenger and companion to the central couple. Later, he reunites them when their relationship has broken down. In his final dialogue with Renée, Masseau offers her what she construes as a '*recette*' (E, 455) for a functional relationship, advising her to cultivate a self-effacing devotion to Jean in order to win him back.

The significance of Masseau, and, more generally, of Colette's inclusion of an instrumental second male figure in this narrative of heterosexual love, warrants closer attention. It is noticeable that the novel juxtaposes a single woman with two men joined by a friendship and an allegiance that pre-dates Renée's acquaintance with either of them. This central triangle is not, it should be stressed, in place from the start. When the novel opens, there are four key protagonists: Renée, her friend May, May's lover Jean, and his friend Masseau. This small cast of characters can be understood as one couple (May and Jean) flanked by two friends, or, alternatively, two sets of friends, May and Renée, and Jean and Masseau. However, the romantic reorganization that occurs in Nice breaks down these initial bonds, joining Renée and Jean and expelling May, who, barring one subsequent scene, disappears from the narrative once the central couple has been formed. May's exclusion puts in place the male-dominated triangle of Renée, Jean and Masseau. Therefore, the novel's key heterosexual bond is formed at the expense of female friendship, yet leaves intact the bond between men. This asymmetry in female and male homosocial bonds effectively isolates Renée. Aside from brief appearances by other characters, notably her former performance partner, Brague, the remainder of the drama is played out among these three protagonists.

Renée's isolation within this triangle leaves her vulnerable to Jean and Masseau, who work together to engineer her relationship with Jean. The formation of the couple

initially takes the form of a series of triangular encounters involving the three main characters. In the first such encounter, Masseau and Jean arrive uninvited at Renée's hotel room in Nice, and, prefiguring Jean's territorializing attitude later in the novel, the two men occupy this space with an offensive familiarity. The hotel room, a sanctuary to which Renée retreats in the opening scenes of *L'Entrave*, after seeing Max and his family, is invaded by the two men. Masseau, who, after a walk by the sea, has draped seaweed around his neck, admires this bizarre collar in the mirror and makes use of her writing desk, while Jean opens bottles and lines up Renée's hairbrushes. She is irritated:

Je n'aime pas beaucoup qu'on vienne dans ma chambre défaite, odorante, ni qu'on m'indique, en l'effleurant du doigt, une mèche de cheveux qui glisse sur ma nuque, ni qu'on m'enlève « un fil » qui colle à ma jupe, un peu plus haut que le genou. (*E*, 355)

The list of these misdemeanours ends with an unpleasant physical familiarity, attributed impersonally to 'on', the actions of the two men blurring together into one unwelcome collective. This double masculine presence is, early in the novel, linked with the unwelcome penetration of female space and with the imposition of a masculine order on the female protagonist. In this regard it recalls the analogous scene early in *La Maison du péché*, in which Augustin and Vitalis make an uninvited visit to Fanny's house near Hautfort. As in *L'Entrave*, the interior of the female character's home is inspected for detail, Vitalis curiously examining Fanny's furniture and the prints on the walls before the two men, in a prelude to the attempt at converting Fanny to Catholicism, broach the topic of religion (*MP*, 102-107). In both novels the male couple's occupation of the female subject's space prefigures their joint attempts to recuperate the autonomous woman into an (erotic) triangle in which she will be disempowered.

Returning to *L'Entrave*, Jean and Masseau's united masculine front seeks to break the bonds joining women. Renée, hearing from the two men that May is unwell, offers to visit her; Jean orders her not to go, and, sure that he will be obeyed, makes no particular effort to conceal the obvious lie (*E*, 355). Masseau, as it transpires, is using

Renée's desk to forge a note, ostensibly from May, in which she announces that she is leaving Jean. The appropriation of one woman's writing desk is the appropriation of another woman's voice. When the note is delivered to Jean in May's absence, both Renée and, in this instance, Jean, are fooled by Masseau's imitation. Believing that May has left him, Jean takes Renée's hand in a gesture of intent, while Masseau, having succeeded in this plan, looks on (*E*, 361).

This occupation scene is replayed again when Jean and Masseau follow Renée to Geneva. This time, however, both men are complicit in the attempts at seduction, Masseau visiting Renée at her hotel, and Jean waiting for them nearby at Ouchy. Masseau's involvement in forms of linguistic manipulation, following his forgery of the letter in Nice, continues here; arriving at the hotel, Masseau sends a note to Renée, signing it 'Jean', and asks to see her in her room. When it is Masseau, rather than Jean, who appears on the threshold of the room, Renée is puzzled. In the note, the signature 'Jean' both signifies, and does not signify, the identity of Renée's visitor. However, the signature, while misleading, is not, Masseau claims, false; he too, he states, is named Jean (*E*, 377). This particular sleight of hand, while manipulative – Masseau has the opportunity to witness Renée's flustered preparations to see Jean – is only the opening shot in a game of identity and signification that takes place between them.

Renée, trying to make sense of her growing attraction to Jean, is disappointed to be confronted by Masseau rather than the man himself. However, the appearance of Masseau does not resolve the confusion at work in this scene. Renée's visitor continues to blur the categories of truth and identity by performing *as* Jean. When Renée asks Masseau to explain the purpose of his visit, he responds:

Masseau hausse les sourcils, et pose sa main droite sur une garde d'épée imaginaire.
— Pourquoi? Mais, parce que je vous aime! (*E*, 377)

Conflating the roles of lover and messenger, Masseur declares his love for Renée in the first person. This declaration, the statement of desire that Renée hopes to hear from Jean, is actually made by 'Jean'/Masseur. The delivery of this message and the seduction of Renée is thus both promoted and confounded; she is led to believe that she is desired, yet the message is obscured by the ambiguous identity of the speaker. Increasingly puzzled as to how to interpret Masseur's discourse, Renée seeks clarification: 'qu'est-ce qu'il y a de vrai dans cette histoire, et pourquoi êtes-vous ici?' (*E*, 377). Yet the deferral of meaning is prolonged by another performance, Masseur both restating his claim to the name 'Jean' and undermining the real validity of this claim by launching into what is explicitly an impersonation of his friend:

— Je m'appelle Jean, répète Masseur.

Et, rejetant la tête en arrière, le regard aminci entre les cils et le menton insolent, il réalise ... un tel prodige de ressemblance que je me lève, émue d'une rancune inexplicable. (*E*, 377-378)

The performance is infuriating for Renée because of its referential elusiveness. Seeking elucidation concerning Jean's feelings for her, she witnesses a performance of Jean that both signifies and refuses signification, that is both recognizably one of courtship and emptied of any such certainty by Masseur's mimicry of his friend. Renée's interest and desire is elicited at the same time as her ability to understand the desire and intentions of the male other(s) is frustrated; as she puts it, Masseur 'me prend, me ramène, puis me laisse, et me reprend, tout cela à l'aide d'un nom' (*E*, 378). This lack of comprehension and deferral of meaning leads her, out of curiosity and frustration, to comply with Masseur, who leads her to Jean at Ouchy. The linguistic seduction of the first man leads to physical seduction by the second, just as Masseur's factitious declaration of love prefigures Jean's subsequent expressions of desire.

It is illuminating here to draw a comparison with another male-dominated triangle in Colette's work: Renée, Hamond and Max in *La Vagabonde*. Just as Masseur works to forge Renée's relationship with Jean in *L'Entrave*, Hamond's efforts are

instrumental in uniting Renée and Max. That they can be conceived in analogous positions vis-à-vis the central coupling is suggested by the fact that both men are referred to as serving as ‘entremetteur’ to the central couple. In *L’Entrave*, Masseur is, for Renée, ‘presque l’entremetteur’ (E, 449), while in the earlier novel she reflects: ‘[si Hamond] osait, il me dirait, en paternel entremetteur: « Voilà l’amant qu’il nous faut, ma chère!... »’ (V, 1115). Both men, as critics have noted, are characters who engineer and nurture the relationships in more or less direct ways.³³ The triangular encounters that characterize the early stages of Renée’s relationship with Jean in *L’Entrave* are also to be found in *La Vagabonde*, Hamond often accompanying Max to dinner at Renée’s apartment.

If, in this respect, there are parallels between the male-dominated triangles in the two novels, there are also key differences. In *La Vagabonde*, for example, Renée is not excluded from the male bond. While Hamond is complicit in Max’s attempts to establish a relationship with Renée, she already shares a close friendship with the older man that predates, and in some sense, takes primacy over, the bond with Max. Renée has a claim upon Hamond that pre-exists and is in a sense not circumscribed by, Hamond’s complicity with Max. Moreover, unlike the obscurity that characterizes the foundations of the friendship between Jean and Masseur, the relationship between Max and Hamond is explained by another long-standing tie. Hamond has known Max, through his mother, since the younger man was a child (V, 1113).

Thus the bond between the two men in *La Vagabonde*, while operating in a similar way to that in *L’Entrave*, is open both to representation (its genesis is explicit) and to challenge by Renée’s prior claim on Hamond’s friendship. She openly questions his motivations as ‘entremetteur’ and speaks honestly to Hamond about her doubts. In

³³ Marks (*Colette*, p. 96) and Paisant (p. 48) note their parallel roles.

L'Entrave, such confidences are out of the question. At Ouchy, considering herself to be the victim of a 'conspiracy' (E, 382), Renée contemplates articulating her fears: 'ces choses-là, on ne les dit pas. Masseur, interrogé, se déguiserait en Machiavel, et je ne connais personne qui, moins que Jean, inspire la confiance' (E, 382). *L'Entrave* is characterized by a closing of male homosocial relationships, both in terms of a kind of referential blankness, and in terms of the radical exclusion of women from partnership in them. In *L'Entrave*, the male-dominated triangle is more closely identified with exclusion and coercion, or what Marks terms "'no-exit" situations', than in *La Vagabonde*. There is, perhaps, a connection between this shift towards a more hermetic or at least mysterious male bond in the second novel, and the limits of Renée's agency in each text. Where the first novel proposes *vagabondage* and the rejection of marriage as the most viable way for Renée to live, *L'Entrave* deals with her acceptance of a kind of subordination that is shown to inhere, for women, in the heterosexual relation. Put another way, the opening up to female partnership of the homosocial bond in the first novel allows for the possibility of *vagabondage*, while the closure of this bond in the second novel operates to bring about Renée's shackling.

The ludic blurring of identity in Geneva, in which Masseur performs as a kind of double for Jean, foreshadows his subsequent role in sustaining his friend's relationship with Renée. Masseur secures the spatial enclosure of Renée in Jean's home, later in the novel, by taking Jean's place as her 'garde du corps' (E, 426) when he is absent. Similarly, Masseur acts as substitute to Jean, sitting at the head of the latter's dining table, when Jean must miss dinner with Renée in order to attend to his father. It is, finally, Masseur who adumbrates a conception of love at the end of the novel, offering Renée a model for an enduring relationship. Masseur acts for his friend again, motivated by what he terms his 'faiblesse' (E, 453) for Jean, convincing Renée of the need for her utter self-effacement in devotion:

Mais l'habiter! Mais le prendre en vous! Le prendre en vous, le porter en vous, à ce point que sa lumière, que toutes ses manifestations caloriques de gaieté, de colère, de souffrance, de sensualité, au lieu de vous atteindre comme les autres, vous puissiez les croire projetées de vous-même ... (E, 454)

Renée's acceptance of this self-effacement as a mode of existence, what Victoria Best terms living 'an unresolved identity crisis, a blurring of self-other boundaries',³⁴ thus apparently accomplishes what Jean's initial domestic tyranny could not. It is the prescription of Masseur, the third point and second man in the central triangle, which re-establishes the ailing heterosexual relationship. The decisive dialogue between Renée and Masseur at the end of *L'Entrave* parallels that other decisive dialogue, towards the end of *La Maison du péché*, in which Forgerus enforces Augustin's final rupture with Fanny. The effects produced by these parallel interventions are notably different: Masseur reunites the central couple while Forgerus dissolves it. Yet in both texts it is the triangulating figure, whose interests lie primarily with the male sexual protagonist and against the female, who makes the final pronouncement on the central coupling.

Men's Love

The isolation of Renée within Colette's central triangle is, in various ways, engineered and exploited by the two male characters, whose own bond is integral to the formation and nurturance of the heterosexual relationship. As in Tinayre's novel, the make-up of this triangle does not, as Sedgwick puts it, 'involve bonds of "rivalry" between males "over" a woman'.³⁵ However, Renée's role as a token of exchange between men is nonetheless suggested. The most salient piece of information given about the friendship of the leading men is that Masseur is reliant upon Jean to fund his opium addiction. The

³⁴ Victoria Best, *Critical Subjectivities: Identity and Narrative in the Work of Colette and Marguerite Duras* (Oxford: Lang, 2000), p. 200.

³⁵ Sedgwick, p. 23.

significance of this dependency is suggested by Masseau in one of his dialogues with Renée, a rare illumination of his motivations. Justifying his refusal to give her any information about Jean's feelings towards her, he states: 'je ne puis que me taire, enrichir ici de quelques notes mon grand *Traité* ... comprenez donc, ma pauvre amie, ajoutez-t-il plus bas, l'opium est cher' (*E*, 433). Masseau's rejection of Renée's entreaty is the direct result of his own agreement with Jean, Masseau construing his silence and immunity to Renée's request to be that which is exchanged for opium money. How far this particular 'traité' frames the totality of Masseau's interventions in the novel is unclear. However, the imperative to keep Jean's favour at least suggests a very literal version of the exchange of women, with Masseau acting as 'entremetteur' in the central relationship in return for Jean's continued financial support.

More broadly, Colette's triangular drama, like Tinayre's, offers an account of heterosexual love in which the primary claims of bonds between men are insistently asserted. I have already noted the primacy of Jean's relationship to his father, and the narrative of bourgeois masculine becoming in which his relationship with Renée, the appropriation of the female subject as a sign of his power and status, forms one strand. It can be added that the terms in which Masseau conceptualizes love in his dialogue with Renée are inscribed with the primacy of paternal-filial bonds. Masseau recites an apologue in which a man returns to his home to be greeted with 'un bruit épouvantable de cris et de tambour' (*E*, 452) and 'une odeur immonde' (*E*, 452). Swearing and holding his nose, he calls upon his wife to explain the offensive noise and smell. The remainder of the apologue I quote at length:

La femme sourit et dit: « L'odeur, c'est cet onctueux fromage ... et le vacarme, c'est ton fils, qui fait le petit guerrier avec sa trompette et son tambour. » Alors l'homme ... s'écria: « En vérité, mon fils est né pour guerroyer, pour battre les tambours et sonner puissamment de la trompette ! Et quant au fromage, la perle d'ambrosie ne vaut pas sa grasse sueur, dont l'arôme mouille la bouche ! » Puis il s'assit à la table, coupa le fromage et embrassa son fils. (*E*, 452)

While Renée finds the apologue ‘obscur’ (E, 452), Masseur elucidates: ‘Jean, c’est le fils turbulent, Jean, c’est l’odorant fromage’ (E, 452). Renée, it is suggested, should learn to love Jean in the way that the man learns to love his son, by recognizing and cherishing the less pleasant aspects of the boy, because, presumably, they are in some way products of himself: the son is *his* creation (‘ton fils’/’mon fils’).

It is useful to consider further the way in which Masseur articulates love in terms of a father’s joyful embrace of his son. For, while Renée is required to efface herself and her supposed egoism in order to love Jean as Masseur advises, the father can enjoy the son and his boisterous behaviour as in some sense his own. Paternal self-effacement is not necessary; the son acts as confirmation of the importance and power of the father as subject. The difference that gender makes is reinforced by returning, for a moment, to the role played by the wife. The son is not the mother’s child; responding to the husband’s question about the noise their son is making, she refers to him as ‘ton fils’. She has no part to play in the joy afforded by the father’s recognition of the child as his own. Rather, she enables and facilitates a joy from which she is excluded. The effacement of the mother in the apologue can, in this sense, be read as a version of Forgerus’s erasure of the mother in his fantasy of masculine autogenesis. The exclusion of women from love between men, identified in *L’Entrave* with the privileged bond between father and son, is reinforced later in the scene. Far from maintaining that love is a kind of universal concept – a necessary conceptual move if Renée is to identify herself with the man in the apologue – Masseur highlights the gender asymmetries involved in its construction. Dismissing Renée’s desire to know what kind of love she might expect to receive from Jean in return for the devotion advocated by his friend, Masseur states: ‘Ça ne vous regarde pas ... Comme si l’amour féminin avait quelque chose à voir avec le nôtre!’ (E, 454). Renée is barred from knowing anything of how men love.

Masseau's reference to a love shared exclusively among men, occurring within this crucial adumbration of women's role within the heterosexual couple, reinscribes the male homosocial privilege that subjugates and circumscribes the limits of the male-female bond. In one sense, his conceptualization of bifurcated masculine and feminine types of love is consistent with his cultivation of a specific set of gender power relations within the heterosexual couple. Feminine devotion, which Masseau construes as a servile self-effacement, ensures the supremacy of the male partner, whose own devotion, it might be conjectured, consists of the kind of faithful ownership of the female subject that Jean attempts early in the novel. The masculine variant of heterosexual love is, as I have suggested, reproduced through a process of identification between men; Jean's love for Renée is expressed through a set of acquisitive and territorializing responses that imitate his father's attitude to his mother. Men's love, construed in this way, constitutes a bond of identification between male subjects whose continued hegemony depends upon the reproduction of asymmetric power relations between men and women. The barring of the nature or workings of *l'amour masculin* to the female subject is consistent with the perpetuation of male hegemony through the exclusion of women from these privileged bonds.

Read within a Sedgwickian framework that encourages sensitivity to what is being registered in expressions of love between men, Masseau's collective 'le nôtre' might also lend itself to another reading, that of an allusion to male same-sex desire. This possibility is not made explicit in *L'Entrave*; the association between the novel and male homosexuality is forged, rather, in Colette's subsequent discourse on the text. In *Le Pur et l'impur*,³⁶ Colette's exploration of, and meditations on, erotic experience, she reflects on male homosexuality, pointing to the limitations of women's understanding of

³⁶ Colette, *Le Pur et l'impur*, in *Œuvres*, ed. by Claude Pichois, 4 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), III, 550-653. Subsequently abbreviated to 'P'; further references are given after quotations in the text.

the erotic bond linking two men. This lack of comprehension is illustrated with an anecdote in which Colette recalls a woman with whom she was acquainted during her marriage to Willy. This woman, is, Colette states, ‘dans *L’Entrave*, nommée May, et rendue méconnaissable’ (P, 635). In *Le Pur et l’impur*, ‘May’ strives unsuccessfully to repeat her seduction of a man – referred to as ‘Jean’ – whose desires are secretly directed towards men. ‘May’, anxious to win the attention of ‘Jean’, one evening dresses up in the clothes of another man present at Colette’s soirée, before parading in front of ‘Jean’, who remains, up to this point, silent and uninterested. Witnessing ‘May’ dressed in ‘le complet veston bleu marine’ (P, 636) of the fellow guest, ‘Jean’ is roused to anger. Colette reflects that, in the aftermath of the incident, his eyes ‘manifestaient encore à May la haine, la furieuse interdiction de caricaturer une idole enfouie, révéree dans les ténèbres’ (P, 636). The configuration of female ignorance and prized, if undisclosed, bonds of love between men itself recalls Masseau’s refusal to allow Renée to know or understand a love that is exclusive to men.

I do not identify the account of ‘May’ and ‘Jean’ with any original or truthful version of the hidden aspects of May and Jean’s relationship in *L’Entrave*, or with the confirmation (or denial) of any particular relation of desire, Jean for Masseau, Masseau for Jean, or both. The anecdote in *Le Pur et l’impur* stands in a relation of irresolvable ambiguity to the narrative of *L’Entrave*, but does, perhaps, suggest that male same-sex desire in some sense inhabits the novel as an erotic possibility, even if, crucially, this inhabiting occurs in the mode of that which is unsaid and unavowed. While critics of the novel have not commented on this erotic possibility, they do suggest that Masseau, in particular, stands in a relationship of marginality or alterity with respect to the gendering and idealized heterosexual union of the central couple. Marks, for example, refers to Masseau as ‘sexless’,³⁷ a term reproduced by Hinde Stewart in her

³⁷ Marks, *Colette*, p. 96.

characterization of Masseur as a 'sexless, aging addict'.³⁸ Paisant, meanwhile, notes that Masseur, like Hamond and Margot of *La Vagabonde*, are both 'porte-parole du discours masculin sur la femme' and 'des êtres curieusement déssexués'.³⁹ Such critical judgements hinge principally upon the ambiguity created by the signifiers of femininity that cluster around him: Masseur mimes female characters such as the Empress Eugénie (*E*, 342) and Colombine (*E*, 354) and wears 'des gants... cousus à surjet comme les gants des femmes' (*E*, 376).

The perception of sexual indeterminacy points to Masseur's tenuous inscription in a particular matrix of gender and heterosexual desire that is most obviously embodied by Renée and Jean. Renée is struck, for example, by the mismatch between Masseur's vigorous advocacy of a highly traditional set of gender roles within an idealized heterosexual relationship and his failure to embody the kind of masculinity that she understands to be the basis of heterosexuality: 'Il parle d'amour avec une emphase péremptoire, cet être qui a si peu l'air d'un homme' (*E*, 454). Renée seems to consider Masseur's authoritative speech on heterosexual love to be a speech given, in some sense, from the outside. This outsider status recalls Tinayre's triangulating figure, Forgerus, who, like Masseur, plays a decisive role in the formation of the heterosexual couple, albeit in a negative sense. Tinayre constructs the celibate Forgerus as a figure who wrongly and falsely ignores the call of heterosexual love, which is itself presented as natural and valuable by her narrator. It is when he is faced with Fanny Manolé that, in finding her attractive, he becomes 'un homme' for the first time via his induction into heterosexual desire. In contrast to the true/false binary operating around Forgerus, Colette constructs Masseur as a figure of unresolved indeterminacy with respect to the

³⁸ Hinde Stewart, p. 51.

³⁹ Paisant, p. 48.

order of gender and sexuality that he advocates and enforces yet which does not appear to account for his own, more ambiguous, gendering.

The question arises of whether Colette's installation of Masseur as spokesman for, and enforcer of, an idealized heterosexual union and its concomitant gender positions should be read as the ruination of the legitimacy afforded to these arrangements at the end of the novel. Read this way, Masseur's articulation of the rules of gender and sexuality might properly be construed as a parodic iteration that, like Butler's conceptualization of drag as a 'parody [...] of the very notion of an original'⁴⁰ mocks the very idea that any such prescription could ever offer a truthful or authentic 'recipe' for gender and sexual desire. This is a point that Holmes touches on when she writes that Colette's decision to have 'the ironic, opium-smoking, sexually indeterminate Masseur' as spokesman for this union both 'propos[es] and undermin[es] its validity'.⁴¹ I do not think that *L'Entrave* resolves this ambiguity. It is, perhaps, to such ambiguities that Huffer refers when she writes that 'the irreconcilable tension between the possible subversion or reinforcement of an oppressive sex-gender system is an undeniable aspect of reading Colette as and through contradiction'.⁴²

This chapter has explored bonds between men in *La Maison du péché* and *L'Entrave*, focusing on the male-dominated erotic triangle and its role in the forging, constraining and breaking of heterosexual relationships. Such triangular structures emerge in both novels as the key mechanism for the positioning of the female protagonist as an

⁴⁰ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 175.

⁴¹ Holmes, *Romance and Readership*, p. 44.

⁴² Huffer, p. 11.

exchange object for the nurturance of privileged bonds between men and the reproduction of masculinities aligned with male domination of women.

The chapter has also offered a conceptualization of the encounter between the female rebel and the male subject that departs from those previously discussed in this thesis. Chapters 1 and 2 explored female protagonists' support for powerful masculinities through their participation in rescue narratives or, as in *Les Cervelines*, through the female subject's articulation of the ongoing necessity and desirability of the gender hierarchies that her activities would appear to render problematic. Tinayre and Colette dramatize the ways in which the female subject comes to be implicated in the sustenance of powerful masculinities through her coercion, manipulation and defeat by men. The closure – or the threatened closure – of the narrative of female independence and self-determination comes to represent the condition upon which continued male supremacy depends. In both novels, heterosexual love is closely identified with hierarchical gender relations. *L'Entrave*, in particular, makes clear that Renée's love for Jean is incompatible with her freedom because the submission of the female subject before the beloved and empowered male inheres in the heterosexual bond. In the next chapter, I discuss two novels that, through their staging of heterosexual relationships, explore both the stubbornness and apparent intractability of these gender positions, as well as pointing to their possible re-negotiation.

Chapter 4

Giving and Taking Away: Rachilde's *La Jongleuse* (1900) and Gabrielle Réval's *Le Ruban de Vénus* (1906)

In my discussion of *La Maison du péché* and *L'Entrave*, I argued for the importance of the male homosocial bond as the key mechanism in both the suppression of female rebellion and the reproduction of masculinities closely wedded to men's domination of women. This chapter engages further with constructions of masculinity founded upon men's inscription as subject of meaning, exchange, as 'possessor' of the female body in sex and marriage, and agent of the female rebel's domestication. While Chapter 3 focused primarily on representations of bonds and transactions between male characters, this chapter centres on female characters' efforts to disrupt and de-authorize the operations and assumptions of masculinities premised upon male domination of women as construed above.

My readings of *La Jongleuse* and *Le Ruban de Vénus* are framed and structured by each novel's staging of two narratives of female rebellion. This doubling of the female narrative is bound up in important, if different, ways with the text's construction of masculinity and the possibilities and limits of female revolt. What emerges in both novels is a central tension between female characters' endorsement of the necessary power and authority of the male subject over women and their de-authorization of this hierarchical configuration of gender relations. This tension is embodied by the contrasting fates of the two rebels in each text: one 'succeeds' – eluding male ownership and de-authorizing male claims to power – and one 'fails' – acknowledging the intractability of male domination and becoming the object of the kind of 'shackling' operations discussed in relation to *La Maison du péché* and *L'Entrave* in chapter 3.

In my analysis of *La Jongleuse*, I connect Rachilde's decadent novel with themes and structures previously discussed in this thesis by considering both the fate of the New Woman protagonist and the relationship between this fate and the workings of a love triangle. If the eponymous heroine of *La Jongleuse* is Eliante Donalger, 'juggler and epistolary maven'¹ and figure of revolt against male-dominated systems of sex and identity, the novel contains another female rebel, one who has much in common with the professional New Women who inhabit the fiction of Yver and Réval: Eliante's cycling, smoking niece, Missie Chamerot. The two women take up their positions alongside medical student Léon Reille in a female-dominated erotic triangle that is finally dismantled with the death of Eliante and the marriage of Léon and Missie. In *Le Ruban de Vénus*, Réval weaves together two New Woman narratives, tracing the career and marriage of art student Cécile Castellar and the rise of journalist Suzanne Darzille. While Cécile, like Colette's Renée Néré after her, finds love incompatible with work and autonomy, Suzanne rejects what are presented as the subjugating effects of feminine devotion in order to nurture her career and independence.

Both novels, like all of the texts explored in this study, attest to the different ways in which the naturalized linkage of maleness and forms of power and authority is dependent on female endorsement and support. Rachilde and Réval explore the difficulties and costs attached to women's withdrawal of this endorsement and support through the contrasting fates of their heroines. In *La Jongleuse*, Rachilde portrays Eliante as a female protagonist with the capacity to de-authorize Léon's claims to a masculinity performed through control and possession of her body and sexuality. However, this de-authorization is, paradoxically, founded upon Eliante's investiture of Léon with precisely these rights in relation to her niece, Missie. Eliante's successful revolt is, through the workings of Rachilde's erotic triangle, premised on Missie's failure, as well

¹ Mesch, p. 149.

as upon the re-routing and re-inscription of Léon's masculine privileges through the body of the domesticated New Woman. I read Missie's fate as the cost of Rachilde's staging of the undefeated female rebel, a sacrifice of the consciously modern, 'new' female subject that can be understood in the context of Rachilde's well-documented suspicion concerning feminism and shared interest among women.

Réval's novel deals with the apparent intractability of masculinities aligned with men's power over women via Cécile's fatal subjugation to her husband. As in *L'Entrave*, the rebellious woman's domestication is bound up with her experience of the hierarchical gender positions produced and guaranteed by heterosexual love. Cécile's relationship with her husband elicits a passive and subordinate femininity which serves to uphold her husband's claim to the domination of her body and sexuality. As in Colette's novel, this construction of gendered power in heterosexual love in turn serves to replicate and render inexorable a broader set of cultural or social gendered positions aligned with the separate spheres ideal. To experience sexual desire as the enactment of the male subject's control over the female body is translated to Cécile's complicity in the desirability of her domestication and the channelling of her efforts into the public and private interests of her husband as head of the household.

Rachilde's portrayal of the connection between her two female rebels is premised on a kind of dependency: one woman's success relies upon another woman's 'failure' or domestication. Réval's dual female narratives suggest something different. Her narrator in *Le Ruban de Vénus* constructs Cécile's subjugation as a historically specific, and hence mutable, female complicity in masculine power. Cécile represents a female subjectivity of the past, while Suzanne, who displays irreverence towards masculine authority and who is unashamed in her prioritization of personal and professional self-fulfilment, is constructed as the woman of the future.

1. *La Jongleuse*: A ‘tour de passe-passe élégant’²

Rachilde (Marguerite Eymery, 1860-1953) was born near Périgueux, the daughter of the wealthy bourgeois Gabrielle Feytaud and Joseph Eymery, a cavalry officer.³ As a teenager, Rachilde began to publish short stories and articles in the regional press, before moving to Paris with her mother to pursue her literary career in 1878. Her first novel, *Monsieur de la nouveauté*, appeared in 1880, but it was her second, *Monsieur Vénus* (1884), that made her name. An early biographer, Ernest Gaubert, wrote that the novel, published in Belgium by Brancart, was ‘une pierre jetée dans la mare à grenouilles littéraires’.⁴ Accused of obscenity, Rachilde was sentenced to prison,⁵ a punishment she duly avoided by remaining in France. Rachilde was closely associated with the group of decadent writers that included Jean Lorrain and Laurent Tailhade. She went on to take up a key role as fiction critic at the journal *Mercur de France*, co-founded in 1890 by her husband Alfred Vallette, there passing judgement on hundreds of novels. A celebrity of the Parisian literary scene in the last years of the nineteenth century, the publication of *La Jongleuse* marks what Melanie Hawthorne has called ‘the culmination of the fertile and prolific period of Rachilde’s career spanning the years from 1884 until 1900’.⁶

² Rachilde, *Pourquoi je ne suis pas féministe* (Paris: Editions de France, 1928), p. 15. Reflecting on her upbringing and the relationship between her mother, Gabrielle, and her maternal grandmother, Isaline, Rachilde writes that the marriage between her mother and father was the result of similar trickery to that staged in *La Jongleuse*. Rachilde writes that her father had originally courted the ‘fort jolie’ (p. 14) Isaline, who, ‘s’effarouchant ou peut-être se sacrifiant à son devoir, chose très bien portée à cette époque, avait offert sa fille unique à sa place, tour de passe-passe élégant’ (p. 15).

³ For detailed biographical information about Rachilde, see Diana Holmes, *Rachilde: Decadence, Gender and the Woman Writer* (Oxford: Berg, 2001) and Melanie C. Hawthorne, *Rachilde and French Women’s Authorship: From Decadence to Modernism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001).

⁴ Ernest Gaubert, *Rachilde* (Paris: Sansot, 1907), p. 12.

⁵ Gaubert states that this consisted of 1 year (p. 12); Holmes reports that it was a 2-year sentence (*Rachilde*, p. 42).

⁶ Melanie C. Hawthorne, ‘Introduction’, in Rachilde, *The Juggler*, trans. by Melanie C. Hawthorne (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp. xi-xxvi (p. xvii).

Although Rachilde's work fell out of critical favour for much of the twentieth century, it has, since the 1990s, begun to attract intense interest once more. Lisa Downing links this renewed interest to Rachilde's status as 'an early exponent of theories regarding the flexibility of categories of gender and sexuality'.⁷ Much of the writer's fiction is concerned with troubling assumptions about the stability of gender identities and with exploring desires historically characterized as marginal or perverse in relation to naturalized heterosexual norms. If these preoccupations align Rachilde with certain key concerns of contemporary feminism and queer theory,⁸ some critics have also explored both her explicit anti-feminism and the more conservative strands of her constructions of gender and sexuality, particularly her admiration for masculinity as the site of freedom, agency and creativity and the contempt for women that at times emerges in her work. Holmes writes of a 'tension between on the one hand reverence for phallic power and corresponding denigration of the feminine, and on the other revolt *as a woman* against powerlessness'⁹ that characterizes both Rachilde's life story and her work.

Rachilde framed her own rebellion against the codes of bourgeois femininity not as a transgression of the constraints operating on female lives in late nineteenth-century France that aligned her with other women writers, New Women or feminists, but as, alternately, a highly individual project and an alliance with masculinity. 'Rather than working for large-scale change for the social category of women,' Downing writes, '[Rachilde] sought instead to exempt herself from that category, to become an honorary

⁷ Lisa Downing, *Desiring the Dead: Necrophilia in Nineteenth-Century French Literature* (Oxford: Legenda, 2003), p. 92.

⁸ For a discussion of Rachilde and queer theory, see Katherine Gantz, 'The Difficult Guest: French Queer Theory Makes Room for Rachilde', *South Central Review*, 22 (2005), 113-132.

⁹ Holmes, *Rachilde*, p. 17.

man'.¹⁰ Rachilde's is an individualist revolt that refuses both 'the imperative to conform to society's expectations of the passive maternal wife and feminism's call to sisterhood and collective arms'.¹¹ Mirroring Rachilde's individualism, Eliante Donalger's rebellion relies upon a refusal of 'sisterhood' that, in offering up Missie Chamerot as 'passive maternal wife' to the young male subject, also reinforces the hierarchical gender relations that the *jongleuse* repudiates. The 'tour de passe-passe' enacted in *La Jongleuse* bequeaths a degraded maternal destiny on Missie and the privileges of bourgeois masculinity upon Léon.

Masculinity and *La Jongleuse*

Eliante Donalger, aristocrat and widow of a naval officer, embarks upon an unusual affair with medical student Léon Reille. Captivated by the enigmatic Eliante, Léon follows her as she leaves a party one evening and is thrilled to be invited to accompany her home. There, his expectations of sexual conquest are frustrated when Eliante, rebuffing his efforts to seduce her, reveals to him her true object of desire, a life-size Tunisian amphora. Léon is forced to look on as Eliante demonstrates that pleasure, for her, is derived from embracing the amphora rather than him. Convinced, following this first evening with her, that she still desires him, Léon continues to pursue Eliante. He is invited to watch as she 'juggles' with feminine identities, appearing as *femme fatale*, demure *bourgeoise* and 'mère noble' – as well as performing literal knife-juggling tricks at a ball – yet never allowing him to fix her identity or to sleep with her. Between their meetings, they exchange letters; epistolary chapters alternate in the novel with narration of the encounters between the two characters. As Eliante continues to confuse and

¹⁰ Downing, p. 93.

¹¹ Downing, p. 94.

confound Léon's hopes of seducing her, she introduces him to her niece, Missie, a modern, educated young woman, and frequently encourages him to marry her. In the last chapter, having allowed Léon to think that she will finally succumb to his desire, Eliante lures him into her bedroom, where, in the darkness, Missie has taken Eliante's place in her aunt's bed. Léon is exultant until, the following morning, he realizes his mistake; rather than finding Eliante lying beside him, Léon awakes with Missie to witness Eliante's last juggling act. She kills herself while the young couple looks on. The novel concludes with a brief epilogue recording the marriage of Missie and Léon and the birth of their daughter.

La Jongleuse, along with *Monsieur Vénus* and *La Marquise de Sade* (1887), has figured quite prominently in the renewed critical interest in Rachilde.¹² Critique of the structures of male power, including a male-dominated medical discourse that pathologizes the female subject's creativity and resistance to heterosexuality, is important to recent readings.¹³ However, Rachel Mesch's analysis of *La Jongleuse* more forcefully makes the case for this critique, interpreting the novel, like *Monsieur Vénus* before it, as a 'relentless [attack] on masculinity and male bodies'.¹⁴ Mesch's analysis hinges on the issue of fetishism, a favourite decadent theme that, the critic argues, is usually understood as a mechanism of protection for the male subject who fears the castrating threat of the *femme fatale*. In comforting the male subject against the threat of possible castration and cementing his claims to plenitude and wholeness, fetishism thus

¹² Jeri English, for example, has discussed the significance of Claude Dauphiné's preface to the 1982 reprint of *La Jongleuse* for feminist re-appropriations of Rachilde. See English, 'Virginal Perversion/Radical Subversion: Rachilde and Discourses of Legitimation', in *A 'Belle Epoque'?*, ed. by Holmes and Tarr, pp. 211-223.

¹³ In the introduction to her English translation of *La Jongleuse*, Melanie Hawthorne traces the text's association of medical discourses with the maintenance of 'normal' gender roles and sexual practices (Hawthorne, 'Introduction', pp. xi-xxvi).

¹⁴ Mesch, p. 121.

conventionally serves to shore up male claims to power. Rachilde's novel, Mesch argues, while deploying a great deal of fetishistic imagery, refuses to allow Léon to draw upon the fetish as a way of protecting against the possibility of castration. Rather, Mesch suggests, Eliante valorizes 'castrated' bodies, such as the headless amphora, and enjoins Léon to confront his own weakness via a proliferation of images of phallic absence. Eliante, she argues, refuses 'the comforts of the fetish' to the male protagonist, 'forcing him to see himself as powerless and castrated by confronting [him] with missing noses and decapitated vases'.¹⁵ Eliante disrupts the symbolic structures of patriarchy by refusing to endorse either the male subject's necessary claim to phallic wholeness or the female subject's necessary status as 'lacking' or degraded within this economy.

I want to offer a different interpretation of the text's treatment of both female revolt and masculinity. It is by construing the novel as a text concerned with two narratives of female rebellion, and thus considering the importance of Eliante's New Woman niece Missie, that this different reading emerges. Jennifer Birkett, in a brief discussion of *La Jongleuse* that highlights what she takes to be the novel's conservative gender politics, notes:

[Eliante] makes sure Missie will never change the form of men's dreams. The girl she finally pushes into bed with Léon is someone for whom no partner could feel anything but contempt; and Eliante's suicide secures her own place as the unattainable ideal of which Missie will always fall short. [...] [Eliante] may have marked Léon's life with her dream-image, but Missie has the reality. Ironically, her aristocratic delusion of her own freedom and power is the instrument that has set up and will sustain one more part of the middle-class world it so despises.¹⁶

Birkett's reading contains only a very brief discussion of Missie's revolt and its connection to Eliante's own subversive practices. However, the critic suggests above

¹⁵ Mesch, p. 149.

¹⁶ Jennifer Birkett, *The Sins of the Fathers: Decadence in France, 1870-1914* (London: Quartet, 1986), p. 186.

that Eliante's attainment of 'freedom and power', her evasion of the subservient feminine role in patriarchal society and disruption of Léon's claims to power over her, is dependent upon leaving a legacy of subservience for her niece. Eliante's dream requires that another woman experience the 'reality' of male power. Birkett's reference to the sustenance of 'one more part of the middle-class world' also points to the reinstatement of conventional gender positions, through the marriage of Léon and Missie, which occurs at the end of the novel.

I take up Birkett's invitation to think through Missie's fate and its relationship to the novel's reproduction of gender hierarchies in which male authority is upheld. More specifically, I argue that Eliante's evasion of Léon's efforts to control her, which, as noted, have been construed as central to the novel's subversive treatment of gender, are in fact premised on her complicity in producing him as an exemplary bourgeois man. Eliante, I contend, accepts this masculinity as incontrovertible and bestows upon Léon the duties and privileges of a wealthy doctor with a wife and child to instruct, guard and keep. Eliante does not, therefore, ruin or confound the claims of the male subject to the possession and control of the female body: she evades them by acknowledging their intractability and shifting their effects to her niece. This is not to deny the importance of Rachilde's heroine as transgressive, creative rebel. However, my aim is to underline the ways in which this rebellion is enabled and guaranteed by the inscription of the second female rebel as the passive maternal vessel and object of exchange.

Negotiating With Masculinity

It is Missie's narrative of rebellion to which I turn first. While a number of critics of *La Jongleuse* allude to this third figure, the text is primarily read as a drama played out between Eliante and Léon, with Missie afforded a marginal place. In what follows, I replace Missie at the centre of the novel's concerns by paying close attention to her pre-

marital revolt and construing it as a female rebellion against male authority that is comprehensively de-legitimized in Rachilde's text. In the next section, I consider the ways in which the suppression of this revolt is instrumental to a reinstatement of male power that works in tension with Eliante's unsettling of Léon's expectations of, and claims to, her body and sexuality.

As a New Woman, Missie attempts to upset the gender hierarchies underpinning male domination by joining Léon as subject in the public world. Juliette Rogers notes that Missie displays some of the pervasive clichés attached to this Belle Époque figure of female revolt. Drawing on the Anglo-American stereotypes of the 'humorless intellectual and the freewheeling young women who smoked cigarettes and rode bicycles',¹⁷ Rachilde, Rogers argues, paints a rather unsympathetic portrait:

Eliante's young niece is a bicycle-riding science student, portrayed as easily duped, shallow, and rather dull. [...] Missie remains the stupid "clown," the boring "monkey" who is continually dismissed by Léon as an uninteresting child. Missie's intellect and independence are of no interest to him whatsoever, and she is only able to "catch" Léon in the end by following the manipulative advice of Eliante and giving birth to his child.¹⁸

As Rogers suggests, the portrayal of Missie's interest in science and social work, her disarming frankness, and her enjoyment of cycling are all treated as markers of puerility and gracelessness.¹⁹ Missie is often focalized by Léon or discussed by Eliante in her letters to him, leaving little possibility for a more sympathetic construction on the reader's part of the scope or investments of Missie's rebellion against feminine norms.

¹⁷ Juliette M. Rogers, 'Women at Work: The Femme Nouvelle in Belle Époque Fiction', *L'Esprit créateur*, 37 (1997), 17-28 (p. 17).

¹⁸ Rogers, 'Women at Work', pp. 17-18.

¹⁹ For more on the bicycle and the New Woman in France, see Siân Reynolds, 'Vélo-Métro-Auto: Women's Mobility in Belle Époque Paris' and Ruth E. Iskin, 'Popularising New Women in Belle Époque Advertising Posters', in *A Belle Époque?*, ed. by Holmes and Tarr, pp. 81-94 and pp. 95-112.

Eliante, whose own revolt takes a very different form, displays a disapproving and perplexed scepticism with regard to Missie's endeavours, and, at one point, reproaches Léon for flirting with Missie, one of 'les femmes d'aujourd'hui, mes pires ennemies' (*LJ*, 168). For Eliante, Missie's founding of a *crèche populaire* and her willingness to countenance a *union libre* with Léon represent a dubious and vulgar complicity with modernity. They also represent a troubling of femininity as construed by Rachilde's heroine. Discussing, early in the novel, Missie's possible suitability as a wife for Léon, Eliante remarks:

—Elevée par moi, monsieur, elle aurait été [...] ou une belle et brave épouse, ou une spirituelle et grande courtisane. Mais M. Donalger l'a envoyée aux lycées. Ce ne sera qu'un singe savant, ignorant l'art d'être femme. (*LJ*, 69-70)

The conspicuous education that aligns her interests with those of Léon the medical student also compromises her femininity. While the novel does not propose a particular identification between Missie and her uncle Donalger, it is notable that it is under the aegis of the only male member of the household that the niece sets off in search of knowledge. Her motherless lycée education has failed to teach the young woman 'l'art d'être femme'.²⁰

For Eliante, the secular, educated young bourgeois woman of the Third Republic is necessarily a transgressor of a set of feminine ideals. As her remark concerning the 'spirituelle et grande courtisane' suggests, it is not precisely – or only – the sexual naivety of the bourgeois *jeune fille* that is at stake here. It is a broader configuration of femininity based on the requirement that women please men rather

²⁰ Réval's much more extensive fictional treatment of girls' lycées and women's teacher training in this period points to some unsettling of established feminine ideals in the reformed educational system. Gretchen Van Slyke has argued that in Réval's depiction of the training of female lycée teachers, women are '[e]xhorted to be simultaneously virile in thought and womanly in demeanor' (Van Slyke, 'Monsters, New Women and Lady Professors: A Centenary Look Back at Gabrielle Réval', *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 30 (2002), 347-362 (p. 350)).

than attempting to imitate them by occupying the public world or sharing in masculine systems of knowledge. Seeking to claim a place as subject in these systems, Missie, according to Eliante, fails to approximate to the category of *femme*. In doing so, she also evades the category of human, becoming, instead, a ‘singe savant’, and later, seen by Léon, ‘Cette espèce de grande guenon’ (*LJ*, 72).

If Missie’s New Woman identity means that, in the eyes of her aunt, she is not quite a woman, this identity relies upon the appropriation and deployment of certain masculine signifiers which mark out the difference between her own interests and experiences and the mode of forced ignorance that characterizes the ideal femininity of the *jeune fille*. When Léon first meets Missie, at Eliante’s salon, he sees a clumsy young woman who cultivates both childish and masculine manners. His first impression, of ‘une jeune fille de vingt ans essayant d’en paraître dix et habillée d’une blouse d’enfant de chœur’ (*LJ*, 61) gives way to shock upon witnessing Missie light a cigarette:

elle alluma une cigarette, croisa les jambes:
—Fumez-vous, cher monsieur ? C’est excellent pour le rhume, vous savez.
Léon Reille était ahuri. Il savait bien que l’éducation du jour tolérait ces manières de garçon manqué, seulement il songeait qu’une grande diablesse d’innocente pareille devait furieusement encombrer le salon d’Eliante. (*LJ*, 64)

Smoking, as Rogers points out, was something of a cliché in representations of the New Woman, serving as a privileged marker of her rejection of conventional feminine manners. It figures prominently in Yver’s depiction of New Woman sociability as performed by Jeanne and Marceline in *Les Cervelines*, with Marceline’s smoking becoming a contentious issue for her more conservative prospective mother-in-law. Rachilde, meanwhile, wrote disapprovingly of women and smoking elsewhere, evincing scepticism about the value of women’s appropriation of this masculine practice in *Pourquoi je ne suis pas féministe*:

« Je n’aime pas le tabac, me confiait une jeune personne timide, mais c’est *pour le geste...* » Fichtre ! Mais alors, il y a beaucoup d’autres gestes masculins qui

peuvent être imités...avec plus de profit, par exemple : quinze heures de travail par jour !²¹

The audacity of Missie's gesture is underlined in this scene by Léon's subsequent acknowledgement that he, a smoker, had not dared light a cigarette during his first visit to Eliante's home (*LJ*, 65). Yet Léon is purportedly less stunned by the gesture itself than by the apparent incongruity of this 'grande diablesse d'innocente' cluttering Eliante's salon. Missie's 'manières de garçon manqué' bring something alien or disorderly into Eliante's domestic space. The masculinized niece jars, for Léon, with the aunt's alluring femininity. It is interesting, then, that Eliante's own appearance on this occasion, rather than reproducing the seductive femininity of the amphora chapter, also gestures towards the masculine. Léon is disappointed to see her in this rather more mundane context dressed in 'une robe *tailleur*, noire, bien entendu, mais commune et tachée d'une affreuse cravate violette à pois blancs' (*LJ*, 62); Eliante's drawing-room persona itself relies upon the citation of masculine sartorial codes.²²

Missie's smoking can be understood as an appropriation of masculine manners that contributes to the disorderly gendered identity that Eliante, through the marriage plot, attempts to re-order as the novel progresses. I return to this point below. First, however, I want to examine more closely the effects and implications of Missie's masculine appropriation. As noted above, Léon's focalization of Missie throughout the novel means that her gender play is presented through a mocking and derisive lens. Ardent in his pursuit of Eliante, Léon has no patience for Missie's New Woman manners. Yet this recurrent de-authorization itself invites a consideration of what is at

²¹ Rachilde, *Pourquoi*, p. 71. Rachilde appears to be puzzled, in this pamphlet, about the precise motivations behind women's appropriation not only of smoking, but also of masculine hairstyles and sartorial codes.

²² Hawthorne notes that 'the *tailleur* explicitly mimicked *male* fashion and practice' and that 'the "unisex" *tailleur* threatened to collapse the masculine/feminine clothing distinction' (Hawthorne, *Rachilde*, p. 147).

stake in these manners and practices. More specifically, Missie crossing her legs and lighting a cigarette before asking Léon if he smokes too constitutes an invitation to the male guest to re-think the underlying relations of gender and power in their meeting. In her adoption of the masculine homosocial practice of sharing a cigarette in public, Missie seeks to cast off the imposed passivity of the feminine role and to share something between ‘men’.²³ The significance of this gesture becomes more pointed when it is recalled that in the salon scene, and at her ball later in the novel, Missie is acutely disempowered by the script of femininity that she is asked to follow. Léon himself reflects, in this first salon scene, that the young woman is imposed on the assembled guests ‘comme on tend une aumônière à l’église’ (*LJ*, 62). It is through smoking, in particular, that Missie leaves the enforced passivity of femininity for the activity of masculinity: the consumption and exchange of cigarettes and the display of this phallic object. Her New Woman identification, encompassing the appropriation and performance of these overtly masculine traits and practices, might then be read as permitting Missie at least a temporary re-negotiation of her position in a context of dichotomized gender positions.²⁴

²³ Commenting on a conversation between Raoule and the military officer Raittolbe in *Monsieur Venus*, Downing writes: ‘When Raittolbe responds by calling [Raoule] ‘monsieur’, he promotes her to a position of homosocial bonding. That is, she and Raittolbe discuss sexuality and ‘the prey’ [Jacques] on equal ground, the difference between them removed’ (Downing, p. 96). The kind of gender mobility afforded to Raoule, who is, like Eliante, skilled in playing with gender identity, is not permitted to the degraded New Woman Missie.

²⁴ Scott McCracken has written of the significance of smoking for anglophone New Woman identity in *Masculinities, Modernism and the Urban Public Sphere* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007). Discussing Dorothy Richardson’s *Pilgrimage*, McCracken argues that for Richardson’s protagonist, Miriam, smoking ‘becomes a revolt against the dictates of femininity as passive display’ (p. 64) via ‘an entry into the masculine symbolic’ (p. 65). The practice of smoking, McCracken argues, permits ‘the public performance of a new gendered subjectivity’ (p. 64) which is produced through and in negotiation with masculine and feminine norms, but which does not fully map onto either.

Léon refuses to accept Missie's invitation, reaffirming both her feminine place and the rigid codes of gendered behaviour that govern their social interaction: 'Non, je ne fume pas... au moins, devant les jeunes filles!' (*LJ*, 65). Yet her efforts to reshape her encounter with the male subject continue. As Léon prepares to leave, Missie violates convention by openly requesting that Eliante invite him to stay for dinner and to escort aunt and niece to the theatre. If Rachilde's narrator explains this solecism as the result of Missie's chaotic and disorderly mind (*LJ*, 71), its gendered subtext is made clear in Missie's protest to Eliante's gentle rebuke:

Quand tu me ferais les gros yeux? Ça ne servira *de rien*; Monsieur est étudiant, moi je serai doctoresse quand ça me plaira, on est des *copains*! Tu dis, toi-même, que je prends la science comme une éponge !
Très fière de ce nouvel effet, elle éclata de rire, d'un jovial rire de garçon obtus.
(*LJ*, 71)²⁵

For Missie, the violation of social conventions is licensed by a shared set of intellectual interests and a shared professional trajectory; already qualified as an *institutrice*, she maintains that she could join Léon in his medical training any time she liked. Aware of her ability to transgress the traditional gender boundary that marked young women as unfit for such a public role, Missie justifies the transgression of other social codes on precisely the same basis. She conceptualizes the potential heterosexual couple as 'copains', a formulation that, again, hints at the attempted adoption of a homosocial bond of sameness precluded by the rigorous enforcement of sexual difference. Missie's vision here prefigures Yver's more sustained exploration of the implications of women's professionalization for gender identities. *Les Cervelines* deals with the realization of the

²⁵ The pejorative associations of the sponge image as they concern female intellect are suggested in Rachilde's subsequent use of the same image in *Pourquoi je ne suis pas féministe*. She writes: 'Je ne nie pas les capacités des cerveaux féminins d'autant plus aptes, maintenant, à concevoir les choses de l'esprit que les femmes sont privées (ou se privent) du devoir naturel de concevoir par ailleurs, mais telles des éponges absorbant l'eau, ces cerveaux privilégiés ne rendent guère que cela quand on les presse... de s'exprimer. Ce n'est pas chez la femme que les fontaines intellectuelles peuvent se changer en dispensatrices de vins fortifiants' (Rachilde, *Pourquoi*, p. 24).

female project of becoming a *doctoresse* and, given the still pervasive coding of professional and intellectual activity as masculine, with more extensive masculine performances on the part of its female protagonists.²⁶ In her attempt to evade the stifling gender codes constraining the *jeune fille*, Missie turns to her own talent for science, a ‘masculine’ activity, in order to establish a kind of parity with Léon.

Rachilde’s narrative works to close down the subversive possibilities of Missie’s invitations to Léon. In contrast to the disruptive work that her aunt’s use of artifice, playacting and shifting identities accomplishes, Missie’s New Woman gender performance is presented as a short-lived pretence that is rapidly undermined by her wholly conventional aspirations. While Eliante’s deployment of multiple identity categories may therefore be read as undermining the essentialism or fixity that traps the female subject in patriarchy, Missie is, as the novel progresses, both fixed and, in Butler’s terms, made ‘intelligible’. As Butler writes, “‘Intelligible’ genders are those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire’.”²⁷ The emergence of her romantic attachment to Léon brings about her closer inscription in a heterosexual matrix of desire for the ‘opposite’ sex and secures her conventional femininity. This process is manifest in the gradual changes in Missie’s appearance and in her nascent prettiness. By the final chapter, the cyclist’s culottes have been cast aside and she has begun to copy Eliante’s hairstyle (*LJ*, 221).

More explicitly, however, Rachilde’s narrative works to expose the superficiality of the New Woman identity. This is especially apparent at the ball that Eliante holds for

²⁶ Missie’s assertion that Léon is a ‘copain’ finds an echo in a similar articulation, this time from a male character, in *Les Cervelines*. Paul Tisserel, who had wished to marry the brilliant doctor Jeanne Bœreck, reflects that ‘ç’aurait été une jolie camarade de vie, moitié ma femme, moitié un ami’ (*LC*, 3-4). Their prospective marriage is conceived along (male) homosocial lines.

²⁷ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 23.

her niece and her friends. Rachilde's narrator describes Missie and her fellow New Women in terms that elucidate their true priorities:

Elles étaient là une quinzaine toutes en blanc, des camarades du cours, du lycée, des protectrices de crèche populaire, des pédaleuses, un essaim de papillons *couleur de neige* [...] d'allures décidées à devenir des femmes à part, si on ne les épousait pas, toutes munies de diplômes et affectant le langage vulgaire ...
(LJ,136)

The daring wish of becoming 'femmes à part', a formulation that underlines the liminality or otherness of the New Woman gender identity, is entirely subject to the much more conventional feminine wish to be chosen for marriage by a man. The narrator points to the 'real', wholly conventional femininity that lies beneath the rebellious veneer. Like Marni's insistence on Pierre's fundamental recalcitrance with regard to authentic masculinity, Rachilde mobilizes the categories of authenticity and inauthenticity in order to cast Missie's revolt as mere pretence.

It is at the same party that Missie expounds on her autonomous future:

Un mari vous *achetant* le jour de ses noces... Pouah! C'est vilain! Il y a des objets qui ne doivent pas s'acheter. Chacun gagne sa vie, voilà ! (LJ, 155)

Missie's speech prefigures Renée's more famous reflection in *La Vagabonde*: 'Je gagne ma vie [...]. À mes bonnes heures, je me dis et me redis, joyeusement, que je gagne ma vie !' (V, 1084-1085). While Renée's utterance signals the joy in self-determination that eventually leads her away from marriage with Max, Missie's proud declarations to Léon are presented, in Rachilde's text, as empty rhetoric. Her explicit rejection of the male-dominated structures of exchange explored in the last chapter is merely the product of slightly drunken jealousy over Léon's relationship with Eliante. Unfairly casting doubt on her aunt's future financial generosity, Missie is defensively asserting her ability to make her own way in the world as an insult to her rich aunt. She proclaims her ability to cross out of the domestic sphere and into the hitherto masculine public world out of frustration that Léon is not interested in marrying her and securing her position as wife

and mother. Missie is, in fact, only too willing to endorse Léon's monopoly of the public world and his right to confer meaning and value upon her by marrying her.

Making the Man

Mesch's recent reading of *La Jongleuse* hinges on the premise that Rachilde's heroine attacks the structures of male power and sexuality by forcing Léon to confront the fact of his powerlessness and castration. Mesch pays particular attention to two chapters in the novel. The first is the famous scene in which Léon is forced to look on passively as Eliante, rather than making love with him, achieves sexual satisfaction by embracing a human-sized alabaster amphora. The second is a later passage in which Léon, persistent in his efforts to seduce her, gains access to her bedroom. There he undergoes another kind of encounter with male frailty: he is shown a portrait of Eliante's dead husband, Henri Donalger, in which his nose is missing after an accident at sea. Having wished to receive a confirmation of male authority over Eliante through this glimpse of a powerful dead rival, Léon is disappointed. Mesch writes: 'the portrait that Léon sees, rather than affirming the masculine prowess of his rival [...] provides nothing but the image of castration, lack of virility, and weakness'.²⁸ Rachilde's concern, in *La Jongleuse*, with engineering the male encounter with evidence of his own frailty constitutes, for Mesch, a re-working of the decadent castration topos. While in many decadent texts, the theme of castration is treated via the fetish – which serves to permit a denial of the fact of castration – Rachilde's text, Mesch argues, persistently refuses to allow the male protagonist to take comfort there. Rather, the images of castration, such as the famous

²⁸ Mesch, pp. 145-146. Mesch (p. 145) posits that this scene in *La Jongleuse* constitutes a version of the 'portrait of a gentleman' topos that Schor identifies in the fiction of Lafayette, Staël, Sand and Sarraute. See pp. 240-243 of this thesis for further discussion of Schor's argument in relation to Réval's *Le Ruban de Vénus*.

headless amphora and the portrait of Henri, force Léon to confront what he might otherwise be permitted to deny.

Alongside this dismantling of the myth of masculine plenitude, *La Jongleuse*, Mesch argues, stages the female rebel's evasion of the subjugation that inheres, for women, in male-dominated structures of exchange. Eliante's memory of her marriage to Donalger is characterized by fear of male aggression and heterosexuality and a heightened sensitivity to the degraded place that women occupy within the conjugal bond:

Marriage (the end result of Léon and Missy's tryst) is represented as a form of prostitution, where the female is eminently substitutable. Eliante, in contrast, [...] escapes from all this and achieves a spiritual apotheosis worthy of the decadent ideal by finally transforming her life into art.²⁹

The widowed Eliante has found pleasure outside heterosexuality and the institution of marriage. The conclusion of the novel thus enacts, via the suicidal juggling trick, her final casting off of its degradations.

Mesch's highlighting of both the text's 'attack' on masculinity, and of the contrasting fates of Eliante and the newly forged couple of Missie and Léon, opens up a series of questions that I propose to explore here. While the decadent heroine enacts a spiritual evasion of the 'prostitution' that is marriage, Missie, bound to earthly realities, takes up her position within the institution and its concomitant gender hierarchies. The success and failure of the novel's two narratives of female rebellion are here inscribed. Closer attention to the relationship between these divergent narratives, however, reveals more about their complex interdependency and their implications for the representation of Léon and masculinity in the text. In particular, this relationship suggests a more

²⁹ Mesch, p. 153.

ambivalent representation of masculinity and male power than Mesch's argument concerning Rachilde's 'attack' on them appears to allow.

Eliante quickly implicates Missie in her relationship with Léon. In a letter written after the first meeting between her niece and the medical student, she invites him to marry Missie:

Je vous parle de Missie, mais je n'en suis point jalouse. Que voulez-vous qu'elle me prenne ? Je vous aime et je suis heureuse de vous aimer. En l'épousant, vous me donneriez la certitude d'une éternité de bonheur, simplement. (*LJ*, 84)

Two issues arise from this proposal. The first concerns Léon's role in the 'bonheur' alluded to by Eliante, which refers to her non-heterosexual eroticism, most clearly staged in the scene with the amphora but evident in her juggling and dancing performances elsewhere in the novel. Like her prized object of desire, Léon is written into the script of her pleasure. However, rather than endorsing Léon's claim to the agency and centrality conventionally offered to the male subject in the heterosexual relation, Eliante designates a more marginal position for him. Léon's role in her 'bonheur' is, in fact, to witness a female sexuality that, as Felski notes, is 'divorced from the demands and constraints of male sexual desire'.³⁰ Eliante recurrently institutes an incommensurability between her own pleasure in the performance and the expectations of the male subject called to witness it. As Léon reflects during her juggling act at the ball held for Missie:

[Léon] gardait pour lui la douleur de la voir là, debout et jonglant, séparée de sa famille, de la société, du monde entier, de toute l'humanité par l'énigme de sa comédie perpétuelle.

Et il devinait bien qu'elle ne jonglait pas seulement en son honneur ou en leur honneur, elle jonglait pour s'amuser. (*LJ*, 143)

The male subject is both called to the performance and denied the pleasure he expects to take from it.

³⁰ Felski, p. 199.

The second implication of Eliante's proposal is that the inscription of Léon in this marginalized position depends upon his union with another woman. As Eliante's profession of love indicates, her proposal does not constitute a renunciation of Léon to her niece in any simple way. She wishes to sustain her own 'erotically charged, but celibate'³¹ relationship with Léon, but suggests that the only way for her to do so is to involve a third, triangulating figure in the equation. She later acknowledges that, in offering Missie to Léon, she makes herself a kind of 'intermédiaire':

je suis obligée de m'entremettre pour vous fournir l'occasion de demeurer près de moi... (*LJ*, 90-91)

Eliante's re-scripting of the masculine place in her life and happiness in fact requires that Léon be allowed to take up a much more traditional role in relation to her niece.

What emerges from Eliante's proposal is, therefore, a construction of Léon's masculinity that embraces paradox and contradiction. She imagines, for her own life, a role for the male subject that undermines his claims to agency and control of the female body. Yet in offering him Missie as a bride, she reinstates his claims to the position of sexual agent and subject of exchange, acknowledging and indeed abetting a masculinity premised on precisely those structures that she subverts on her own account. In the same letter, Eliante blithely deflects Léon's efforts, following the amphora episode, to take his revenge by narrating his encounters with a prostitute. She simply acknowledges the ineluctability of this kind of masculine performance as it concerns other women:

Vous, je veux bien que vous soyez un homme.
Allez voir les filles, mon ami ! Allez voir les filles ! (*LJ*, 87)

These injunctions underline, once more, Eliante's paradoxical role in upholding a masculinity premised on the penetration and control of the female body – to be 'un homme' consists of precisely this – as well as undermining these practices when it is her

³¹ Holmes, *Rachilde*, p. 137.

own sexuality and body that is at stake. Moreover, given, as has already been noted, the novel's construction of marriage as a kind of prostitution, a clear structural congruence emerges between the positions of the prostitute and the young bride. Missie, no less than the *filles* alluded to by Eliante, is offered as body through which Léon will enact a masculinity that Eliante rejects and reconfigures in her own relations with him.

Missie's role in mediating the effects of Eliante's refusal to endorse Léon's claims is suggested elsewhere in the letter. Referring once more to Léon's proposed marriage to Missie, she writes:

Si vous me plaisez, je veux vous conserver comme le vase tunisien, et il faut que je vous place à l'ombre du bonheur. Le bonheur, c'est moi, et Missie c'est le rideau. Elle vous tamisera... ma lumière! (*LJ*, 90)

Eliante's reference to the potentially damaging effects of her 'bonheur' or 'lumière' serve to underline her awareness that her rejection of his phallic sexuality constitutes a potential castration of the male character. Rather than having to 'see' this bright light directly, she proposes that he occupy a position in which its effects will be attenuated. Missie becomes the 'rideau' that stands between Léon and these potentially harmful effects. The use of this image is particularly telling in the context of Mesch's reading of *La Jongleuse*, which, as noted, privileges a discussion of Eliante's refusal to permit Léon to ward off the threat of castration through the fetish. Mesch writes that what is disturbing, for the male subject, about this decadent heroine is the way in which she is 'constantly unveiling, revealing what is behind the fetish, the mask, the cabinets'.³² Yet here Eliante is very clearly veiling the effects of her non-phallic sexuality for Léon, and it is Missie, the 'rideau', who is installed as fetish. Missie metaphorically covers over and

³² Mesch, p. 147.

compensates for Eliante's absence, her withdrawal from the feminine position within the economy of masculine desire.

Eliante's marriage proposal includes an adumbration of the roles that she envisages for Léon and Missie as husband and wife. In this vision, the New Woman is placed under the control of an authoritative husband who will manage her body and sexuality. Mapping out a nexus of privileges and responsibilities falling to the male subject, Eliante seeks to make Léon the bearer of meaning and value for the passive woman offered to him in this bargain. The self-fashioning juggler, whose identity play consists primarily in evading the constraints of the feminine roles elaborated by men, delegates the task of fashioning her niece's identity and value to the bourgeois husband:

Marie Chamerot, est [...] un bon et docile instrument de maternité, sinon de conception amoureuse. Elle deviendra jolie si vous la désirez. Avec un peu de chair d'amour sur sa chair de vierge, elle arrondira ses angles et prendra des allures plus gracieuses. (*LJ*, 88)³³

Through his future role as husband and father, Léon is also delegated the task of feminizing Missie's hitherto boyish body. His interpellation to this role thus also serves, according to Eliante's vision, to re-inscribe the male monopoly on the signifiers of masculinity: Missie must be made, through Léon's active desire, to abandon her boyish slenderness in favour of a more womanly (pregnant) silhouette.

The couple's financial future is to be assured through the inheritance that Eliante proposes to confer on Missie:

³³ Nancy K. Miller writes of Renée noticing, in the opening scene of *La Vagabonde*, the name Marie carved into a wall. This is, Miller writes, 'the most significant and at the same time the most ordinary name a woman can have in a Catholic country' (Miller, 'Woman of Letters: The Return to Writing in Colette's *The Vagabond*', in *Subject to Change*, pp. 229-264 (p. 230)). It is against 'this gesture of anonymous femininity', symbolized by the carved name of 'Marie', that Colette writes the story of a woman who rejects the securities of the heterosexual couple and returns to 'the solitude of writing' (p. 230). This is, as noted, a female solitude that will end in *L'Entrave*. In erasing the Americanized New Woman name Missie in favour of Marie, Eliante arguably consigns her niece to the 'anonymous femininity' of the bourgeois wife and mother.

Je lui donnerai, quoi qu'il arrive, une dot très convenable, et elle sera mon héritière si elle vous épouse. Un médecin sérieux (vous deviendrez certainement un médecin sérieux) n'est pas l'obligé de sa femme quand celle-ci lui apporte une fortune. L'homme qui travaille sérieusement, dans un ménage, ne gagnerait-il pas un sou, est toujours le protecteur de sa compagne et ne lui doit rien. (*LJ*, 90)

Eliante is willing to invest her fortune in Léon, through her niece. Léon's future as a 'médecin sérieux', meanwhile, will be prestigious enough to withstand any threat of dishonourable dependency on his wife's fortune. The source of Léon's potential disempowerment vis-à-vis Missie – his poverty – is thus foreclosed, his professional prestige reinstating his claim to a position of authority in relation to his wife. The couple's proposed economic arrangements are also stark in their distribution of gender roles. While Eliante is confident that Léon will have a successful medical career, Missie will never become a 'doctoresse', a career path that she so loudly proclaims is within her grasp. Instead she will have children.

The love triangle that Eliante plans in this letter is thus premised on the maintenance of her very unconventional relationship with Léon through the forging of a second bond between her 'lover' and her niece, the latter founded upon the re-inscription of hierarchical gender positions. The male subject, whose claims to power are threatened by the first relationship, is thus reinstated as centre of meaning and power in the female life in the second. This set of erotic, marital and gender arrangements remains an elusive ideal in Rachilde's text, however. While the marriage eventually occurs, Eliante recognizes the impossibility of sustaining her own relationship with Léon.

This shift occurs as a consequence of the conversation between Léon and Missie at the ball discussed above. Missie's jealous outburst encompasses not only a set of proud claims to financial and professional autonomy, but also a set of unflattering lies about Eliante, including an exaggeration of her aunt's age calculated to elicit Léon's disgust. Later, it emerges that Missie falsely informs her aunt that she had received a

profession of love from Léon in the same conversation. This series of lies induces a crisis in Eliante's rebellion. Mortified by her niece's claims, Eliante avows a kind of rivalry with Missie for Léon's desire. In doing so, she acknowledges her place within a male-dominated economy of sexuality in which women figure as objects to be appraised by men. In a rare illumination of Eliante's point of view, usually occluded via Rachilde's deployment of Léon as principal focalizer, the heroine contemplates, and swiftly rejects, concession to Léon's desire:

Elle n'était faite que pour prêcher au milieu du temple désert, et demain, si elle devenait sa maîtresse, elle serait semblable aux autres, un petit trottin bien humble trottant derrière le monsieur triomphant... (*LJ*, 198)

This brief acknowledgement of rivalry with Missie marks the end of Eliante's triangular plot. The same acknowledgement, in ending Eliante's negotiations with Léon, may also be read as marking the intractability of a masculinity premised on triumphant conquest of the subjugated woman. In this context, Eliante's only option becomes the accomplishment of a permanent evasion of its effects through death.

The mechanism for this evasion relies, again, on the installation of Missie as Eliante's substitute vis-à-vis Léon. When an exasperated Léon arrives at Eliante's house to propose to her, she presents him to her oblivious brother-in-law as Missie's suitor (*LJ*, 199). Her brother-in-law's deafness militates against Léon's ability to correct the mistake. For Eliante, his misprision, which she has engineered carefully, can be presented to Léon as ineluctable: 'Qu'est-ce que vous voulez, Léon, je n'y peux rien... nous sommes les victimes d'une fatalité' (*LJ*, 200). A second example of this substitution is Missie's presence in Eliante's bed in the novel's final chapter. Eliante's earlier description of her niece as a 'rideau' thus becomes doubly apt: not only does Missie serve as a fetish that masks Eliante's absence for Léon, she is also the 'curtain' behind which Eliante hides in order to make good her escape.

The ludic qualities of these scenes, as well as their central concern with the forging of the bourgeois heterosexual couple, recall Masseur's efforts to unite Renée and Jean in *L'Entrave*. In Colette's text, it is Masseur as gender outlaw who, paradoxically, engineers a union between Renée and Jean that is premised on masculine domination and feminine subservience. His early interventions, like Eliante's substitutions, are premised on elusive or mistaken identities: the forging of May's signature and his own masquerade as Jean. In Rachilde's text, as well as Colette's, the outlaw figure deploys her capacity to destabilize identity in order to foster a union founded upon the seemingly intractable binary gender positions from which she exempts herself.

Rachilde's version of the erotic triangle poses slightly different questions to Colette's, however. While in *L'Entrave* it is Renée as lone female subject who becomes the victim of Masseur's identity games and is thus drawn back into the bonds of heterosexual union with Jean, in *La Jongleuse* Léon takes up this place. Léon's progress towards the privileges and responsibilities of the bourgeois husband and father is thus closely implicated with disempowerment through lack of knowledge. His protest, contrasting starkly with Renée's reticence, is clearly articulated. Following Missie's claims at the ball, Eliante visits him in order to probe his intentions towards her niece. There he rails against her efforts to push him into marriage with the younger woman: 'Ah! madame, rugit Léon, serrant les poings, je vous défends de toucher à ma liberté, j'en suis seul responsable' (*LJ*, 187). Subsequent events, in nullifying Léon's ideal of freedom, serve as an ironic comment on the male subject's claims to individual agency or control over his fate.

The mechanics of Léon's assumption of the role of bourgeois *père de famille*, insofar as they are founded upon coercion and attended by his reluctance, offer a more explicit version of the scenario of male revulsion that appears in other novels analysed

in this thesis. Léon's unwilling participation in the novel's final marital and economic exchange may be likened to Jean's recalcitrant attitude towards taking up the paternal mantle in *L'Entrave* and to Jean and Paul's efforts to evade the demands of bourgeois masculinity in *Les Cervelines*. Rachilde's adherence to a decadent philosophy founded upon 'the rejection of communality and the social imperative'³⁴ certainly heightened her work's sensitivity to what she perceived as the banalities of bourgeois lives and gender arrangements. However, even in the work of those writers who seemingly attempt to render authoritative masculinities as essential to men's happiness – Marceline's instruction that the timid Jean Cécile should seek to 'dominate' a family comes to mind – the workings of gender as enforced ideal emerge prominently.

If masculinity, no less than femininity, can be read through these texts as an enforced set of identifications and gendered behaviours, this constraint does not level the hierarchies of power that are reproduced alongside these ideals of bourgeois gender identity. The loss inflicted upon Léon by Eliante's trickery and evasion is, importantly, accompanied by the gift of another woman to take her place. Missie's complicity in this consolatory function is already made clear early in the novel's final chapter, when, acknowledging that Léon is in love with Eliante rather than with her, she tells him: 'il faut que je vous aime pour ceux qui ne vous aiment pas. Ce qu'elle s'en fiche, des amoureux, elle?' (*LJ*, 224). This conclusion points to the sustenance and endorsement of Léon's right to authority and power at the same time as it is undermined by Eliante's final withdrawal.

³⁴ Downing, p. 94.

2. *Le Ruban de Vénus: Loving Men, Laughing at Men*

Gabrielle Réval (Gabrielle Logerot, 1874-1938) trained at the École Normale Supérieure de Sèvres, before teaching at a girls' lycée in Niort.³⁵ Réval began her literary career with the publication of *Les Sèviennes* in 1900, the first of a series of successful novels exploring the lives of female students and teachers in the reformed state girls' education system of the Third Republic.³⁶ Other novels published in the pre-1914 period, including *Le Ruban de Vénus* and *La Bachelière* (1910) also draw on the theme of women's education. In a tribute published in 1910, Réval stated that she owed her first success to Jeanne Marni. She recounts that she took the manuscript of *Les Sèviennes* to Marni for an honest opinion of its merit, and that it was the older writer who assumed the responsibility for ensuring that it was published; the novel was subsequently dedicated to her. Moreover, it was, Réval notes, Marni who devised her 'nom de femme de lettres'.³⁷

Love and the New Woman

Réval's depictions of women who challenge the ideal of domesticated, maternal femininity have been of interest to critics concerned with exploring the re-negotiation of gender identities in the early decades of the Third Republic. Diana Holmes and Juliette Rogers, for example, have analysed the ways in which *Les Sèviennes* interrogates the joys and struggles experienced by members of the female educational community established at Sèvres. Réval depicts young women who are encouraged to develop inquiring minds and to think deeply, yet who are often rejected and stigmatized by the wider community

³⁵ A biographical sketch appears in Waelti-Walters and Hause, pp. 85-86.

³⁶ The subsequent novels were *Un lycée de jeunes filles* (1901) and *Lycéennes* (1902).

³⁷ *Hommage à Jeanne Marni*, p. 48.

for their intellect and professional activities.³⁸ Holmes notes the subversive edge to Réval's depiction of heterosexual love in the novel; her heroine Marguerite Triel eventually leaves the teaching profession in order to establish a *union libre* with her lover.³⁹

Le Ruban de Vénus, which has not featured in recent critical work on Réval, deals with a female student at the École des Beaux-Arts. The politics of women's entry into this previously all-male institution have been documented in detail by Tamar Garb, who writes of the work undertaken by the Union des Femmes Peintres et Sculpteurs to secure women's place at the École des Beaux-Arts in the 1880s and 1890s.⁴⁰ Cécile Castellar is a talented painter whose professional ambitions are nurtured by her mother, Clémence. Having experienced marriage as a kind of enslavement to her adulterous husband, Clémence advises her daughter to avoid love in favour of developing her talent and earning her own living. Rejecting her mother's advice, Cécile marries. Having expected marriage to represent an extension of her friendship with her husband Jean Chatelain, Cécile is gradually made to recognize its profoundly hierarchical nature. It is through the discovery of sexuality, in particular, that Cécile acknowledges her subservience before Jean, who becomes a kind of captor. The 'ruban de Vénus' referred to in the novel's title becomes a metaphor for the bond of enslaving desire that ties Cécile to her husband. Réval's metaphor parallels Colette's figurative use of the idea of the 'entrave' in relation to female sexuality.⁴¹ Jean's infidelity leads to the couple's

³⁸ Holmes, *French Women's Writing*, pp. 54-57; Rogers, *Career Stories*, pp. 93-99. See also Waelti-Walters, chapter 6; Van Slyke, p. 352.

³⁹ Holmes, *French Women's Writing*, p. 57.

⁴⁰ Tamar Garb, *Sisters of the Brush: Women's Artistic Culture in Late Nineteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 70-104.

⁴¹ Margaret Callander notes that 'the notion of the 'entrave', the leash, is intimately bound up with Colette's vision of the sexual. In *La Vagabonde* we saw a heterosexual woman feeling not so much the victim of a man as of her own sexuality' (Callander, 'Colette and the Hidden Woman:

divorce. However, Cécile subsequently returns to her former husband, a professional failure and alcoholic, before dying in childbirth at the end of the novel.

Réval establishes a parallel female narrative centring on Suzanne Darzille, Cécile's childhood friend. Initially working as a mannequin with a couturier, Suzanne breaks into journalism and eventually becomes editor of the women's magazine *Grâces*. Having initially sought to achieve a good marriage, Suzanne comes to consider marriage as a bar to female freedom, establishing a *union libre* with her lover instead. Where Cécile suffers the deadly effects of a heterosexual union characterized by male power and female submission and dependency, Suzanne discovers that female happiness and satisfaction are to be found in work and autonomy, thus endorsing the message that Clémence unsuccessfully impresses upon her daughter.

Much of the novel is focalized externally by Réval's omniscient narrator, with occasional shifts to internal focalization by central characters. Like Yver's narrator in *Les Cervelines*, Réval's narrator at times offers explicit direction to the reader by evaluating and framing what is at stake in the novel's conflicts. A key instance of this framing occurs towards the end of *Le Ruban de Vénus*, when the reader is offered a schema within which to understand the contrasting attitudes and fates of the leading female protagonists: '[Cécile and Suzanne] représentaient [...] les types de femmes qui incarnent dans notre époque de transition des idées bien divergentes sur la mentalité féminine' (RV, 261). Cécile, who is at this point on the verge of renouncing her autonomy and career in order to pursue reconciliation with her ex-husband, is 'la femme d'autrefois, docile, soumise' (RV, 262). In contrast to Cécile's submissive devotion, Suzanne, although in an established relationship with an older man, Bourgès, has

Sexuality, Silence, Subversion', in *French Erotic Fiction: Women's Desiring Writing, 1880-1990*, ed. by Alex Hughes and Kate Ince (Oxford: Berg, 1996), pp. 49-68 (p. 58)).

pursued her career more determinedly: ‘D’esprit positif [...] elle avait trouvé le moyen de se faire, dans ce Paris, une situation personnelle brillante, en s’aidant de l’amour et de la protection de Bourgès’ (RV, 261). Within the schema set by Réval’s narrator, Cécile is aligned with a female subjectivity of the past, and Suzanne, more implicitly, belongs to the future.

The two women, according to the narrator, are divided by their attitudes towards love. Cécile loves her husband in a manner that links her to ‘[le] passé des aïeules par les souvenirs mystérieux qui se lèguent à la race avec le sang’ (RV, 262). She loves him through a kind of collective female memory that binds Cécile to previous generations of women: she shares in their subjugation by loving as a woman, through fidelity and gift of self. If this is a concept of feminine devotion that is in some sense hereditary, passed on via the ‘sang’, its ineluctable nature is contested by Suzanne, who, Réval’s narrator informs the reader, does not love in the manner of Cécile and their ‘aïeules’. Instead, she accepts a man’s love – that of Bourgès, her partner – in order to secure another kind of fulfilment: ‘une situation personnelle brillante’. Her life differs radically from Cécile’s because she will not position herself in a history of female submission through love. Instead, she transgresses feminine ideals by seeking pleasure in work and professional success. The narrator guards against any construal of Suzanne as unethical. She is, the reader is informed, ‘l’être le plus droit, le plus simple, le plus grave’ (RV, 261). Her decision is an ethical one *not to love* that permits her to dislodge the beloved male as the sole source of meaning and value in the female life.

If Réval is exploring changing female attitudes to love and sex through her dual New Woman narratives, she is also mapping out a historical shift in female support for the alignment of maleness, power and authority, as it concerns the control of female bodies and lives. Like Colette in *L’Entrave*, Réval constructs heterosexual love as a highly gendered transaction that, for women, is premised on a veneration of the male

subject, a respect for his place as guardian and authority over the female body and life, and an injunction towards self-effacement in his interest. In affording her lover ‘de la tendresse et de la reconnaissance’ (RV, 261) but refusing to *love*, Suzanne refuses to invest this kind of power in the male subject.

Healing Masculine Wounds

The twin female narratives in Réval’s novel share similar origins: both are presented, like Berthe Robin’s, as the consequence of paternal failure. Cécile is the daughter of a ruined alcoholic father who has gambled away his business and his wife’s dowry. Having lost the comfortable bourgeois lifestyle that she enjoyed during her childhood, Cécile is forced both to earn a living and to invest heavily in her own talent rather than looking to her father for material or spiritual support.⁴² Similarly, it is the huge debts that Suzanne’s bourgeois father leaves to his wife and daughters upon his death that drive her to Paris in search of paid employment. Suzanne, stoical in the face of this paternal betrayal, makes her own way, nurturing a scepticism concerning men’s ability to anchor the female life and de-authorizing male claims to omnipotence. In contrast, Cécile continues to believe in the necessary centrality and authority of the male subject, attempting to reinstate the plenitude of the fragmented or inadequate male subject through persistent devotion and self-abnegation.

Étienne Castellar’s ruin is financial, moral and physical. The account of Cécile’s turbulent home life centres, in the early part of the novel, on her father’s drunken anger and impotence before his wife and daughter. Having endured the humiliations of her

⁴² Réval constructs a different relationship between the father and the New Woman daughter elsewhere in her work. In *La Bachelière*, her heroine Gaude Malvos is an archaeologist and researcher who models her career on identification with her father, and who, after his death, devotes her life to completing his unfinished work. See Waelti-Walters, *Feminist Novelists*, pp. 87-90 and Rogers, *Career Stories*, pp. 128-133.

husband's infidelity, his bankruptcy, and her dramatic *déclassement*, Clémence Castellar exhibits utter contempt for her husband and openly states her desire for his death. Reduced to begging and stealing from his wife's kitchen 'comme le misérable qui s'en va [...] cogner à la porte d'un asile de nuit' (*RV*, 36), Étienne nonetheless persists in empty gestures of patriarchal authority. Stumbling into the family's modest apartment to be met only with coldness from his wife and daughter, he loudly demands the respectful attentions owed to 'le patron' (*RV*, 37):

Il envoya un coup de pied dans la table.
 — Nous verrons qui est le maître ici! Je cogne! ... qu'on me serve!
 Les yeux glacés fixèrent l'homme. Il baissa la tête et honteux:
 — Je n'ai rien vendu ... (*RV*, 38)

Étienne's failure to fulfil the role of guardian and provider to his family, once added to his earlier financial and sexual indiscretions, fatally undermine his pretensions to mastery over the household; he is defeated by his wife's cold stare and his own admission of professional ineptitude.

The emptiness of the father's will is further highlighted in his response to Clémence's open challenge to his masculinity: 'si tu étais un homme, tu travaillerais' (*RV*, 39). His disqualification from the category 'homme', rather than eliciting proof of male mastery, prompts threats of self-annihilation:

— Ah! je suis une chiffelle! ah! je suis un mauvais père, ah! je mendie votre argent. Eh bien, tu vas voir, je vais me tuer là, sous tes yeux [...].
 Il s'avança vers la fenêtre, l'obscurité glacée les fit frissonner. [...] L'homme se pencha. Cécile eut un battement de cœur. Elle se leva. Un regard de la mère la cloua à sa place. Tant de fois, le misérable avait simulé le suicide pour les effrayer, qu'elle ne croyait pas à la possibilité de l'exécution ce soir-là. (*RV*, 39)

Castellar's sarcastic reiteration of his wife's criticism leads, in this passage, to what amounts to an endorsement of her judgement. His suicide threat suggests that he concurs with her view that he fails to approximate to a model of breadwinning, controlled, industrious masculinity, and thus forfeits his place and value within the home. This is, however, a mock forfeiture insofar as Étienne has no intention of

executing his threats. Rather, the repeated charade of the suicide threat allows him to position himself as an object of pity for his wife and daughter. By making a spectacle of his inadequacy and ruination, the *patron* invites Clémence and Cécile to acknowledge his significance once more. This is a female respect for the male subject that would be routed through pity for his loss rather than fear or awe at the omnipotence of the father. This strategy fails to win any sympathy from Étienne's wife. Cécile, however, is unable wholly to turn away from her father and his lost prestige. It is this lingering attachment to a myth of male omnipotence comprehensively discredited by the reality of paternal failure that subsequently structures her relationship with her husband Jean.

The intensity of Clémence's hatred of her husband, and, by extension, of men in general, prompts her nurturance of Cécile's career plans. Clémence's bitter disappointment at her husband's dereliction of his duties as a husband and father extends to her outright repudiation, on her daughter's behalf, of marriage and its concomitant gender roles:

Ne sois pas comme ces filles qui s'imaginent que le bonheur est d'être aimée.
[...] Le bonheur c'est d'être libre. Le bonheur, c'est le travail qu'on aime. [...] Te vois-tu, toi, si bonne, si délicate, liée à un goujat, à un brutal qui étoufferait ton génie, parce qu'il aurait tous les droits sur ton cerveau et sur ton corps. (RV, 40)

Like Rachilde's Eliante, Clémence's experience of marriage prompts a desire to enact a radical overturning of the bourgeois gender positions that cause her such intense anger, notably male ownership of the female mind and body, and women's enforced endorsement of the male subject as bearer of meaning and value. In Réval's text, however, this desire translates to a determination to prevent the reproduction of masculine power over the female subject through marriage and, moreover, proceeds via Clémence's claims, on her daughter's behalf, to professional and public activity. Missie's hollow plans to earn her own living, a rejection of bourgeois convention utterly rejected by her aunt, are encouraged in Réval's inter-generational female bond. The New

Woman rebellion against this reviled male ownership so wholly stymied in *La Jongleuse* is valorized and promoted in *Le Ruban de Vénus*.

If Cécile's nascent revolt is thus enmeshed in a mother-daughter bond in which female autonomy is privileged over male-authored subjugation, this bond quickly proves useless against the allure of the male subject. It is at Étienne's funeral, which for Clémence marks the end of male tyranny in her life, that Cécile begins to consider her friend Jean Chatelain as a future husband. Pointing, with neat symbolism, to the reproduction of male ownership of the female subject, it is at Étienne's graveside that Jean steps forward to take Cécile's hand for the first time (*RV*, 69). This particular turn in the plot serves as the first indication that Cécile's story, rather than enacting a successful re-negotiation of the hierarchical gender relations through which men dominate women, will attest, rather, to their intractability. While Réval's text gestures towards the de-authorization of patriarchal domination through the mother's valorization of the daughter's claims to independence and self-determination, this female bond is ultimately exposed as inadequate in relation to male authority and its reproduction via heterosexual union.

The account of the early period of Cécile's marriage is concerned with her gradual apprehension of the inevitability of female subjugation and male power within the heterosexual relationship. Like Missie, she initially harbours an ideal of heterosexual friendship in which the rigid gender hierarchies of bourgeois marriage would be re-negotiated. At the time of the engagement, Cécile imagines that 'leur mariage ne serait qu'une camaraderie plus intime' (*RV*, 88). Her ideal echoes Missie's vain efforts to interpellate Léon Reille as her 'copain'; Cécile envisages the continuation of the shared intellectual interests and, implicitly, the equality that underpinned her friendship with Jean. This ideal leads Cécile to pursue her own interests in the early days of the marriage, an attitude that rapidly becomes unacceptable to her husband:

Tant qu'elle n'avait été pour lui qu'une camarade, cette conscience de sa valeur d'artiste lui plaisait; Cécile était placée si haut devant lui! Mais depuis qu'ils étaient unis, le souci constant de son travail, de ses projets étalait un égoïsme qui lui déplaisait. (RV, 104-105)

Cécile's idea of marriage as an extension of their friendship is exposed as incompatible with Jean's view of the material difference between 'camaraderie' – which permits a more fluid configuration of gender positions – and the more conservative roles assigned to women and men in marriage.

Jean's resistance to his wife's independence is a rehearsal of the recurrent dilemma of the affront to male authority posed by New Woman protagonists of this period. Cécile's narrative is rather stark in its response to this clash of expectations: Jean quickly emerges as the more powerful figure in the marriage, taking up the position of male agent of women's 'shackling' discussed in the previous chapter. The territorializing responses of Colette's Jean are echoed in Jean Chatelain's articulation of his wish to possess Cécile's heart and body wholly: 'Laisse-moi posséder ce royaume, et courir partout à ma guise, sans que rien de toi se dérobe à moi' (RV, 104). Cécile's abandonment of what Réval's narrator terms her 'attitude autoritaire' (RV, 104) meanwhile, is founded upon her experience of sexual desire. The discovery of sexuality, as represented in *Le Ruban de Vénus*, is closely bound up with the New Woman's learning to revere the male subject and to endorse his claims to plenitude and authority. The first days of the marriage are marked by Cécile's uneasiness concerning her mother, whom she feels she has abandoned. After their first argument, Jean overcomes Cécile's annoyance:

Il dénoua les mains qui le repoussaient, elle résistait hostile. Plus fort, il souleva la tête échevelée de sa femme, la posa doucement sur son épaule, et son bras l'enveloppa impérieusement...

Cécile se sentait vaincue, son corps raidi s'abandonna et sa bouche, prête à mordre, couvrit de baisers celui qu'elle voulait repousser, un moment auparavant. (RV, 102)

Réval's description of the female protagonist's desire – it is noted later that 'ce fut elle qui, ce jour-là, osa la première caresse' (*RV*, 102) – is founded upon her defeat to the stronger male subject. It is because Jean is 'plus fort' and is able physically to overcome her hostility, that Cécile is 'vaincue'; from there female resistance becomes the expression of desire. Heterosexuality as staged here thus serves to re-inscribe femininity as being defined by weakness and masculinity by power.

Réval's construction of desire, with its clear inscription of gender hierarchy, obeys precisely the conventions surrounding male and female experiences of heterosexuality that Rachilde, through Eliante, problematizes and subverts.⁴³ Cécile experiences desire as the submission that Eliante dies to evade. The effects of this sexual defeat, meanwhile, are far-reaching: it leads to Cécile's installation of Jean as the foundation and sole meaning of her life. This all-consuming devotion is expressed in religious terms:

Elle restait absorbée en prière, les mains jointes sur ses genoux, ne voyant plus rien, ni tableau, ni modèle, ni rêve, ni mère, ni amie, mais Lui partout, Lui à qui elle voulait plaire, Lui qu'elle préférerait à la gloire promise. (*RV*, 167)

As Cécile prays for Jean's safe return from a journey, the 'Lui' of God or Christ is thoroughly conflated with, if not supplanted by, the 'Lui' of her husband. Réval's novel traces a connection between subjugation to the male subject through sexual desire and his investiture as source of all meaning that is later echoed in *L'Entrave*. Renée's return to Jean is premised on her acknowledgement of him as the condition and foundation of all experience and meaning in her life:

⁴³ Writing of Rachilde's subversive representations of heterosexuality in the context of late nineteenth-century culture, Diana Holmes notes: 'the female role in heterosexual relations was often construed in terms of self-giving, self-abandonment [...] a loss or gift of the self; male sexuality was associated rather with a series of active verbs: *posséder, vaincre*, an affirmation and supplementation of the self. Rachilde's heroines share a strength of will and a sense of their own importance which is incompatible with self-abandonment' (Holmes, 'Monstrous Women: Rachilde's Erotic Fiction', in *French Erotic Fiction*, ed. by Hughes and Ince, pp. 27- 48 (p. 37)).

Tout ce que j'aimais avant lui me sera alors rendu, la lumière, la musique, le murmure des arbres, le timide et fervent appel des bêtes familières, le silence fier des hommes qui souffrent – tout cela me sera rendu, mais *à travers* lui ... (E, 461)

The two articulations of female love, dedicated to two men called Jean, share the investiture of the male subject with the privilege of being the centre or origin of meaning in the female life. Where Cécile excludes all other interests in her devotion to her husband, Renée makes Jean the condition upon which what were previously *her* interests now rest. Female subjectivity is here characterized by dependency in relation to a masculinity premised on autonomy and wholeness.

Cécile's investiture of Jean with this unique importance in her life recalls Simone de Beauvoir's conceptualization of the dilemma of the woman in love in *Le Deuxième Sexe*. Beauvoir discusses the power asymmetry underpinning women's and men's conceptions of the meaning of love, noting that while for men, love is 'une occupation',⁴⁴ for women it is 'la vie même'.⁴⁵ These differing views of love, she posits, are not inevitable or natural. They are the product, rather, of a broader asymmetry shaping women's condition under patriarchy: the casting of woman as man's Other rather than as an autonomous, complete human being in her own right. As Beauvoir writes, '[La femme] se détermine et se différencie par rapport à l'homme et non celui-ci par rapport à elle; elle est l'inessentiel en face de l'essentiel. Il est le Sujet, il est l'Absolu: elle est l'Autre'.⁴⁶ Raised to believe that she will never achieve the same freedoms and status as men, women, Beauvoir suggests, invest heavily in heterosexual love and in the beloved male as a way of managing and compensating for their own degraded status. The *amoureuse*, she argues:

⁴⁴ Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe*, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1976 [1949]), II, p. 540.

⁴⁵ Beauvoir, II, p. 540.

⁴⁶ Beauvoir, I, p. 17.

s'efforcera de surmonter sa situation d'objet inessentiel en l'assumant radicalement; à travers sa chair, ses sentiments, ses conduites, elle exaltera souverainement l'aimé, elle le posera comme la valeur et la réalité suprême: elle s'anéantira devant lui. L'amour devient pour elle une religion.⁴⁷

Rather than cultivating her own ambitions and freedoms as an unmarried woman, Cécile gradually embraces the self-effacing, subservient and worshipful attitude that Beauvoir describes.

Her willingness to afford this authority and centrality to her husband contrasts, however, with the signifiers of deficiency and weakness that cluster around the character of Jean. Female talent, as in *Les Cervelines*, is accompanied by male mediocrity. The son of a Nantes shipowner, Jean is portrayed, as the novel opens, as a reclusive librarian at the *École des Beaux-Arts*. Suzanne remarks on his unkempt appearance in an early conversation with Cécile, referring to him as 'l'homme des bois' (*RV*, 9). Introduced via his careless appearance, Jean continues to be associated with a lack of professional diligence. Following his marriage to Cécile, he leaves his role at the *École*, and talks of beginning a doctorate that never materializes. When the couple leaves Paris for Brittany, he spends his time roaming the cliffs and collecting plants, a rediscovery of youthful pleasure that is construed as indolence by Clémence, who refers to him as 'un fainéant' (*RV*, 182).⁴⁸ A number of the novels examined in this thesis exhibit men's revulsion at the obligations of bourgeois masculinity. Réval's Jean defers this assumption of responsibility indefinitely, his professional restlessness indicating a failure to approximate to the discipline and achievement of the bourgeois masculine ideal.

⁴⁷ Beauvoir, II, p. 540.

⁴⁸ A further parallel with Jean in *L'Entrave* emerges here. As Colette's novel closes, Renée and Jean are also in Brittany; she, waiting at his house, watches him 'sur le haut d'une falaise dentelée' (*E*, 463). However, in Colette's novel this leisure time is circumscribed by Jean having taken up his father's role at the bank and thus by a return to his 'masculine' role as a productive actor in the public sphere.

Unlike *La Jongleuse*, which offers a more sustained exploration of male subjectivity through the deployment of Léon as primary focalizer, Réval's narrative tends to exclude Jean's point of view. The early relationship between Cécile and Jean receives slight treatment, and Jean remains rather inscrutable throughout the novel. In this respect, despite clear differences in the narrative techniques between the two texts – Réval's narrator provides a brief sketch of Jean Chatelain's background, for example – he is similar to Colette's Jean in *L'Entrave*. Both male figures are knowable primarily through the responses of the heroine to them. In both novels, what emerges most strongly in relation to the leading male is the importance of the masculine position and its effects on the female subject; this position, in both cases, comes to be aligned with breaking the bonds between women and the control of the recalcitrant female subject through sex and marriage. However, while in Colette's novel this positioning maps onto the outline of a narrative of bourgeois masculine *Bildung*, in *Le Ruban de Vénus* Jean is repeatedly aligned with ineptitude and failure.

Réval's construction of Jean's masculinity is thus marked by a central contradiction: the absoluteness of the male subject's domination of Cécile, founded upon his capacity to subjugate her through sexuality, is at odds with the ineptitude and mediocrity so closely associated with him in the novel. In depicting a masculinity in which male inadequacy or lack is reproduced from one generation to the next – Jean's later failings, infidelity and alcoholism, replicate Étienne's almost exactly – Réval's text suggests that this contradiction or discrepancy is in some sense structural. What sustains masculine hegemony is female devotion: this both overlooks such deficiencies and, on occasion, recuperates evidence of male lack as merely one more sign of the male subject's claims to centrality and power.

This kind of recuperation is most clearly at work in Cécile's final reunion with Jean, which occurs after a divorce lasting several years. Determined to pursue

reconciliation, Cécile visits Jean at home, where she sees the evidence of his fruitless and dissolute life:

Des papiers traînaient, couverts de ratures, disant le travail indécis et mou ; par terre des livres usés, déchirés, traînaient. C'était le désordre d'un lieu de fainéantise. Et lui, sur son lit, dormait comme une brute. [...] Elle fut saisie d'une peine immense devant la détresse de celui qu'elle aimait, elle l'aima plus encore, de le voir si faible, si amoindri devant elle. (RV, 270)

The spectacle of Jean 'amoindri' serves only to make Cécile love him more. That Jean's state should have this effect on Cécile engages the possibility of a shift in the hierarchical organization of their relationship. From being tied to Jean by his seemingly inexorable domination of her, Cécile now acknowledges his diminished state as the basis for a future bond. This possibility is quickly foreclosed, however. Upon witnessing Jean's degraded state, Cécile begins to reflect on the self-sacrificing devotion that will be required, on her part, to nurse him back to physical and mental health:

Elle ne vit plus [...] que la beauté de ce sauvetage nécessaire, de ce sauvetage qui serait aussi une réparation. [...] Elle devait relever ce misérable, lui rendre sa force, son esprit, sa dignité d'autrefois ; elle serait la gardienne, l'amie, la réparatrice. (RV, 273)

The repeated reference to the need for 'réparation' indicates both masochistic self-reproach – Cécile blames her decision to divorce him for his ruin – and an underlying concern with the necessary suturing of the fragmented and wounded male subject. The graphic representation of the degraded, failed male character is recuperated, by Cécile, as merely evidence that she must bring him back to strength, wholeness and authority. She refuses to acknowledge the fact of male deficiency, but rather seeks to heal it by sacrificing herself.

The scene at Jean's apartment functions as a repetition of the episode of paternal impotence discussed above. Cécile's father seeks to reinstate his authority and importance within the home by displaying his wish for self-destruction and attempting to elicit the pity of his wife and daughter. Where Étienne fails, Jean succeeds, if

unconsciously, in re-inscribing his right to female deference by routing Cécile's subjugation to him through pity and concern for his lost power. That the diminution of the male subject figures, for Cécile, as marker of lost grandeur or authority is most clearly indicated by the re-emergence of the link between her devotion to Jean and religious worship. As the reunion scene at the apartment ends, Cécile spends a sleepless night listening to Jean's confession of his past adventures:

Morte de fatigue, elle se raidit contre la souffrance et resta toute la nuit, le buste droit, portant sur ses genoux le corps pesant de l'époux, comme en l'église de Sainte-Marie-des-Fleurs, la *Pieta* [sic] de Michel-Ange porte dans une vigile éternelle le corps du Crucifié. (RV, 274)

Réval's narrator offers a comparison of Cécile holding Jean to an image of Mary holding the crucified Christ. This comparison, in figuring Jean as Christ, represents the climax of her reinvestment in the myth of male omnipotence. The degradation associated with her former husband is recuperated as a sign of future grandeur, just as the suffering of the crucified Christ is the basis of, and prelude to, eternal glory. There is no indication here that the comparison with Michelangelo's *Pietà* should be read as a product of Cécile's perception or fantasy. Rather, it appears as an interpretation provided Réval's narrator, indicating the narrator's complicity, at this moment, with Cécile's view of the beauty of self-sacrifice.

Disrespecting Masculine Authority

Cécile's narrative is concerned with the intractability of female endorsement of male authority over the female subject. However, *Le Ruban de Vénus* also stages a re-negotiation of the male subject's place as centre of meaning and value for the female protagonist through a second narrative of female rebellion. The voice of dissent belongs to Suzanne Darzille, Cécile's childhood friend, who, in the novel's first chapter, arrives in Paris from their native Touraine in order to make a living. To Cécile's surprise,

Suzanne, a gifted writer, initially rejects novel writing and journalism in favour of a post as mannequin for the couturier Bourgès. It is only after she has embarked upon a romance with Bourgès himself, whom Suzanne refuses to marry, that she chooses to accept his help in winning the post of editor at the women's magazine *Grâces*, there enjoying her role at the centre of literary and fashionable life in Paris.

Suzanne's career, traced in less detail than Cécile's, appears to be based on a rather conventional set of positions for the female subject. Her role as mannequin for, then lover of, a man whose connections subsequently assure her entry into Parisian journalism indicate that Suzanne's success and security are premised on the visual consumption of the female subject, and upon her inscription in a subservient position vis-à-vis Bourgès. However, Suzanne presents a more complex set of propositions about female agency and, crucially for this reading, about women's negotiation with masculinity and male power than this would suggest. Suzanne's striking beauty, along with her role as magazine editor, indicate that Réval may be drawing here on the example of the famous editor of *La Fronde*, Marguerite Durand.⁴⁹ Roberts asserts that Durand, both personally and through her newspaper, cultivated a subversive, distinctly French New Woman identity by demonstrating the compatibility of the signifiers of conventional femininity such as seductiveness and charm with more unconventional 'new' behaviours such as female professionalization and independence.⁵⁰ In her representation of the offices of *Grâces*, Réval evokes a feminine chic – the offices are described as 'un des plus jolis endroits du Paris féminin' (RV, 244) – alongside the bustle of a working newsroom through which passes 'l'élite cérébrale du féminisme mondain' (RV, 245).

⁴⁹ Roberts (p. 46) asserts that Madeleine Foucart in Tinayre's *La Rebelle* is another fictionalized representation of Durand.

⁵⁰ See Roberts, chapter 2.

Suzanne's story contrasts with Cécile's insofar as it marks the withdrawal of the female subject's assent to a position of subjugation before the hitherto necessary authority of the male other. Réval opens *Le Ruban de Vénus* with a scene that inaugurates a strand of female dissent that serves as a counterpoint to Cécile's fatal devotion to Jean. Suzanne, having just arrived in Paris, waits outside the École des Beaux-Arts in order to surprise Cécile, who is unaware of her friend's presence in the city. Gaining access to an antechamber at the École and there successfully attracting Cécile's attention, she is led through various studios in which female students are at work. Réval's description of the scene inside the École focuses on a life class involving a small group of students:

Les unes étaient accroupies à la turque au pied du modèle, un jeune Italien qui se tenait campé sur l'estrade. Les autres, debout devant leurs chevalets, terminaient l'esquisse de la tête ou du torse. (RV, 7)

In her discussion of the late nineteenth-century debate surrounding women's entry to the École, Garb highlights the subversive possibilities attached to women's participation in life-drawing classes, and in particular the questions it raised about masculinity and gendered power. Among these questions was that the female artist's power 'to possess the world with her sight',⁵¹ when that power took in the male subject as model, threatened to undermine his primary claim to look and to make him the vulnerable object for appraisal and consumption as spectacle.

Réval's description of the life class, published almost a decade after women finally gained admission to the École in 1897, is clearly concerned with this male vulnerability. It is via the introduction of Suzanne as an outsider to the institution that the tensions operating around it are opened to debate. Réval's narrator describes the positions of the female students in more detail as Suzanne takes in the scene around her:

⁵¹ Tamar Garb, 'The Forbidden Gaze: Women Artists and the Male Nude in Late Nineteenth-Century Paris', in *The Body Imaged: The Human Form and Visual Culture Since the Renaissance*, ed. by Kathleen Adler and Marcia Pointon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 33-42 (p. 35).

Autour du jeune Italien, immobile comme une statuette d'ivoire aux tons chauds, les élèves formaient une série d'orbes qui allaient en se resserrant, si bien que les visages des premières n'étaient qu'à quelques centimètres de cette nudité virile. (RV, 8)

This description underlines the intense female scrutiny to which the lone male model – depersonalized at the end of the above quotation to ‘cette nudité virile’ – is subject.

Suzanne, witnessing this scrutiny, quizzes her friend about the female students' possible embarrassment when in such close proximity to the male model. However, Cécile merely instructs her to look at the women at work in the class:

— On s'habitue à tout. Est-ce que les étudiantes en médecine sont gênées quand elles enfoncent le bistouri dans un macchabée? Ici on respecte toutes les convenances: vois notre modèle.
Suzanne se pencha sur l'épaule de Cécile et regarda l'atelier de peinture [...]. Le modèle italien leur faisait face. Son torse grêle se bombait sous l'effort de la respiration, la tête fine regardait le ciel, et le bras soulevé gardait l'attitude du fauconnier qui vient de lâcher le faucon. (RV, 10)

This passage, while concerned with Cécile's insistence on the female students' successful adoption of the hitherto masculine codes of the École, also hints at the sources of protection afforded to the male model. His pose, arm held aloft, suggests that the students are at work on an idealized nude that will offer an image of powerful and heroic masculinity. Meanwhile, Cécile's allusion to their acculturation to the ‘convenances’ points towards female students' successful adoption of the practice of ‘intellectual abstraction’⁵² that, Garb records, was demanded at the École in this period. It was the students' proclaimed ability to ‘transcend the physical’ and to ‘see beyond immediate visceral experience’⁵³ in their relationship to the nude that both de-sexualized the life-drawing class and, in the case of the male model, prevented banal corporeal realities from disrupting the production of an heroic masculine image.

⁵² Garb, ‘Forbidden Gaze’, p. 40.

⁵³ Garb, ‘Forbidden Gaze’, p. 40.

Although she is invited to observe the same ‘convenances’ when she looks at the male model, Suzanne sees something different:

Les yeux de Suzanne palpitérent soudain; un rire fusa si irrésistible qu’il gagna toutes les jeunes filles autour d’elle. Mademoiselle Darzille venait d’apercevoir, suspendu à la taille du jeune homme par une ficelle grailonneuse, un petit sac grand comme rien, sac où les jardiniers prévoyants enferment la plus belle grappe de raisin pour la défendre contre les piqûres des abeilles. (RV, 10)

Suzanne reveals the ways of looking at the male body which are foreclosed by the ‘convenances’ of the École and the training of its female students. The outsider, unwilling to comply with her friend’s idealizing look, is quick to perceive both the physicality of the body and the absurdity of the way it which it is (partially) dressed for presentation to the group of students. It becomes an object available to curiosity and humour, its claims to heroism undermined.

Both the source and implications of Suzanne’s laughter in this scene are worthy of further exploration. It is not simply the fact of the model’s nakedness that she finds funny. Rather, it is the particular covering afforded to his body that elicits her laughter.⁵⁴ The absurdity of this garment undermines Suzanne’s ability to imagine the model as anything approximating to a hero or a figure commanding respect. That it is the model’s underwear that prompts her laughter is significant for another reason however: there is the added suggestion that this ‘petit sac grand comme rien’ is funny precisely because its smallness and absurdity implies the smallness and absurdity of that which it covers too. The stripping of the male model of his heroic status proceeds, in Suzanne’s mirthful look, via the stripping of the penis of its right to symbolize power and authority, that is, from the breaking down of the equation between penis and phallus. The male genitals

⁵⁴ The humour associated with this garment in Réval’s novel was not new. Garb records a tradition of nineteenth-century caricatures concerned with female artists and the male nude, including ‘the ridiculous, much talked about *caleçon*, the trunks which it was suggested that male models could wear in the presence of women artists’ (Garb, *Sisters*, p. 90).

are made an object of humour and, crucially, a site of vulnerability. They must be protected from a look that might attack or diminish them, like ‘la plus belle grappe de raisin’ must be protected against bees. The effects of Suzanne’s errant look, meanwhile, are quite dramatic:

Petite musette grise... Suzanne riait à gorge déployée, d’un rire si franc que le modèle effarouché sortit de son rêve, et se précipita derrière la toile qui lui permettait de se vêtir. (RV, 10)

Suzanne both disrupts the class and sends the fearful male model running for cover. He must first shield and then re-clothe the body which has been viewed in such a way that, as a nude model, he is suddenly exposed.

Suzanne’s disregard for the rules of the *École* constitutes Réval’s staging of a female response to the male subject that refuses the authority that women attribute to men elsewhere in the novel, and encourages the reader to construe her as a rebel against this orthodoxy. Despite her dramatic impact on the life class in the novel’s opening chapter, however, Suzanne’s critical voice emerges only gradually. In her early conversations with Cécile, she conceptualizes her first job with Bourgès as merely a prelude to the advantageous marriage she will make if, as planned, she remains chaste before marrying: ‘je considère ma vertu comme une annuité versée à une assurance sur la vie. [...] Je veux toucher la prime de cette assurance-là, qui est le mariage’ (RV, 21-22). If her language indicates a cynical awareness of the mechanics of marriage as a commercial transaction, Suzanne nonetheless intends to obey the bourgeois convention of protecting female chastity as a guarantee of a future profitable marital exchange. She accepts that ‘la vie’, for the bourgeois *jeune fille*, ideally consists of taking up the role of wife and mother.

Yet it is precisely this imagined ‘prime’, in the shape of marriage proposals from Bourgès, that Suzanne goes on to reject. By part three of the novel, as a now divorced Cécile contemplates her fatal reunion with Jean, Suzanne has dismissed marriage as

inimical to her interests. In contrast to Cécile's vain struggle against her enslaving and overwhelming devotion to her husband, Suzanne has negotiated a relationship with Bourgès that acknowledges female sexual desire at the same time as positing that meaning and pleasure for the female subject do not lie solely with the male subject:

Nous ferions un ménage de chien et de chat, tandis que nous sommes des amoureux parfaits. [...] Que j'aie le malheur de lui dire: « Donne-moi ton nom », ah! comme je le payerais cher! Une fois Madame Bourgès, adieu les *Grâces*, adieu ma royauté sur ce Paris vivant, vibrant, luxueux, que je dirige à ma guise [...] je ne serais plus que la femme d'un grand couturier... (RV, 259-260)

Suzanne recognizes that marriage represents a kind of erasure for the female subject. It would, for her, involve the renunciation of her professional activities as editor of *Grâces* and her disappearance behind the name Madame Bourgès. Instead, she cultivates a relationship that, like the elusive heterosexual camaraderie envisaged by Cécile and Rachilde's Missie Chamerot, aims to elude or subvert the relations of submission and ownership that obtain in marriage, as conceptualized in the two novels. Suzanne has established the kind of *union libre* that Missie only ever talks about.

It would perhaps be erroneous to overstate the subversive aspects of Suzanne's position in relation to her lover. After all, Bourgès is, in an important sense, guardian of Suzanne's career. Yet her rebuffing of his marriage proposals constitutes a circumscription of the place and importance that she is willing to afford him, and thus contrasts with Cécile's quasi-religious devotion to 'Lui'. This re-scripting of the place of the male subject in the female life is manifest in Suzanne's symbolically important double rejection of Bourgès's name. Having refused the offer of becoming Madame Bourgès, she also confers her own name on their two children 'par principe' (RV, 220; 261). She guards against the paternal claims which succeed so forcibly in *La Maison du péché* and which Renée is offered as a model of love in Masseau's apologue.

Suzanne's de-authorization of female respect for powerful masculinities is also manifest in her role as interlocutor to another female character, the talented sculptor Camille Réber. Like Cécile's, Camille's narrative attests to the deathly consequences of women's aggrandizement and hero-worship of men: her love for her teacher, the womanizing Vandœuvre, gradually drives her to intense jealousy, mental illness and incarceration at the Salpêtrière. Some aspects of Camille and her story, not least her name, suggest that Réval may have been thinking of Camille Claudel. In 1913, seven years after *Le Ruban de Vénus* was published, Claudel herself was committed to the Ville-Evrard asylum.⁵⁵

In another key episode dealing with the structures of power and gender in the visual field, Suzanne lends a sceptical ear to Camille Réber's account of the early stages of her relationship with Vandœuvre:

j'étais arrivée à l'atelier avant mes camarades. En passant j'avais acheté tout ce que j'avais trouvé de violettes et de roses, je voulais fleurir l'Endymion que le maître a envoyé depuis au Salon. Tu l'as vu, le jeune dieu recevant le baiser de Diane. C'est un groupe étonnant. [...] Personne dans l'atelier, j'éparpille mes fleurs sur les corps de marbre; je les sentais vivants, je voyais ces bras s'ouvrir, et saisir la forme qui se penchait. Était-ce moi, était-ce Diane ? Je ne pouvais plus m'éloigner, mes mains se tendaient vers l'épaule nue... « Qu'est-ce que tu fais là ? » C'est lui, lui qui vient d'entrer; je le sens derrière moi, et puis... et puis, fit-elle avec effort, ce fut terrible, je tremblais, je ne savais ce que je disais, je voulais partir, m'échapper. (RV, 63-64)

Camille's intense devotion to her teacher and his work is expressed as a sensual attraction to Endymion's naked shoulder. Vandœuvre, witnessing a rapt Camille before the sculpture, demonstrates his reciprocal desire for her. Camille's concession to his desire is in fact marked at the end of this quotation by her articulation of a wish to flee,

⁵⁵ See Odile Ayral-Clause, *Camille Claudel: A Life* (New York: Abrams, 2002), chapter 17.

a rhetorical move that emphasizes once more that heterosexuality is frequently bound up, in Réval's text, with male domination and female loss of agency.

Camille succeeds in winning Vandœuvre's favour by offering him the spectacle of his work being looked at adoringly by his devoted female student. What renders this scenario more intriguing and more important, however, is the particular slippage between Réval's protagonists and those represented in Vandœuvre's sculpture. Camille, contemplating the arms that reach out for Endymion, experiences a kind of blurring of the distinction between self and representation: 'Était-ce moi, était-ce Diane?'. That Camille in some sense becomes Diana, giver of the kiss, strongly implies an imagined merging of the figure of Endymion with the figure of Vandœuvre. The linkage between *maître* and represented male figure is also underlined by the reference to Endymion as 'dieu', connecting with the godlike qualities ascribed to the artist, whom Camille describes earlier in this conversation as 'comme un dieu inaccessible' (RV, 62). Réval's construction of the female response to the male artist mirrors Delarue-Mardrus's conferral of these same godlike qualities on Armand in *Douce moitié*. The implied slippage between Vandœuvre and Endymion also suggests, therefore, that Camille is describing not only her enthrallment before a piece of the sculptor's work, but also her enthrallment before an idealized representation of the man himself.

Camille's account of the scene with Vandœuvre exhibits parallels with the 'portrait of a gentleman' topos that Naomi Schor has identified in Lafayette's *La Princesse de Clèves*, Staël's *Corinne*, Sand's *Indiana* and Sarraute's *Portrait d'un inconnu*. Schor argues that each of these texts includes a scene which 'stages the violation by the male gaze of the female protagonist's private space and the protagonist's discovery therein of a portrait, his own and/or that of another masculine figure'.⁵⁶ In each case, the scenes

⁵⁶ Schor, p. 112.

work to expose the male character's fascination with the male imago as 'evidence of phallic power'.⁵⁷ The female character's place in the scene is to provide, for the watching male subject, the spectacle of her own desire for the imago, thus reinforcing male claims to power. Schor goes on to analyse the various ways in which each female-authored text also works to undermine the security of the male character's relationship to this 'larger-than-life self-image'.⁵⁸

Discussing Nemours's pleasure in secretly witnessing the *Princesse de Clèves* gazing at his portrait, Schor writes:

What makes the voyeur's pleasure so uniquely, so hyperbolically gratifying is not only that he holds the object of his desire prisoner of his gaze, not only that his gaze violates her most intimate secret, but rather and above all that what he beholds is his own likeness viewed through the eyes of an adoring woman. *Jouissance* for Nemours is being the spectator of his own desirability.⁵⁹

The male protagonist's pleasure in being 'the spectator of his own desirability' is implicit in Réval's version of this scene. The mode of narration – Camille relating the scene in direct speech to Suzanne – means that Vandœuvre's point of view is absent. However, that it is the spectacle of the woman decorating and adoring 'his' representation that prompts him to seduce her is strongly implied. It might be added that Réval's rehearsal of this scene enacts a kind of doubling of male pleasure: Vandœuvre sees Camille admiring both 'his' image (Vandœuvre as Endymion) and his creation, the sculpture itself. The male subject's phallic power as artist is reinforced here in a manner that does not appear in Schor's chosen examples.

For Schor, 'portrait of a gentleman' scenes such as that figuring in *La Princesse de Clèves* offer 'conjointly a representation of a male protagonist and *en abîme* a commentary

⁵⁷ Schor, p. 117.

⁵⁸ Schor, p. 131.

⁵⁹ Schor, p. 117.

on man's relationship to his own representation'.⁶⁰ Representations of men work to consolidate the male subject's claims to supremacy and authority by offering an aggrandized, idealized version of the male self. The functioning of symbolic systems that insistently reinforce this phallic male self in turn requires the support of the adoring female subject to endorse these claims. The critic is, then, mapping out at the level of representation itself the same imperative that the female subject endorse male claims to authority that I detect more widely in the plotting of the texts I have discussed in this study.

Schor's chosen texts exhibit different strategies for unsettling the aggrandizing and idealizing function of representations of men, including instances of the withdrawal of female endorsement of such representations. It is at first difficult to discern any evidence of these subversive strategies in *Le Ruban de Vénus*; unlike the *Princesse*, Camille accepts the advances of the desired man, and in doing so embarks upon the path to insanity and death that links her narrative closely to Cécile's. Vandœuvre, eventually casting her aside and appropriating her talent for his own glory, moves on to the next desirable woman. However, it is by considering Suzanne as Camille's female interlocutor that Réval's critique of the male narcissist and his self-image appears. It is, as noted above, Suzanne who is the recipient of Camille's confidences concerning Vandœuvre in this dialogue between women. Rather than endorsing Camille's avowal of the 'possession terrible' (RV, 63) that she experiences in relation to her teacher, Suzanne treats it with a concerned and wry cynicism that, in puncturing the godlike qualities ascribed to Vandœuvre, is akin to the de-idealizing look that she directs at the male model in the novel's opening chapter: 'Comme tu t'enflames pour ce vieux bonhomme! Il a du génie, c'est entendu, mais les gens de génie n'aiment pas, ils se laissent aimer comme les coquettes...' (RV, 63).

⁶⁰ Schor, p. 117.

Suzanne unsettles the phallic power that Camille ascribes to the *maître* by creating a discrepancy between Vandœuvre as Endymion and Vandœuvre as the rather more mundane ‘vieux bonhomme’. This discrepancy between ideal and reality recalls Armand’s refusal to believe in Langelot as red ribbon-clad ‘homme arrivé’ in Delarue-Mardrus’s novel. In *Douce moitié*, the failure of belief in male power occurs between men, while Judith as female rebel remains faithful to the ideal of authoritative, public masculinity, having instigated the meeting as a way of furthering Armand’s success. Réval locates this loss of support in the rebellious female subject herself: the highlighting of the discrepancy between masculine ideal and reality occurs between women. Suzanne points to the joint delusion whereby Vandœuvre’s claims to an aggrandized and godlike status are endorsed and upheld by Camille’s excessive devotion. Camille functions, as in the scenes analysed by Schor, as merely the guarantor of male self-love. It is Suzanne as sceptical female interlocutor, therefore, who, as Schor puts it, ‘work[s] to unsettle man’s secure relationship to his own image and the representational system it underwrites’.⁶¹

This chapter has examined the ways in which female characters in *La Jongleuse* and *Le Ruban de Vénus* attempt to disrupt the operations of masculinities premised on male domination of women. My discussion of these texts has been framed by a structural parallel whereby each novel foregrounds two narratives of female rebellion. It has sought to argue that, in both novels, refused female endorsement of male claims to omnipotence, plenitude and authority lies at the heart of the female subject’s ability to evade subjugation within heterosexual relationships. In contrast, the reproduction of

⁶¹ Schor, p. 115.

masculinities aligned with male control or domination of women is connected, in both novels, with female endorsement of these claims.

Existing critical work on *La Jongleuse* has established its concern with the unsettling of conventional gender identities and hierarchies. Eliante's frustration of male expectations, systems of knowledge and economies of desire has been of particular interest. By reading the novel as a text concerned with two narratives of female rebellion, I have argued that Eliante's disruptive operations proceed alongside a conflicting reinstatement of male claims to authority and primacy. These claims are upheld through the marriage plot in which Missie's body and her inheritance are conferred upon Léon. Eliante's own evasion of male-dominated systems of marital and sexual exchange is structurally premised upon rewarding the male subject with a substitute object. The novel's conclusion, meanwhile, is also reliant upon the comprehensive defeat of Missie's own rebellion against male authority through her claims to parity with Léon in the public sphere.

Le Ruban de Vénus is also concerned with exploring the ways in which female subjects are called upon to uphold masculinities aligned with power. In her depiction of Cécile's relationship with Jean, Réval echoes the dilemma articulated elsewhere by Colette: the apparent intractability of female submission and masculine domination in heterosexual relationships. Cécile's attempts, at the behest of her mother, to evade the enslaving effects of marriage founders after the discovery of sex, which is presented as the mechanism through which the male subject's domination of the female subject is finally secured. The dual female narrative in Réval's novel is crucial, however. For it is through the contrast between the fates of Cécile and Suzanne that Réval points to the breaking of the hierarchical gender relations that ensure masculine supremacy. Unlike her friend, Suzanne is able to refuse the injunction to view the male subject as necessarily the site of power and meaning. Her withdrawal of this endorsement

constitutes a rupture with what Réval presents as a shared history of female love as submission and aggrandizement of the male subject.

Conclusion

I began this thesis by considering Frédéric Loliée's characterization of French women's writing at the very end of the nineteenth century as an arena in which men were routinely degraded and diminished, especially in their interactions and relationships with disdainful female protagonists. In 'Comme elles nous jugent!', Loliée accounted for this phenomenon by locating women's representations of men within a larger narrative of female resistance to patriarchal structures and to the constraints on women's lives from the 1890s onwards. The critic tied the perceived grievances of women writers to those of feminists and New Women, and posited the existence of a 'ligue offensive' (7) of belligerent female subjects determined to revolutionize gender relations in French society by subjugating men and dispossessing them of their traditional rights and privileges. Loliée's discovery of a set of feeble, feminized men in the pages of contemporary women's fiction was, for him, disturbing yet consistent with his perception of a broader assault by women on the bases of male authority.

If, for Loliée, women writers of the 1890s were fulfilling the ambitions of feminists and New Women by belittling men in their fiction, the circulation of women's unflattering or subversive representations of men was in turn, he argued, responsible for exacerbating unwelcome shifts in gender relations and hierarchies in French society. In the section of his article which dealt with the issue of marriage and its portrayal in women's fiction, Loliée complained that '[c]es maris extasiés, ces amoureux transis, en qui défaille le dernier souffle de la dignité mâle, ont une veulerie à vous soulever le cœur' (15). The portrayal of such inadequate and morally weak husbands was, he argued, especially damaging. For, in failing to depict strong husbands, presumably those capable of the 'domination sentimentale' of a wife and family that Marceline Rhonans

recommends to Jean Cécile in *Les Cervelines*, contemporary women writers were committing a violence against men and, through them, against the institution of marriage. Invoking the old fear about the dire consequences of women reading novels, Loliée pointed to the ill effects of impressionable young women – the future brides and mothers of France – consuming such fiction. Armed with evidence gleaned from their favourite female-authored texts, young women, Loliée suggested, were beginning to see marriage not as a sacred institution and the source of their future happiness, but rather as a ‘lourd cauchemar’ or a ‘plaisante comédie’ (15).

By denuding fictional men of their power as masterful guardians of their wives, female writers had effectively stripped the male subject of his powerful allure, causing prospective brides to hesitate before deferring to a supremely authoritative and knowledgeable husband. In 1899, France was, Loliée asserted, a long way from the ‘idéales fiançailles de jadis, temps de délices et d’illusions qui laissaient entrevoir aux douces ingénues des horizons de paradis’ (15). Given the perceived exposure of men as weaklings and inadequate in fiction, young women no longer believed that ‘paradis’ was to be found in the arms of a man. This illusion broken, such women were cultivating their own talents and abilities, bringing to marriage both a marked cynicism in its capacity to satisfy the female subject, and a set of personal expectations that constituted a break with the innocent, pliable young brides of the past: ‘*On se résigne à la cérémonie parce qu’elle est encore de rigueur [...] mais avec quelles restrictions mentales, dans le présent et pour l’avenir?*’ (16).

In advancing this argument, Loliée endorsed the idea that the construction of men and masculinity in women’s fiction had the power to effect social and cultural change, if only by influencing susceptible female minds. The male textual imago, circulating in debased form from the pens of women writers, had, he implied, contributed to the undermining of men’s claims to power and authority in French

society, especially via the erosion of women's reverence for their prospective husbands. Six years after Loliée's article appeared, the right-wing critic Charles Maurras published his own reflections on the purportedly deleterious effects of women's negative characterizations of men. In his polemical essay 'Le Romantisme féminin', Maurras discussed the fiction and poetry of Delarue-Mardrus, Noailles, Marie de Régnier (Gérard d'Houville), and Renée Vivien.¹ He drew together questions of women's writing, gender, and nationhood by arguing that these writers constituted a threat to the integrity and stability of national and gender identities. All four writers, Maurras suggested, were divided from French tradition, both in terms of their non-French personal heritage and through their writing, which, he argued, bore the mark of a Germanic Romanticism alien to Catholicism and Classicism. According to the critic, they were also gender outlaws, demonstrating an intense individualism and a heightened concern with their inner lives and desires which were inimical to true femininity. Maurras did not repudiate the assertions of other critics who, as I discussed in the introduction to this thesis, argued that women writers were primarily concerned with their own lives and feelings. Rather, he suggested that, in the work of the four writers in question, this propensity had been taken too far, compromising feminine virtues through excess: 'Bien loin de préserver la source de la vie féminine, cet entraînement régulier aux outrances du sentiment la dissipe et la brûle en vain'.² The threatened loss of true femininity was, Maurras asserted, more real in the case of the four writers than in that of those other rebels against traditional femininity, 'la doctoresse ou l'avocate'.³

¹ Charles Maurras, *L'Avenir de l'intelligence: Auguste Comte, Le Romantisme féminin, Mademoiselle Monk* (Paris: Fontemoing, 1905).

² Maurras, p. 253.

³ Maurras, p. 254.

The consequence of women writers' intense focus on their own selves and desires was inevitably, Maurras suggested, lesbianism and the repudiation of marriage:

La femme, disent-elles, est seule apte à comprendre et à recevoir, à donner et à rendre l'essence de l'amour, telle que son cœur la désire : « l'homme est dur », « l'amant est brutal »... Elles sont écoutées. [...] Une cité de femmes est en voie de s'organiser, un secret petit monde où l'homme ne paraît qu'en forme d'intrus et de monstre, de jouet lubrique et bouffon, où c'est un désastre, un scandale qu'une jeune fille parvienne à l'état de fiancée, où l'on annonce un mariage comme un enterrement, un lien de femme à homme comme la plus dégradante mésalliance.⁴

As Elaine Marks has noted in her analysis of this passage, Maurras's complex efforts to render these women marginal or other to French culture and tradition culminates here in the charge that their work is subversive of the heterosexual order: "The real danger, then, of "romantisme féminin" is [...] that it changes the natural sexual orientation of women".⁵ What interests me in Maurras's contention is not strictly his equation of women's writing with lesbianism and the degradation of marriage. It is, rather, his suggestion concerning the means by which what he calls 'ce risque lesbien'⁶ might affect increasing numbers of women. The critic perceives a particular menace in women writers' assertions concerning men – that « l'homme est dur », « l'amant est brutal » – and the credence given to such assertions. The establishment of a 'cité de femmes' is premised on the notion that, as Maurras puts it, women writers are listened to when they characterize men as brutes, lechers and clowns. Women reading such unfavourable judgements would presumably choose to love women rather than men. For Maurras, therefore, the woman writer's denunciation of men in her work held the threat of discrediting and disrupting the purported naturalness of heterosexuality and, with it, men's authority over women. Like Loliée, he suggested that the circulation of women

⁴ Maurras, p. 249.

⁵ Elaine Marks, 'Sapho 1900: Imaginary Renée Vivien and the Rear of the belle époque', *Yale French Studies*, 75 (1988), 175-189 (p. 186). Mesch (p. 11) also cites this passage.

⁶ Maurras, p. 250.

writers' pronouncements on men were set to re-shape the thoughts and desires of their female readers, demeaning men and rendering them superfluous to women's happiness.

Like the feminists, female professionals and other *révoltées* with whom both Loliée and Maurras grouped her, the woman writer was frequently viewed as a transgressive and threatening figure. This threat was multi-faceted, encompassing her apparent rejection of the femininity of the wife and mother, the commercial rivalry that women writers introduced to the literary market and, as Mesch has argued, the spectre of female intellectual prowess that haunted anxious male minds in this period. However, following the logic of both Loliée and Maurras, it may also be suggested that women writers had unique, and for some, fearful, power to change the attitudes and responses of their readers. When it came to the female-authored male, signs of ridicule, criticism, or degradation, including, crucially, feminization, thus threatened to destroy women's belief in the necessity of masculine power and to erode women's respect for men's authority.

My analysis of the representation of men in eight female-authored novels of this period reveals a different pattern to those identified by the critics above. The encounters between rebellious female subjects and male characters in these texts do not attest to any consistent or sustained attack upon the legitimacy of powerful masculinities and male-dominated gender hierarchies. These encounters reveal, rather, the close implication of female protagonists in the endorsement and reproduction of masculinities aligned with power and authority and in their enactment in both public and private contexts. They tell us less about the aggressive or indeed insurrectionary attitudes of women writers towards fictional men and the gender order in the first years of the twentieth century than they do about the intractability of powerful masculinities and the ways in which female subjects are shaped to support and sustain them.

In making this argument, I do not claim to offer a truer or more objective analysis of female-authored men than those offered by contemporary critics such as Loliée and Maurras. If these critics brought a set of political and cultural anxieties concerning changing gender relations in the years around 1900 to their readings of women's characterizations of men, my own reading of women's writing from this period is also, inevitably, both selective and, in the broad sense, politically grounded. It is based, for instance, on the premise that it is useful and important to think about masculinity within a feminist reading of women's writing. This notion has itself at times been controversial for feminist critics, as Robyn Wiegman notes in her charting of feminist scholarship's turn to masculinity as an object of study since the 1980s, via such key interventions as Sedgwick's *Between Men* (1985). Some feminist critics, Wiegman writes, problematized the way in which this turn to masculinity 'seemed to reproduce the centrality of "man" against which women's studies as a broad interdisciplinary field had long defined itself.'⁷

I detect two key ways in which female protagonists come to be implicated in the reproduction and endorsement of powerful and authoritative masculinities. The first is premised on the closure of the narrative of female revolt and the appropriation of the female rebel as object of exchange among men or, more broadly, as subordinate partner in heterosexual relationships. The female subject becomes, in these instances, the object through and in relation to whom the male subject proves and performs his dominance. She, in turn, acquiesces in a role of subordination, shoring up the omnipotence and centrality of the male subject through devotion and self-abnegation. Versions of this scenario emerge in *L'Entrave*, *La Maison du péché*, *La Jongleuse* (Missie) and *Le Ruban de Vénus* (Cécile). I do not claim that female characters' assent to this role is easily or

⁷ Robyn Wiegman, 'Unmaking: Men and Masculinity in Feminist Theory', in *Masculinity Studies and Feminist Theory: New Directions*, ed. by Judith Kegan Gardiner (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), pp. 31-59 (p. 36).

indeed freely given; Colette and Réval, in particular, construct narratives in which female protagonists' support for powerful masculinities is predicated on a gradual concession of their claims to agency and autonomy, a concession which in both cases is attended more or less explicitly by forms of coercion.

Second, I identify in my chosen texts a series of narratives of female mentorship or encouragement of struggling male subjects. These narratives manifest a more overt and active form of female complicity in upholding masculine supremacy. The most salient examples of this second scenario occur in *Nietzschéenne* and *Douce moitié*, which are concerned with the yoking of female energies and talents – the exercise of which may render the female subject liminal or transgressive with respect to conventional models of femininity – to the cause of promoting masculine power and success. However, versions of this scenario occur elsewhere. Rachilde's Eliante, while evading Léon Reille as a lover, bestows wealth, a wife, and a future as an exemplary bourgeois male upon the young medical student. Marceline Rhonans, another woman who avoids the lot of the bourgeois wife and mother, instructs her former fiancé to abandon his attachment to the *cerveline* in order to perform a much more conventional, dominant masculinity vis-à-vis a submissive young bride. Finally, I read Berthe Robin's relationship with Pierre Tisserand as an analogous form of tutelage. Berthe, as Marni's privileged source of knowledge about men, teaches Pierre about his inadequacies while articulating the features of her ideal masculinity.

As the example of Marni's cowardly male protagonist indicates, the pattern of female complicity in the reproduction of powerful masculinities does not mean that the texts discussed here present versions of secure, unproblematic or omnipotent masculinity. Rather, they point insistently to the failures and revulsions that frequently attend men's efforts to embody and enact those forms of social, cultural, sexual and physical supremacy that are aligned with valorized masculinities. Pierre's panicked

efforts to evade the rites of bourgeois masculine courage in his disastrous duel, for instance, find echoes in Jean Cécile's deferred assumption of the authority of the husband and father and, in more allusive fashion, in Colette's depiction of a reluctant son taking up his father's place at the office. Such traces of revulsion are important insofar as they highlight the ways in which masculinities are not natural effects of the male body, but are, rather, produced and policed through forms of coercion. Failure and revulsion may accompany, but do not necessarily overcome, those continued efforts at conformity that are compelled and sustained by regulatory gender ideals. Such ideals cast certain configurations of gendered traits, practices and desires as acceptable and produce others as devalued, unnatural or impossible.

If, as I have argued, these novels demonstrate that masculinity, no less than femininity, is produced and performed through coercion and constraint, my study may be understood as a reiteration of one of the foundational premises of scholarship in masculinity studies as it has developed, across various disciplines, since the 1970s. That is the necessity of understanding men, no less than women, as gendered subjects. Lynne Segal, addressing an imagined male reader in her reflections on the project of masculinity studies, articulates this point as follows:

You had to gain the knowledge that you belong to a specific gender rather than to the universal mould, to begin to apprehend the ways in which masculinity too was a hazardous estate, a paradoxical affair – something most women have in some sense always known of their situation.⁸

These novels portray men who are reluctant, obliged to conform, and haunted by the ever-present threat of failure; their negotiations with masculinity are often tortuous, 'hazardous' and 'paradoxical'. My chosen texts thus reveal gender to be exacting for male as well as female protagonists. As my key argument suggests, however, I do not

⁸ Lynne Segal, 'Back to the Boys? Temptations of the Good Gender Theorist', *Textual Practice*, 15 (2001), 231-250 (pp. 232-233).

disregard either the hierarchical organization of gender in the texts I have examined, or the ways in which these novels, for the most part, stage the re-valorization and reproduction of those hierarchical arrangements which assure men's privilege and power over women.

While this thesis has focused primarily on representations of men and constructions of masculinity, my decision to approach this topic by thinking about encounters between male subjects and rebellious women placed female subjectivity at the heart of my concerns. Indeed, I have been interested here in thinking about what representations of men can tell us about the ways in which female subjectivities and lives are imagined and re-imagined in these novels. In arguing that my chosen texts exhibit female rebels' sustained support for the desirability and necessity of masculinities aligned with power and authority, this study has illuminated a particular aspect of female subjectivity that the unconventional or disruptive behaviours of these rebels do not expunge or destroy. That is the imperative that, in a patriarchal society, the female subject should believe and invest in the male subject as whole, powerful and as the source of meaning, value and happiness not only in his own life but in hers too. The endurance of this belief and investment requires a capacity to aggrandize the male subject and to overlook or make good his vulnerabilities and weaknesses, a capacity exemplified, in different ways, by heroines such as Réval's Cécile and Lesueur's Jocelyne. Kaja Silverman, discussing a different cultural context, conceptualizes this function as a kind of fetishism whereby, in contrast with Freud's formulation, the *female* subject is called upon to sustain conventional gender arrangements by 'disavow[ing] male lack'.⁹

⁹ Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 119. Silverman is here concerned with interrogating masculinity in post-1945 American cinema.

My argument has been that analysis of these novels tells us something of the intractability of ideals of powerful, authoritative masculinity as they operate on male subjects and as they compel the endorsement and respect of even those female subjects enacting forms of revolt against conventional gender positions in this period. As I noted in my introduction, however, this project does not claim to offer a complete account of what is at stake in the encounter between the male subject and the period's female rebel. Such examples as *La Vagabonde* serve to warn against any assumption of the universal applicability of the models I have mapped out here. *Le Ruban de Vénus*, moreover, both illustrates the female rebel's stubborn endorsement of powerful masculinities and gestures towards its undoing via Suzanne's willingness to acknowledge, laugh at and accept those male frailties and vulnerabilities that other female protagonists disavow or seek to repair. Given the many texts by women writers published in this period that have thus far been wholly neglected by literary history, further research into representations of men in French women's fiction in the years prior to 1914 would certainly enrich the perspectives I have offered here. It may, for example, further demonstrate the prevalence of the patterns and operations I have identified and discussed, or, equally, complicate or refine the paradigm I have elaborated in my study.

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