Saying the unsayable: identities in crisis in the early novels of Marie Darrieussecq

Introduction

When Marie Darrieussecq's first novel *Truismes* exploded on to the French literary scene it was clear that she was a young writer intent on taking the reader to disturbing places.¹ Set in a partially recognisable, dystopic France of the near future, this erotic, funny and inventive novel satirises right-wing extremism, repressive state mechanisms, new-age fanaticisms and political correctness gone mad. Its primary focus on gender and body politics is provocatively inflected by Darrieussecq's choice of narrator – a young woman who metamorphoses into a sow – and the novel reveals the author's penchant for probing the frontiers between the everyday and the fantastic, the mimetic and the marvellous. *Truismes* launched the single-minded fascination with identity crises and altered states which would be confirmed by the subsequent novels, *Naissance des fantômes* and *Le Mal de mer* and it gave the French publishing world its phenomenon for the beginning of the 1996 literary year.²

In contrast to this pyrotechnic *succès de scandale*, Darrieussecq's next two novels were more sober, more literary and more tightly focused. *Naissance des fantômes* is an introspective, sometimes hallucinatory study of loss which is minimalist in terms of character range and plot. It is another series of confidences from a young first-person narrator who feels she is losing touch with reality, but rather than charting beastly transformations and innumerable adventures it simply catalogues her attempts to define herself through the empty spaces left after the sudden and inexplicable disappearance of her husband. Expanding on the theme of separation *Le Mal de mer* follows a young mother as she embarks abruptly on an ill-defined

voyage of discovery, taking her small daughter with her and leaving the novel's husband/father behind. Each of these major works is a forensic analysis of a particular trauma, a particular crisis of identity, and each provides variations on dominant areas of investigation one might already call Darrieussecquian. Painful metamorphoses, solitude and the incommensurability of the other, the resurgence of childhood fears, the existence of parallel worlds which encroach on and disrupt what we think of as 'reality' – these are the stuff her fictional universe is made of. Her determination to develop a distinctive, coherent set of metaphors for each altered state overrides other features such as plot or psychology. From *Truismes* onwards she attempts less to explain what is happening to her protagonists than to put the reader into contact with states of being which evoke shared experiences of trauma, growth and change.

A final point: the punchy presentation of gender relations in *Truismes* and Darrieussecq's assertion that she is a feminist should not lead us to the conclusion that she sees herself as a woman's writer in any militant or politicised sense.³ Although in this first novel feminine identity is clearly explored within an oppressive, patriarchal context, the following works constitute much more elliptical examinations of the self in crisis with no overtly political dimension and Darrieussecq's ambitions are less ideological than literary. In other words, what she does want to challenge are the limits of language, and the clinical precision with which she anatomises fleeting states of being is testimony to her sustained attempt to 'dire l'indicible' (say the unsayable).⁴ This chapter will develop the ideas expressed above by pursuing three themes: monstrous bodies, missing others and fantastic landscapes.

Monstrous bodies

A fascination with bodies is evident throughout Darrieussecq's work and bodies may be monstrous in less obvious ways than the freakish forms we encounter in *Truismes*. To begin with, however, I will explore the politicised idea of the monstrous body in this first novel, concentrating on the problems of interpretation it sets for the reader.

I have already suggested that the heroine's porcine transformations keep the struggle over the meanings of the female body firmly at the centre of this complex text. Cleverly standing in metaphoric relation to a wide range of experiences from puberty to menopause, they allow Darrieussecq to explore a collective sense of feminine identity through highlighting one

woman's relationship – sometimes painful, sometimes joyous – with her physical self. They also exemplify to the point of caricature the monstrous or 'abject' body, a concept which permeates the novel entirely. The abject body is one which leaks and bleeds, is protean and uncontainable, and there are numerous manifestations of this such as the heroine's flood-like periods, ever-expanding breasts and buttocks, uncontrollable body hair, unaccountable appetites and increasing tendency to walk on all fours. The abject is said to engender dread and abhorrence in men⁵ and to denote 'a realm outside culture . . . shapeless, monstrous, damp and slimy [and] threatening to reduce culture to chaos'.⁶ It situates gender identities according to the dangerously essentialist culture–nature polarity, its corollary being the perceived necessity to 'civilise' and 'control' female bodies.

As the novel's punning title suggests,⁷ Darrieussecq's primary purpose in *Truismes* is to accumulate commonplace perceptions and discourses such as these which have perennially sought to constrain and manipulate women. They are deeply entrenched and institutionalised in her not so brave new world, and rather than contest them her aim appears to be to reinforce them so thoroughly that their insidiousness and absurdity are consistently underlined. For example, her heroine is non-intellectual, narcissistic, predominantly interested in beauty products and entirely dependent for her sense of self-worth on masculine desire ('mon seul atout était mon côté *pneumatique*' (p. 29) ('my only asset was my *pneumatic* aspect' (p. 19))). She consents to the view of her body as a currency which is plummeting in value and to the pathologising of the female body which is perpetuated by her own diagnoses, those of her clients in the massage parlour, her dermatologist, the fantastic figure of the *marabout*, the gynaecologists and last but not least her partner who declares that 'les femmes, ça a toujours des problèmes de ventre' (p. 23) ('women always have problems with their insides' (p. 13)). In each case what comes to the fore are her increasingly acute sense of shame, negative self-perception and lack of autonomy as her body deviates from society's exacting gold standard of sexual desirability.

It is not possible within the scope of this chapter to explore every twist of *Truismes*'s picaresque narrative. Instead, if we are to establish what message Darrieussecq's novel holds for the collective body of women, we should turn to its end point. This involves no reversal of fortune and little enhanced comprehension on the part of the heroine. She remains a pig-woman and is resigned to exclusion since she has renounced human society altogether, leaving the patriarchal order of the city for the country-

side and the company of pigs. The conclusion also sends us back to the start of the narrative since it foregrounds the heroine's decision to bear witness; the novel both begins and ends with a *mise en scène* of the writing project.

A positive reading of *Truismes*'s conclusion might point out that the heroine is no longer colluding with a society which was threatening to annihilate her, that she has learned how to obtain rather than simply provide sexual pleasure and that far from being repulsed by her monstrous body she now assumes it and delights in it:

Je me laisse souvent aller. Rien n'est meilleur que la terre chaude autour de soi quand on s'éveille le matin, l'odeur de son propre corps mélangée à l'odeur de l'humus, les premières bouchées que l'on prend sans même se lever, glands, châtaignes, tout ce qui a roulé dans la bauge sous le coup de pattes des rêves. (p. 148)

(I often relax and enjoy myself. There's nothing better than warm earth around you when you wake up in the morning, the smell of your own body mingling with the odour of humus, the first mouthfuls you take without even getting up, gobbling acorns, chestnuts, everything that has rolled down into the wallow while you were scrabbling in your dreams. (p. 135))

She is clearly finding a new, more poetic voice and above all she has begun to write, the first step to understanding the assumptions by which she has been framed, and itself an identity affirming exercise.

A negative reading of the conclusion might instead point out that the heroine, condemned to permanent hybridity, is still constrained by the misfortunes of biology. Neither human nor pig, she is doubly outcast and barely accepted by her new companions ('Je ne suis pas à la hauteur de leurs attentes' (p. 141) ('I'm unable to rise to their expectations' (p. 128))). Although her attempt to write could be seen through the lens of feminist thought and practice which links writing and the affirmation of subjecthood, Darrieussecq allows her heroine scant success in this domain. Lacking in analytic focus, her retrospective narrative could hardly be defined as a demonstration of understanding and the whole process is in any case shown to be jeopardised by the mud of the wallow in which she enjoys rolling, 'qui salit tout, qui dilue l'encre à peine sèche' (p. 11) ('which dirties everything and dilutes ink that's barely dry' (p. 1)). The competing fluids of ink and mud reactivate the misogynistic nature-culture, body-intellect cliché – one of the harmful truisms the author is supposedly attempting to destroy through satire – thereby casting a shadow over any

indicator of change or emancipation the conclusion may otherwise have held.

In short, the identity crisis dramatised in *Truismes* does not lend itself easily to a single interpretation. On the one hand the novel seems deeply pessimistic, a study of the worst in women's experiences, riddled with soft-porn images and sexual violence, and with a narrator who is unpardonably light-hearted and too insouciant to denounce the social order. From this perspective the ultimate outrage is that as Darrieussecq takes us 'back to the future', she appears to indicate that bodies of feminist knowledge have not percolated down to ordinary women: it is as if they were an irrelevance of history. Reading the text as ironic, oppositional practice, however, *Truismes* could be said to exemplify Lidia Curti's equally persuasive argument that the freakish body can be 'a derisive counterpoint to stereotypes of the feminine'.⁸

Darrieussecq's following novels retain an intensive focus on the body, but in a less controversial and more ambitious way. They are almost entirely unconcerned with sexuality or erotic experiences and far from being a key to identity physical appearances become practically irrelevant. The metamorphoses with which these novels are concerned are invisible ones, and the bodily changes they describe are not a source of, but a response to, crisis. If bodies here may be defined as monstrous this is because they are shown to be beyond our control, eluding interpretation and eluding language. Darrieussecq's emphasis on the physical is a particularly original feature of her work. The novel, she contends, has focused too heavily on the psychological, on the mind at the expense of the body, and her own fiction shifts the balance with an unrelenting examination of trauma through close-up, slow-motion studies of the physical sensations to which it gives rise. Building on the ground cleared by the *nouveau roman*, Darrieussecq eschews conventional notions of plot and character. She gives her protagonists no face, no pre-history, no curriculum vitae and no name, and although we may sense that they are rounded, real individuals, their function is more important than their character; the author's aim is to give expression to generic experiences, not to leave us with indelible impressions of unforgettable personages. Thus in *Naissance des fantômes* the heroine's initial experience of unity as she watches swallows cut across the early evening skies is physical: 'j'avais l'impression d'être moi-même une grosse chose vibrante et chaude . . . entière, pleine et ramassée' (p. 13) ('It was as though I too were some large, trembling, hot thing' (p. 7)), and the transformation through which her sense of self is progressively splin-

tered will also be described through the body. 'Ecrire "elle se sentait triste", non!' (Write 'she felt sad', no!) proclaims Darrieussecq,⁹ 'mon roman est tout sauf psychologique' (my novel is anything but psychological).¹⁰

Missing others: disappearances, hauntings and holograms

Darrieussecq's protagonists are profoundly isolated and haunted by absence. Each novel creates a situation in which others go missing and are missed: the husband of *Naissance des fantômes* and the mother and daughter of *Le Mal de mer* disappear without warning, triggering crises in the lives of those they have left; the heroine of *Truismes* disastrously seeks out her estranged mother and gradually loses all contact with the social world as she herself – or at least her human incarnation – goes missing. Such literal disappearances are simply one way of highlighting what is in any case endemic in interpersonal relationships as described by Darrieussecq: however hard we try to communicate, we do not connect. We keep on missing each other.

It is to *Naissance des fantômes* and *Le Mal de mer* that we will turn in order to consider the idea of the missing other and the shaken sense of self which is its corollary. In the first of these, Darrieussecq's lucid and inventive meditation on the enduring theme of the disappeared distils the effects of a common grief within one woman's experience. Her choice of a missing rather than a dead husband is a key factor in this respect, embracing generations of women who have waited (Duras's *La Douleur* is clearly a precursor),¹¹ and reaching out to all those who attempt to reconcile themselves with unaccountable loss. If the disappeared cannot be located, what happens to the self? What happens to the memory of the other? And these questions also refer to the ghosts which haunt Europe's collective conscience: 'Comment écrire après Auschwitz quand "eux" sont partis et pas revenus? Comment dire le monde sans "eux"? Comment reconstruire autour d'un trou noir?' (How can we write after Auschwitz when 'they' left and did not return? How can we express the world without 'them'? How can we rebuild around a black hole?).¹²

Darrieussecq's determination to produce a detailed account of the physical effects of loss gives rise to one of the most original features of her second novel: its increasing reliance on tropes drawn from science. If this is a ghost story, it is one that refers us not to superstition but to quantum physics; if it is a love story, it is 'un roman d'amour vécu sous l'angle des molécules' (Garcin, p. 90) (a love story experienced from a molecular

point of view). In an irreversible paradigm shift consistent with the idea of a life in pieces, physical objects and people alike are caught up in a terrifying dance of dispersed atoms and porosity: 'Mon mari était forcément quelque part, gazeux peut-être, à la limite de sortir de l'univers, mais quelque part forcément' (p. 94) ('My husband had to be somewhere, maybe in form of a gas at the very outer edge of the universe, but he still had to be somewhere' (p. 86)). The effort of will required to hold together the contours of the world is tremendous. Microscopic examinations of objects in the marital apartment reveal uncanny structural modifications, and the heroine's own body is perceived biologically as a fragile collection of barriers, 'un ensemble de digues, la peau, la derme, les muscles, l'enveloppe des organes, la barrière immunitaire' (p. 78) ('a system of dikes (epidermis, dermis, membranes, muscles, immune barriers)' (p. 70)), barely keeping disintegration at bay. In a striking *mise-en-abyme* of the novel's repeated slippage between the graspable and the inconceivable, the narrator attempts to give voice to her perceptions as she climbs the familiar winding staircase to her apartment and contemplates the void of the stairwell. Defeated in her attempt to probe the limitations of language, she resorts to drawing and what she produces is a complex of spirals within a spiral, a visual evocation of infinity and of the new space-time which is the universe of loss.

The entry to this universe is deceptively ordinary. *Naissance des fantômes* begins with a steady reiteration of this ordinariness, setting up a mystery in a manner reminiscent of detective fiction: 'Mon mari a disparu. Il est rentré du travail, il a posé sa serviette contre le mur, il m'a demandé si j'avais acheté du pain. Il devait être aux alentours de sept heures et demie' (p. 9) ('My husband's disappeared. He got in from work, propped his briefcase against the wall and asked me if I'd bought the bread. It must have been around half past seven' (p. 3)). This nod to a more reassuring, plot-based literary genre is also a feature of *Le Mal de mer*, and Darrieussecq exploits it with a purpose over and above that of injecting her narratives with suspense. Detective fiction is about finding people and finding things out about people, and it usually does just that. In *Naissance des fantômes*, however, the author's technique of adopting then abandoning some of its generic traits is mimetic of the heroine's progressive loss of bearings. Although she initially pursues her husband through conventional routes (checking the *boulangerie*, contacting the police and tracing his last-known movements) the 'script' soon fritters away. The investigation is abandoned after a few pages to be replaced by inaction and the void, and the text yields

no answers concerning the husband's departure. In *Le Mal de mer* the detective strand is more structurally integrated within the novel, since the abandoned husband (whom we never see) hires a private detective to track down his wife and child, and Darrieussecq stops writing once this happens. The point is, however, that the novel is devoid of the psychological analysis proper to most detective fiction and little is resolved on the level of human understanding. The detective finds the fugitives, but he does not find anything out about them; the reader never discovers what impelled the young mother to leave in the first place, and the characters are no nearer to understanding each other by the end of the novel than they were at the beginning. This brings us to the second aspect of 'missing others.'

A dominant strand of Darrieussecq's work involves the existential question of the self and the other. Although the identity of the young wife in *Naissance des fantômes* disintegrates because no longer held together by the familiar presence of her husband, her attempts to piece together his traces paradoxically erase any certainty that she ever knew him and bring her to the conclusion that he was a phantom even before he disappeared. *Le Mal de mer* provides further studies in existential isolation. The fact that the novel is more peopled merely provides extra opportunities for Darrieussecq to accumulate 'ces moments où, même si l'on tend la main, on croit ne pas pouvoir atteindre l'hologramme qui se tient devant nous' (p. 32) ('those moments when, even if you reach out, you don't think you can touch the hologram standing in front of you' (p. 23)). The protagonists seem separated from each other as if by an invisible membrane and struck by aphasia. Whereas the first two novels are narrated in the first person and writing is both a theme and an element of the heroines' transformations, the characters here are dumbstruck. There is no dialogue or reported speech, for Darrieussecq is no longer working at the level of articulated thought. Instead, in Sarrautean fashion, she records the sub-currents of conflicting sensations experienced by a series of unnamed '*ils*' and '*elles*', creating an unstable universe of misunderstandings and intimate, identity-threatening crises which are generated by the other and never resolved. The distinctive and finely honed body of imagery through which Sarraute describes our shaken worlds, including references to plate tectonics, whirling planets, meteorites and monsters,¹³ is matched by imagery of similar force, design and consistency in Darrieussecq.

Fantastic landscapes, frontiers and parallel worlds

If the abandoned husband in *Le Mal de mer* is 'sidéré par la porosité des frontières' (p. 41) ('amazed by how porous borders can be' (p. 32)), so is the reader of Darrieussecq. Her fiction, teeming with boundaries and thresholds, pinpoints the frontier places to which we are taken as we undergo violent change and the fissures through which we can tumble into alien parallel worlds. The metaphorical sense of place in her writing is idiosyncratic and highly developed, each of her heroines' identity crises unfolding in a psycho-physical environment which juxtaposes the comforting and the menacing, keeping the proximity of chaos uppermost in our minds. The postmodern, bomb-damaged, epidemic-ridden cityscape of *Truismes* – which is an integral aspect of Darrieussecq's socio-political satire as well as the backdrop for her heroine's trials – remains recognisably Parisian. In *Naissance des fantômes* the aquatic and the urban come together as waves lap around the walls of métro stations, and a mysterious and dangerous frontier is visible from the heroine's apartment. The slippage between the ordinary and the fantastic is so fluid, so skilfully operated, that any notion we may have harboured of a safe and ordered existence is placed under considerable pressure. This is particularly the case in *Le Mal de mer* where Darrieussecq does not allow us to forget for an instant that 'sous le sol familial, bitumé, rues, cour d'école, square, parking' (p. 58) ('beneath the familiar tarmac surface of streets, school playgrounds, public squares, car parks' (p. 48)) is a seething, formless magma which could erupt at any moment. Here we encounter another of Darrieussecq's parallel worlds which leaks into the quotidian at periods of crisis: the world of childhood and its monstrous terrors. Her writing, she claims, 'se nourrit de vieilles peurs enfantines' (Baudet, p. 21) (feeds on old childhood fears) which engulf us even in adulthood with all their original intensity. In *Le Mal de mer* she revisits childhood trauma through her intense examination of a mother/daughter separation which highlights particularly clearly the metaphorical importance of environment – in this case the seaside – in her work.

If Darrieussecq's hallmark is her focus on what we might call the disruptive moment, the wave is clearly an appropriate figure and the seashore, 'un endroit d'attache et d'abandon' (a place of attachment and desertion), a fitting locus for a series of ruptures and transformations.¹⁴ The author's grasp of water, particularly in its destructive capacity, is Durassian and this eerily somnolent off-season resort is perhaps the most strange and terrifying of all her frontier places. This becomes clear from the novel's opening

sentence – a powerfully anthropomorphic evocation of the Atlantic as seen for the first time by a disorientated little girl: 'C'est une bouche à demi ouverte, qui respire, mais les yeux, le nez, le menton ne sont plus là. C'est une bouche plus grande que toutes les bouches imaginables, et qui fend l'espace en deux' (p. 9) ('It's a mouth, half open, breathing, but the eyes, nose, and chin are no longer there. It's a mouth bigger than any mouth imaginable, rending space in two' (p. 1)). Darrieussecq's slumbering monster of a seascape, whose mythical proportions and apocalyptic capabilities assume Zolaesque proportions, is gradually made to embody the mother as an ambiguous, fearful force.

The frontier between sea and shore, self and other, is portrayed with particular intensity in the novel's opening section where twenty-one pages of mutual incomprehension begin the child's initiation to separation and to the impossibility of osmosis with the mother. The absence of dialogue and the juxtaposition of conflicting points of view establish the distance between the pair, and the prevailing images are the conflicting ones of home and womb on the one hand, and devouring, cannibalistic mouth on the other. The child, limp as a knitted doll or puppet and useless without the mother's hand to animate her, suffers nightmare visions of dismemberment, impotence and incompleteness. Remembering her first cinema visit (the film was *Pinocchio*) and her terror at the celluloid sea, she now wishes to 'glisser à nouveau dans le noir jusque dans le ventre de la baleine' (p. 17) ('[slip] once again into the darkness and even into the belly of the whale' (p. 9)). The blue tent in which the couple spend the night signifies both home and womb, but its security depends on the presence of the father: on mountain holidays it is he who bangs the tent pegs convincingly into the earth, creating a comforting structure, 'la jointure, endroit et envers, entre sa peau à elle et le monde' (p. 21) ('the membrane, within and without, between her own skin and the world' (p. 13)). Here in the unstable sand the tent heaves with convulsions, a *mise-en-abyme* of the sea, a formless parody of home and an unreliable womb. While the mother dreams of one form of symbiosis with the sea as a release from her depression ('La mer est une paroi verticale, à travers laquelle il suffirait de passer' (pp. 27–8) ('The sea is a vertical partition through which you need only to pass' (p. 20))), the child lives through a quite different one. Her breathing and sobbing are dictated by the rhythm of the waves, her tears taste of oysters and seaweed and later in the novel she will, under maternal instigation, learn to swim.

The seaside, then, is the place where both mother and daughter explore absence before their ultimate separation takes place and it is carefully

selected by a mother who knows precisely where she wants to stage her daughter's first oceanic encounter. It is as if the place could account for something without her having to explain, as if it were some second baptism or a rite of passage in terms of understanding the adult world: 'sa mère le croit, qu'on le voit, sur le visage des gens, et particulièrement des enfants, ceux qui ont vu la mer et ceux qui ne l'ont pas vue' (p. 11) ('her mother believes that – that you can tell from people's faces, especially children's, who has seen the sea and who has not' (p. 3)). In her third novel, then, Darrieussecq's attention to fantastic landscapes provides a fresh gloss to the homonymic link that is now a cliché of literature ('mer'/'mère'). The novel's title refers to both the mother's unspecified 'sickness' and the vertiginous instability inflicted by her on 'la petite'. Finally, the title may also refer to the mother's wrongdoing and to the fact that her daughter will, at the end, be 'en mal de mère' (lacking a mother).

Conclusion

In a recent interview, Darrieussecq suggested that in spite of their obvious differences she has come to view her first three published novels as a trilogy.¹⁵ Each of them develops metaphors to account for the violence inflicted upon women and girls by life changes and, while overly narrow biographical interpretations are unhelpful, the author nevertheless acknowledges that the novels were written during a period when she was herself learning to become an adult.¹⁶ Her studies of crisis are open-ended and although in each case a degree of autonomy is gained there is no answer to the perennial question 'who am I?'. The narrator of *Truismes* remains in conflict with herself, the heroine of *Naissance des fantômes* learns that 'l'amour fusion' (Baudet, p. 21) (fusion love) is an adolescent fantasy, the child in *Le Mal de mer* is forced into painful self-reliance and the novel leaves her mother in the liminal space of an airport, on the threshold of a new life yet not free from her depression. To insist on a resolution would, however, be reductive and for Darrieussecq the question of identity is raised at a more fundamental level by the writing project itself than by the 'plot' of these three tales. Perhaps the most challenging of all her frontier places is that inhabited by the writer, 'cet espace indéterminé entre ce que l'on sent et ce que l'on veut nommer' (Gaudemar, p. II) (that indeterminate space between what one feels and what one wishes to name) and it is in this territory that the sense of self is most acutely at stake. This is why Darrieussecq has two of her heroines turn to writing and why she has not shirked from

revealing the torment in which she sometimes writes¹⁷ or the intensely personal elements woven through her studies of crisis. The ultimate interest for the reader of her works is not in any lesson to be derived from the search for the self, but in the moments of intense identification provoked by the astonishingly original outcomes of her resolve to say the unsayable.

Notes

- 1 Marie Darrieussecq, *Truismes* (Paris: POL, 1996); *Pig Tales*, trans. Linda Coverdale (London: Faber & Faber, 1997).
- 2 Marie Darrieussecq, *Naissance des fantômes* (Paris: POL, 1998); *My Phantom Husband*, trans. Helen Stevenson (London: Faber & Faber, 1999); *Le Mal de mer* (Paris: POL, 1999); *Breathing Underwater*, trans. Linda Coverdale (London: Faber & Faber, 2001).
- 3 Jean-Pierre Bourcier, 'Marie Darrieussecq: "Européenne, féministe et athée"', *La Tribune* (13 November 1996), p. 20.
- 4 Sebastian Le Fol, 'Marie Darrieussecq: "Je veux changer la langue!"', *Le Figaro* (11 March 1999), p. 79.
- 5 Julia Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur: essai sur l'abjection* (Paris: Seuil, 1980); Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986).
- 6 Barbara Brook, *Feminist Perspectives on the Body* (London and New York: Longman, 1999), pp. 14–15.
- 7 'Trueie' is the French for 'sow'.
- 8 Lidia Curti, *Female Stories, Female Bodies: Narrative, Identity and Representation* (London: Macmillan, 1998), p. 107.
- 9 M. Baudet, 'Marie Darrieussecq, auteur à haute résolution', *Libre Culture* (19 May 1999), p. 21.
- 10 Jérôme Garcin, 'Marie Darrieussecq: l'après *Truismes*', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 1684 (19–25 February 1998), pp. 88–90 (p. 90).
- 11 Marguerite Duras, *La Douleur* (Paris: POL, 1985).
- 12 Antoine de Gaudemar, 'Darrieussecq, du cochon au volatil', *Libération (Livres)* (26 February 1998), I–III (III).
- 13 See, for example, Nathalie Sarraute, *Le Planétarium* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972).
- 14 Marie Darrieussecq, *Précisions sur les vagues* (Paris: POL, 1999), p. 10.
- 15 Unpublished interview with Shirley Jordan, 29 May 2001.
- 16 'A cette époque-là de ma vie j'étais en train de devenir adulte, entre vingt et trente ans, quoi.' (This was a period in my life – say, between the ages of 20 and 30 – when I was becoming an adult). Unpublished interview with Shirley Jordan.
- 17 See Daniel Mazingarbe, 'Marie Darrieussecq: *Naissance des fantômes*', *Madame Figaro* (28 February 1998), p. 31.