

CHAPTER 2

RAVAGES: THE DAUGHTER'S DEFECTION

As I demonstrated in chapter 1, *L'Asphyxie* may be interpreted from both a political/feminist and a psychoanalytic perspective. Leduc's first novel does not however invite the kind of critical approach that is generated by the (uneasy? belligerent?) 'marriage' of psychoanalysis and feminism. *Ravages* on the other hand lends itself to precisely this kind of reading. For the feminist critic who seeks to employ insights provided by psychoanalytic theory in order to understand what gender means, the processes whereby it is constructed, and the way in which gender relations function, the novel represents a rich source of interest.

In *Ravages*, the dynamics of the mother/daughter bond are scrutinized even more closely than in *L'Asphyxie*. It has been suggested that the novel tells the story of a mother and daughter who 'struggle from dominance to coexistence, from symbiosis to separation'¹ within a patriarchal order that makes women into rivals instead of allies. Although issues of female symbiotic bonding and autonomy are central to *Ravages*, this reading obscures the complexities and ambiguities of a text which cannot be treated as the straightforward chronicle of a passage from symbiosis towards an individuation that is achieved via a daughter's liberatory 'refusal of her mother'.² Interpreting *Ravages* as the tale of the ultimate defeat of its heroine, Thérèse, by a mother who denies her daughter independence and maturity, is (for reasons which will become apparent) equally restrictive.³ It is more productive to approach *Ravages* as containing not only an analysis of the problems inherent in the mother/daughter bond but also a forceful critique of a (Freudian) model of feminine psychosexual evolution which is predicated upon the destruction of the daughter's primal bond with her mother, and which constructs 'normal' femininity around the phallus. It is this latter aspect of the novel which generates its feminist dimension.

In this chapter, the causes of Thérèse's problematic relationship with her mother, the nature of her attempt to liberate herself from the mother's sphere of influence, and the 'phallogocentric' character of the feminine identity she pursues throughout much of *Ravages* will be examined. In addition, the complexities of the model of maternal conduct depicted in the text will be discussed. Finally, I intend here to explore the possibility of reading the

conclusion of *Ravages* as a utopian moment, in which a form of femininity that has proved to be profoundly damaging is finally abandoned by Thérèse, in a way which enables her to regain access to (aspects of) a lost, 'pre-œdipal' bond with her mother.

Ravages is a more hermetic work than *L'Asphyxie*. At its most simple level, the novel describes a young woman's quest for independence, which involves her in a lesbian and a heterosexual relationship, and leads her eventually to abort the child she is carrying. Her story is told by a first-person narrator who, we sense, is less undetached from her past and her younger self than the narrator of *L'Asphyxie*. *Ravages* may also however be read as a symbolic account of the primordial process through which a 'normal', œdipal gender identity is achieved (and ultimately rejected) by a developing female subject, and consequently exemplifies Barthes's contention that 'tout récit ne se ramène-t-il pas à l'Œdipe?'.⁴ The novel conflates infantile and adult, conscious and unconscious levels in an extremely subtle way. It constitutes, in part, the artistic expression of an infinitely complex psychic reality which, because it is so complex, requires careful and prolonged unravelling. The 'unconscious' aspect of the work is particularly noticeable in a series of present-tense monologues (distinct from the occasional intrusions of the historic present elsewhere) which erupt into, and disrupt, the narrative. In these sequences, which are usually lyrical and oniric, and in which the voice of Thérèse's younger self seems (briefly) to take over the narrating function, her innermost desires are exposed. The longest of these monologues, the 'bébé-de-la-ruelle' episode, is of central significance to the novel and will be discussed at length below.

Characterization adds to the complexity of *Ravages*. The entities of mother and daughter are treated as problems to be explored, rather than as self-evident categories. On occasion, Thérèse and her mother display characteristics which reveal the fragility of the boundary between the positions they occupy, and erode the rigidity of the mother/daughter distinction. *Ravages*, in other words, offers ample confirmation of the point made by Marianne Hirsch that 'to study the relationship between mother and daughter is not to study the relationship between two separate, differentiated individuals, but to plunge into a network of complex ties, to attempt to untangle the strands of a double self, a continuous multiple being of monstrous proportions stretched across generations, parts of which try desperately to separate and delineate their own boundaries'.⁵ The situation is further complicated by the presence of Cécile, Thérèse's lesbian lover, who functions as a double of, or substitute for, Thérèse's mother.⁶ Cécile's maternal aspect is ultimately of greater significance, as far as Thérèse's evolution is concerned, than her position as Thérèse's lesbian partner. The relationship between Thérèse and her 'mother/lover' Cécile, like the bond she shares with her biological mother, involves a degree of identity confusion which is particularly evident in the later parts of section two

of the novel. The way in which the daughter and mother(s) depicted in *Ravages* appear, on occasion, to exchange roles and functions may be attributed to the peculiar, symbiotic nature of the bond which unites them, and to the problems of non-differentiation and entanglement which issue from it. An initial discussion of mother/daughter symbiotic identification is vital to an understanding of the account of feminine interaction contained in *Ravages*.

THE SYMBIOTIC BIND

Symbiotic identification between a mother and her child is essentially a pre-œdipal phenomenon, constituting that phase in an infant's development at which its sense of fusion with the maternal figure is so intense that it has little grasp of the distinction between self and other and 'no sense of its own body boundaries'.⁷ It has also, however, been theorized less as a stage through which an individual passes than as part of 'an interpersonal field of relationships internalized by the infant and therefore configurative in the adult personality'.⁸ Its effects tend to be more significant and enduring in feminine relationships, in which the primal identification between mother and daughter is frequently stronger than that which exists between mother and son. The greater intensity of mother/daughter symbiosis has been attributed by Nancy Chodorow in her work on object relations theory to the different treatment sociocultural norms lead mothers to offer their female and male offspring. For Chodorow, 'mothers and women tend to identify more with daughters and help them differentiate less, [so] that processes of separation and individuation are made more difficult for girls', whereas 'a mother tends to identify less with her son, and to push him toward differentiation and the taking on of a male role unsuitable to his age'.⁹ Freud remarked upon the unique character of the (pre-œdipal) mother/daughter bond, but never discussed it in depth. More recent psychological and psychoanalytic studies which have appeared in the United States and in France¹⁰ have however, in their different ways,¹¹ explored the complexities of the mother/daughter relationship in much greater detail.

The conclusions drawn by French and American theorists suggest that the mother/daughter bond, by virtue of its excessively identificatory nature, is characterized by interpenetration and entanglement, rather than by separation. Within it, initial non-differentiation of 'I' and 'not-I' easily continues to prevail, which, for Chodorow, leads to 'experiences of boundary confusion or equation of self and other', and can cause a mother and daughter to feel 'guilt and self-blame for the other's unhappiness, [or] shame and embarrassment at the other's actions'.¹² The continuous character of the relationship between a mother and her daughter can leave the latter with an abiding sense of non-separation from her parent, which prevents her from knowing, precisely, where the borders and limits of her own self lie.¹³ One consequence of this may

be a feeling on the part of the daughter that she is somehow imprisoned within the maternal/filial bond; another may be her impression that she is no more than the mirror-image of a mother whose identity and development she is doomed to reproduce. The 'specularity' that is intrinsic to the mother/daughter tie is the focus throughout Luce Irigaray's short text *Et l'une ne bouge pas sans l'autre* (1979), the opening lines of which convey the feelings of paralysis and stasis daughters can experience in relation to their mother/mirror: 'Avec ton lait, ma mère, j'ai bu la glace. Et me voilà maintenant avec ce gel à l'intérieur. Et je marche encore plus mal que toi, et je bouge encore moins que toi'.¹⁴ Mother/daughter identification may also arouse an unconscious sense of boundary confusion in the mother herself, which can cause her to blur the distinction between her role and that of her child and can provoke conflict and disharmony. In other words, the mother/daughter bond is potentially highly problematic, and can involve difficulties which are absent from other interpersonal relationships.

L'Asphyxie offers some indication of the symbiotic dimension of the mother/daughter relation and the problems it is liable to engender — the heroine of the novel declares in tableau ten that she wishes to 'devenir une autre' (p. 64) *vis-à-vis* her mother, and claims in the final chapter that her mother's presence encloses her in a 'corset de fer' (p. 188) — but does not explore this aspect of feminine bonding in detail. However, mother/daughter symbiosis and its attendant complications is a key focus in *Ravages*. The problematic nature of the maternal/filial bond is made evident in the first of the novel's three parts, in which Thérèse returns to her mother's home after spending an initial, inconclusive night with the man she eventually marries, and in the second section of *Ravages*, which deals with her relation with her 'mother/lover' Cécile. Given the parallels established in the work between Thérèse's bond with her biological mother and her relationship with Cécile, the two unions will be treated here as different facets or stages of a *single* mother/daughter relation.

The difficulties experienced by the daughter–heroine of *Ravages* as a result of the identificatory bond which links her to her mother(s) are suggested in a number of ways. On several occasions, we are given descriptions of engulfing, oppressive spaces which enclose Thérèse, spaces which are tacitly associated with the maternal figure(s) with whom she interacts, and which convey the restrictions the mother/daughter relation imposes upon her. The first of these is the cinema auditorium where Thérèse encounters Marc, her future husband. This environment, described in the opening pages of *Ravages*, is presented as a uterine space, an enclosing domain which Thérèse instinctively perceives as threatening and even life-denying. The 'résonance antique' (*Ravages*, p. 11) which assails her inside the picture house conveys its womb-like character, as does the account of her exit from the auditorium, which resembles a kind of birth ('Je descendis l'escalier avec une fausse désinvolture, je bravai la salle de cinéma, je reçus dans le hall une giclée de vitalité', pp. 12–13).

The desire to free herself from the gloomy cinema/womb and to make it clear that she has done so ('Je roulais des épaules, je voulais [. . .] prouver que je m'étais libérée de la salle de cinéma', p. 13) announces to the reader the problems of individuation her relationship with her mother(s) involves, and her need to resolve them. The 'salle de cinéma' is only one of several symbolic milieux that emblemize the mother/daughter relation and the feelings of suffocation it arouses in Thérèse. Another is the 'maison', which is evoked on a number of occasions in the first and second parts of *Ravages*.

The 'maison' is the most significant and flexible of the symbolic environments whose description conveys Thérèse's feelings of engulfment within and by her mother(s). At first, it is presented as something which is of value to Thérèse. In the 'bébé-de-la-ruelle' episode, a dream-like sequence during which Thérèse recalls (or seems to recall) events from her childhood, the 'maison' functions as a cipher for the exclusive relationship she used to share with her mother, and for the joys this dyadic bond afforded her in the past ('Je penserai d'abord à la maison. A notre maison. Je lui ai bien lavé son carrelage tout à l'heure. J'aime bien travailler pour elle. Oh! que j'aime travailler pour elle', p. 58). The association of the 'maison' with feminine intimacy also emerges from the account Thérèse gives Marc, in part one, of the house in Auvigny inhabited by Cécile ('Elle a une maison. J'y vais chaque samedi, chaque dimanche. Elle aura sa nomination, nous habiterons dans un pavillon', p. 41). In the second part of *Ravages*, however, once Thérèse has started to find her relationships with her biological mother and with Cécile, her maternal substitute, intolerably restrictive, the significance of the symbolic space is modified. The 'maison' ceases to be a site of unity and pleasure, and comes instead to represent for Thérèse a source of unease. On the opening page of part two, she informs her 'mother/lover' that the house they share has begun to terrify her ('J'ai peur dans la maison', p. 75). As the two women discuss the fleas which have infested their home and which, significantly, torment only Thérèse, she suggests to Cécile that her continued habitation of the 'maison' will threaten her reason:

Elle vint s'asseoir sur une marche.

"Si tu dormais, tout changerait. Pourquoi n'arrives-tu pas à dormir? C'est calme ici.

– Calme! Et les puces? Elles me tuent ces puces!"

Cécile baissa la tête.

"Regarde. Le droguiste m'a dit que cette fois ce serait radical."

Elle s'agenouilla près de la chaise. Elle serra mes mains dans les siennes.

"Il n'y a pas que les puces, cette maison me rendra folle. (p. 76)

Thérèse's feelings of asphyxiation within a 'maison' she is increasingly eager to abandon are much in evidence in the opening section of part two of *Ravages*. Later on in this part of the novel, after Marc has become ill and she temporarily loses sight of the possibility of escape he embodies, Thérèse's resentment of the

'maison' becomes intense. As she inwardly articulates this resentment, the link between her relationship with Cécile, her 'mother/lover', and their 'maison' becomes more explicit:

Je me racontai dans l'autobus qui me ramenait en banlieue que j'avais une maison, une amie, que cette amie faisait partie des fondations, que l'on pourrait vivre sans aimer, que c'était supportable [. . .]. Je ne croyais pas un mot de ce que je me disais et je voulais être près de Cécile pour l'accabler. [. . .] Mes efforts pour me rapprocher du pavillon m'éceuraient [. . .]. (p. 132)

The descriptions she gives of the 'salle de cinéma' and the 'maison' and of the sense of entrapment these milieux aroused in her younger self represent one means by which the novel's narrator is able to convey the stifling character of the bond that linked her to her mother(s). Its problematic nature is also highlighted by references to mirrors and reflections. These references, although oblique, enable us to understand more clearly that it is because it is an identificatory, specular relation that the mother/daughter union depicted in *Ravages* is experienced by Thérèse as oppressive.

The account given in part one of *Ravages* of the dynamics of mother/daughter mirroring is both complex and telling. In the course of the row which follows Thérèse's nocturnal escapade with Marc, her mother demands to know where and with whom she has spent the previous evening. At this stage in the story, we gain a strong sense that the particular nature of the relationship she shares with her mother means that Thérèse comes to function as a kind of maternal reflection, and that this impinges upon her own liberty and individuality:

– Tu n'as pas traîné toute une nuit sans quelqu'un. On verra la suite! dit-elle à ses mains jointes.

– J'ai écouté un clarinettiste. Je ne vois pas où est le mal. J'ai écouté un clarinettiste à se mettre à genoux devant lui. De la moelle, maman.

– Innocente! dit-elle à un berger d'Arcadie que reflétait le miroir en face de son lit. (pp. 49–50)

As Thérèse's mother speaks to her daughter here, she simultaneously addresses an image caught inside the mirror facing her bed. In consequence, Thérèse and the reflection within the glass are implicitly bound together, becoming one and the same. The image the mother apostrophizes in the mirror is at once an ornamental statue, a 'berger d'Arcadie', and, given the particular position of the mirror, the mother's *own* reflection (significantly, parallels are established elsewhere in the text between statues and the mother-figure).¹⁵ Consequently, Thérèse emerges in the extract both as a mirror-image of her mother and as a static, lifeless entity, i.e. the 'berger' (whose Arcadian simplicity stands in ironic contrast to the complexity of the mother/daughter dynamic which is being depicted here). The double transformation to which Thérèse is subject makes us conscious not only of the specularity inherent in the

relation that binds her to her mother, but also of the restrictive, paralysing effect that mother/daughter mirroring has upon her.

In the pages that follow the exchange I have just analysed, the complexities of mother/daughter mirroring continue to provide a key focus. Thérèse's mother is presented as a kind of human mirror, a reflective surface whose presence her daughter cannot escape. The narrator infers that this aspect of Thérèse's relationship with her mother considerably increases her sense of engulfment within it, and exacerbates the problems she experiences as she moves towards independence and individuation:

– Tu t'es mariée, tu as de bons moments. Je ne découche pas tous les jours.

– Je le saurai que je suis mariée! dit-elle avec colère. Ça voit loin une mère, ça réfléchit une mère!

J'en avais par-dessus la tête. (p. 53)

Elle mourra. Je ne m'y habitue pas. Je me dis elle mourra: je frissonne. C'est un grand moment d'amour.

Elle vivait et elle réfléchissait. (p. 52)

In the first of the above extracts, Thérèse's need for separation and autonomy — which her mother does her utmost to frustrate — is conveyed by her use of the verb 'découcher'. The mother's references to her own ability to 'voir loin' and, more importantly, to 'réfléchir' (to ponder but also to mirror) suggest that her efforts to prevent Thérèse's pursuit of autonomy are facilitated by the mirror-like nature of their bond and by the power that she, the mother/mirror, derives from this — the implication being that she can see, and see into, her daughter, even at a distance, precisely because Thérèse is her mirror-image, an image caught within the maternal mirror. In the second passage, the independence Thérèse seeks is tacitly equated with the death of her mother, the prospect of which excites Thérèse ('Je me dis elle mourra: je frissonne'). Since however her mother is very much alive, this independence seems, here, to be out of Thérèse's reach. Significantly, the mother's continued existence, which entails Thérèse's continued imprisonment within the mother/daughter relation, is associated once again with the mirror-function the mother/daughter bond bestows upon the mother ('Elle vivait et elle réfléchissait'). In other words, in both of the above extracts, as in the account of the mother's apostrophization of the 'berger', the specular character of Thérèse's relationship with her mother is highlighted, in such a way that the essential contribution made by the phenomenon of mother/daughter mirroring to the problems of individuation Thérèse encounters in her bond with her mother becomes apparent.

Since the mother/daughter relationship emerges as a bond which is both asphyxiating and excessively identificatory, the need Thérèse feels in parts one and two of *Ravages* to bring to an end her attachment to her mother(s) is

understandable. However, her movement towards detachment is not accomplished easily, or without regret. If she senses that she must abandon the 'maison', it also represents a powerful magnet to which she remains drawn. In part one, after Thérèse has encountered Marc and spent the night with him, she seems eager to achieve separation and liberation. However, the narrator's recollection of the conversation which subsequently takes place between Thérèse and her mother suggests the fragility of her determination to do so:

“Je m'en vais: tu boudes. Est-ce que je peux déjeuner?

—”

J'entrouvris la porte, je simulai un départ pour l'effrayer, comme si elle était mon bébé. Je revins près de son lit:

“Tu rumines?”

Leur femme de ménage nettoyait le tapis de leur salle à manger avec l'aspirateur. Il y avait une âme plaintive dans l'appareil.

“Tu ne veux pas me répondre? Tu étouffes sous le drap.

— Cette fois, je m'en vais. Au lieu de se dire bonjour, au lieu de s'embrasser!”

Je ne pouvais pas m'arracher de son lit. (p. 47)

In the second part of *Ravages*, after Marc has temporarily rejected Thérèse, the ambivalence she feels about emerging from the maternal orbit resurfaces in the text. Despite her by now considerable dissatisfaction with it, Thérèse is at this stage almost tempted to preserve her intense attachment to the maternal figure (embodied here by Cécile):

C'est près d'elle que je devrais être, c'est près d'elle que je devrais être . . . Je m'éterniserai aux pieds de Cécile. Je l'aimerai, je serai dans la ligne. Elle existe, Cécile, elle va et vient dans la maison. J'ai Cécile, j'ai une maison, des fondations, je ne devrais pas être triste. Elle était libre et je l'ai laissée. J'arriverai: elle ne me reprochera rien. Comme je vais rattraper le temps perdu . . . (p. 143)

The authenticity of the need to remain close to her mother(s) which Thérèse experiences here, since it is occasioned by Marc's defection and by her resultant feelings of pique, is somewhat questionable. None the less, the above passage does indicate the profound ambivalence which accompanies Thérèse's pursuit of individuation. Throughout the first and second parts of *Ravages*, she appears torn between a desire to remain within the maternal sphere and to continue to be nurtured by her mother(s) — evidenced by her enduring need to be 'accueillie' and 'rafraîchie' by her 'mother/lover' Cécile (p. 143) — and a wish for an autonomous existence. Her 'painful bind'¹⁶ is most apparent in part two, even as her relationship with Cécile is coming to a close. She clearly both longs for and dreads the severance of the maternal/filial bond, symbolized here by the 'chambre' she shares with her 'mother/lover':

Ce soir-là, je sortis dans le jardin. Ce serait moins morne. Cécile avait tiré les doubles rideaux, elle devait se déshabiller. La fenêtre de notre chambre me passionna. “Je ne partirai pas, cette fenêtre chaque soir me nourrira”, me disais-je

sans y croire. Je tombai dans l'herbe. Partir, ne pas partir, je n'en peux plus, dis-je à la feuille de géranium que je serrais dans ma main. (p. 152)

Although Thérèse is increasingly keen to end her bond with her mother(s), detachment remains problematic, with the result that her actions and desires are consistently marked by contradiction. Despite the ambivalence she feels, she none the less appears to succeed in breaking the tie that binds her to the maternal figure(s) of the novel. That a break occurs, and that this break is her doing, is suggested in the highly complex scene which takes place between Thérèse and Cécile, her 'mother/lover', in the hotel room Thérèse rents at the end of part two of *Ravages*. Superficially, this episode records Cécile's rejection of Thérèse, a rejection occasioned by her disillusionment with her lesbian partner and by the fact that she has fallen in love with another young woman. Cécile's repudiation appears, on the surface at least, to be profoundly unwelcome to Thérèse, who seems to wish to *maintain* her symbiotic relation with her lover and to revive their fading love — hence her dogged efforts to relive the past ('Je t'aime. Tout est possible. Buvons le champagne, mangeons les framboises comme à Auvigny', p. 175). However, the hotel room scene also contains indications that another, more profound separation is occurring, a separation instigated by Thérèse, which is the consequence of her determination to *shatter* her oppressively symbiotic relation with her mother(s). In other words, in the course of the hotel episode, two contrasting *ruptures* take place concurrently. If the focus of the episode appears, on first reading, simply to be the severance of a lesbian, adult bond (brought about by Cécile, in defiance of Thérèse's wishes), there is evidence that it simultaneously chronicles the breaking (by Thérèse) of what is essentially a maternal/filial tie.

We are reminded of Cécile's maternal aspect early on in the scene, in a passage in which her new love and her consequent abandonment of Thérèse are evoked:

Cécile me regardait comme si j'étais une photographie. Un être que l'on finit d'aimer ne s'évanouit pas comme une bulle. Elle accouchait de son nouvel amour pour l'autre, elle m'aimait encore en aimant ailleurs. (p. 176)

The use of the verb 'accoucher' in the above lines helps us to realize that while the episode we are witnessing seems merely to involve the painful parting of two women lovers, it also, at a deeper level, constitutes a decisive encounter between a daughter and her 'mother'. Significantly, the latter stages of the scene between Thérèse and her 'mother/lover' take place before a mirror. The inclusion of this object in the description of what occurs in the hotel room increases our impression that we are being shown a maternal/filial exchange, since the glass evokes the problems (illustrated in part one of *Ravages*) caused by the specular character of the mother/daughter bond, and reminds us once more of Thérèse's reasons for shattering symbiosis. The conversation which

takes place in front of the mirror between Thérèse and Cécile suggests that by this point in the narrative, she has opted definitively to do so:

[Cécile] sortit le peigne de poche de l'étui, elle peignit ses cheveux devant la glace. Elle soignait son avenir.

“Regarde-toi, regarde-nous!”

Je la poussai en avant de toutes mes forces. Son front heurta le beau miroir de l'hôtel. Cécile pleurait sans larmes, le tumulte dans sa gorge ressemblait à un rire sans éclat. Ce sont les coups donnés aux autres qui nous abattent le plus. Je lui pris son peigne, je la coiffai doucement devant le miroir. Cécile fermait les yeux.

“Regarde, Cécile, mais regarde donc. Oui, toi, moi. Et tu voudrais que nous formions encore le même tableau!

– C'est toi que me le demandais.”

Le grand lit dans le miroir me donna le vertige.

“Je t'aimais, je t'aime encore. Que faire?” demanda Cécile. (p. 180)

For much of the hotel episode it is Cécile who is presented as the sole seeker of separation. However, the above exchange indicates that Thérèse is also realizing a form of *sevrage*, and that in her case it is the undifferentiated, identificatory relation which has attached her to her mother(s) that she is bringing to an end, before the mirror which emblemizes the specularity of the mother/daughter bond. That she is doing so is conveyed through the positive emphasis she places in the latter stages of the extract on the separate, singular pronouns ‘toi’ and ‘moi’, by her implicit refusal to continue to be part of a homogeneous ‘nous’, and by her determined rejection of the unified ‘tableau’ she and her ‘mother/lover’ have formed hitherto. These elements of the passage suggest strongly that, by now, Thérèse is leaving behind her a mother/daughter bond of an engulfing and essentially infantile nature, and progressing toward a state of independence and autonomy *vis-à-vis* the maternal figure (embodied here by Cécile). If she still feels some nostalgia for the comfort maternal/filial symbiosis has afforded her (‘Le grand lit dans le miroir me donna le vertige’ implies this, since it recalls the observation Thérèse makes regarding her biological mother in part one: ‘Je ne pouvais pas m’arracher de son lit’), she is concerned above all here to reject her mother(s) and to emerge from the maternal orbit. This rejection does not occur in a vacuum. The novel’s narrator makes it quite clear that Thérèse’s movement away from the maternal sphere is both stimulated and facilitated by a decisive event which takes place at the very start of the novel: her encounter with Marc. Since he functions as the agent who provokes Thérèse into breaking symbiosis, Marc’s significance and his role in Thérèse’s development require careful examination.

THE FATHER’S SEDUCTION¹⁷

Taken at face value, Marc represents an intrusive suitor who disrupts Thérèse’s relationships with her biological mother and with Cécile, and whom she

eventually — and unwisely — marries. Since, however, much of *Ravages* can be read as a metaphorical account of a feminine œdipal trajectory, whose progress corresponds to that described by Freud in his late essays ‘Female Sexuality’ (1931) and ‘Femininity’ (1933), Marc may also be deemed to play a symbolic, quasi-paternal role within the narrative, particularly in parts one and two.¹⁸ He possesses, in other words, a ‘double face’. He is at once a lover and eventual husband who makes Thérèse aware of the unsatisfactory aspects of the relationships in which she is already involved and exacerbates her need to end them, and he is a phallic father-figure, who obliges Thérèse to confront feminine castration, seduces her away from her primordial attachment to a maternal object and leads her to substitute for this attachment a desire for him, and for his penis.

In the first two sections of *Ravages*, Marc is presented as a liberating force. During Thérèse’s initial encounter with him in the womb-space of the cinema, she seems instinctively to sense that he will help her to break her attachment to her mother(s). This is suggested by her need to prove to him that she is capable of desiring and moving towards the freedom he appears to embody (‘Il me suivait. J’avais un^e brûlure sur ma nuque, sur mes reins. Je roulais des épaules, je voulais lui prouver que je m’étais libérée de la salle de cinéma’, p. 13). Thérèse’s vision of Marc as a liberator is articulated more explicitly when she returns home after her first, ‘innocent’ night with him, to face her mother’s reproaches. As she recalls the events of the previous evening, Thérèse reflects upon what she perceives as the tyrannical character of her mother’s behaviour towards her. Marc appears to her at this point as the means by which she will be able to undermine the oppressive bond which exists between herself and her mother and obliterate the ascendancy that their relationship affords the older woman:

J’éteignais, j’allumais, j’éteignais, j’allumais. Elle veut me prendre ce dessinateur à la terrasse des cafés comme elle m’a pris Isabelle. Elle prend, elle supprime: c’est infaillible, c’est irrésistible.

“Je m’en irai, je m’en irai le plus vite possible”, dis-je dans l’obscurité.

[Marc] m’appellera bonhomme dans un hôtel de passe et le règne d’une mère finira. (p. 54)

The precise character of the emancipation Marc offers Thérèse is complex, and reflects the dual nature of his role in *Ravages*. Superficially, Marc permits Thérèse eventually to accede (in part three) to a social and sexual conventionality which would have eluded her had she remained attached either to her mother or her ‘mother/lover’ Cécile. Her pleasure at the civic/heterosexual legitimization their union allows her is indicated by the delight she expresses, after she marries him, as she observes in a second hotel mirror the couple they form together. In this scene, which is clearly intended to remind the reader of Thérèse’s earlier rejection (also before a mirror) of her symbiotic bond with

Cécile, Marc's negative response to his new wife, increasingly evident in the third part of *Ravages*, is already discernible:

“Comme tu te regardes! Qu'est-ce que tu vois?

– Je me vois”, dit Marc.

Je l'ai pris par la taille, j'ai mis sa joue contre le mienne.

“Regarde . . . Nous sommes mari et femme. Tu le vois?

– Je vois que j'ai la même tête qu'hier”, dit Marc.

Il tourna le dos au miroir, il lança nos bérets basques sur l'édredon. (p. 195)

Thérèse's need, when she marries Marc, to transform herself into his double indicates her longing to achieve a new identity, which lies outside the mother/daughter bond and which is unrelated to that relationship:

Nous avons crié plus fort que les autres dans la mairie. Nous avions les mêmes bérets basques, les mêmes imperméables, les mêmes cigarettes, la même boîte de suédoises dans nos poches pendant que nous signions sur le registre, pendant que j'abandonnais mon identité de jeune fille. Les boutons de cuir tressé de nos manteaux de pluie étaient les mêmes. Je me grisais avec ces ressemblances. (p. 193)

Thérèse is enchanted by the 'ressemblances' which link her to Marc because they signal her emergence from a form of selfhood which she associates with her mother(s) — her 'identité de jeune fille' — and make manifest the social and sexual status marriage to Marc has brought her. However, Marc's significance, and the significance of the 'liberation' he affords Thérèse, transcend the social. If he provides her with a civic respectability she seems to crave, he also emerges, at a deeper, symbolic level, as a 'paternal' figure who causes Thérèse to embark upon a psychosexual journey which leads her towards the acquisition of a 'normal' female gender identity. The 'œdipal' aspect of Marc's role is most apparent in parts one and two of *Ravages*. It is suggested by the events which take place in the very first hotel room Thérèse visits, a room in which she sees his alien, masculine body for the first time.¹⁹ The fact that Marc is Thérèse's 'premier homme' (p. 39) and the powerful images employed by the narrator in order to evoke his sexual organ transform the scene into a primordial episode, in which a turning point in Thérèse's psychosexual evolution is clearly occurring:

Marc ramassa ses vieilles misères éparpillées. L'aiguille de pin bouffie de puissance oscillait, frappait et refrappait l'air vicié de la chambre, se cognait aux points cardinaux, divaguait de pesanteur. Marc avançait avec son sceptre bistre. (p. 42)

The sight of Marc's 'sceptre' evidently represents a moment of revelation for Thérèse. The account of her exposure to Marc's penis is expressed in such a way that the scene may be read not only as an initiatory, adult episode but also as a symbolic figuration of that stage of female psychosexual development at which, Freud suggests, the feminine subject first becomes aware of her own castration (and that of the mother to whom she has hitherto been libidinally

attached) and begins to move towards the father and ‘normal’ femininity.²⁰ Implicit in the above passage is a recognition on Thérèse’s part of the state of lack which, for Freud at least, is woman’s sexual lot. If we choose to interpret what takes place in the hotel room in this (Freudian) fashion, then Thérèse’s subsequent attraction to Marc — and her subsequent perceptions of her mother as unnaturally passive and impotent and of Cécile as physically flawed²¹ — may be related to the ‘castration complex’ the episode engenders within her. In a comparable way, the path she follows after this initiatory moment may be understood in terms of her need to suppress her first attachment to her (equally castrated) mother(s) and to embark upon an œdipal trajectory which will enable her to compensate, up to a point, for her lack of the penis which Marc, for all his sexual ambiguity (‘Marc à moitié déshabillé attirait le supplice. De tendres épaules, des avant-bras de femme-enfant’, p. 42), possesses.

Marc’s later actions assist Thérèse in this development. In Freudian terms, Marc’s function is to detach Thérèse from her mother(s) and to destroy the ‘maison’ which represents the primal mother/daughter bond, so that she may make the transfer from mother-love to father-love which the female subject must achieve if the œdipal process is to be set in train and ‘normal’ femininity attained. His fulfilment of this divisive role and Thérèse’s acceptance of his phallic intervention are strongly suggested in the second section of the novel:

“Il y a un homme dans la maison”, me dis-je avec satisfaction. (p. 114)

La maison ne nous appartenait plus. Je me demandais si Marc se déchirait à la rocaïlle sous notre fenêtre ou bien si Marc pissait du sperme dans sa main, la tête haute, l’œil frotté d’étoiles. (p. 116)

La ceinture de cuir [qui appartenait à Marc] tomba sur le carrelage, le bruit de la boucle fit naufrager la maison. (p. 89)

The primal displacement of the maternal object in Thérèse’s unconscious is presented in terms of a conflict between Marc and her mother(s) which becomes intense in part two of *Ravages*. Thérèse feels torn between Marc and her ‘mother/lover’ Cécile, and becomes the site of a psychical battle, during which symbolic maternal and paternal entities embark upon a struggle for control of her psychosexual allegiance. This struggle is implicit in the veiled challenges Marc makes to Cécile, which enable him to remind her of her (castrated) femininity and to vaunt his own (superior) phallic masculinity. It reaches a climax as Cécile suggests that she and Thérèse make love, in a gesture of defiance to the intrusive male who has come uninvited to their ‘pavillon’ and threatens its security. Thérèse is paralysed by her awareness of Marc’s voyeuristic presence and of the erotic possession his scopic activity entails,²² and refuses a sexual encounter (with Cécile) which, she senses, will transform her unconscious into a battleground, leaving her the victim of the œdipal conflict raging within her. The sexual character of Marc’s voyeurism — which

deters Thérèse from responding to her ‘mother/lover’ — is highlighted by the parallel that emerges here between his conduct and that of M. de Nemours, another phallic spy bent on erotic conquest as he watches outside Mme de Clèves’s ‘pavillon’,²³ and by the way in which the Freudian eye/penis equation is foregrounded throughout *Ravages*, for example in the narrator’s recollection of Marc’s masturbatory activities (‘Marc pissait du sperme dans sa main, [. . .] l’œil frotté d’étoiles’, p. 116):

Il est sous la fenêtre, il attend comme Cécile attend, il le désire comme Cécile le désire. Si je cède, Marc et Cécile se trouveront en moi. Ils se cherchent à travers moi. Je me trompe, je veux me tromper. . .

“Serre-moi, Thérèse. C’est vrai: je deviens folle avec toi dans mes bras et lui sous la fenêtre.

– Du calme; sois calme, mon petit” dis-je sans assurance. Le Paris-Meaux me frôla l’épaule. Marc sifflait.

“Que c’est triste ce qu’il siffle . . .

– Demain je te le jouerai, dit Cécile. Tu me quittes?

– Nous ne pouvons pas l’abandonner. (p. 119)

This extract conveys Thérèse’s feeling that the œdipal combat between old and new, maternal and paternal love-objects which is taking place will damage her in some way. This combat is extended and lengthy. For much of part two, Thérèse appears to oscillate between loyalty to each of her two objects, reflecting the point stressed by Freud that the female subject’s movement from mother-love to father-love is circuitous. In the above passage, Marc has the upper hand, whereas elsewhere Thérèse hopes that her attachment to her ‘mother/lover’ will be preserved and that the Father/phallus will be vanquished (“‘Elle a le dessus, c’est elle qui a le dessus”, me dis-je’, p. 108). The debilitating illness to which Marc succumbs represents, symbolically, the inner resistance Thérèse puts up against the displacement of her mother-object by a phallic/paternal one. His recovery from typhoid, on the other hand, signals that this displacement must none the less take place — hence Thérèse’s eventual repudiation of her ‘mother/lover’ at the end of part two.

Thérèse submits to the object transfer Marc’s phallic intrusion provokes partly because it liberates her from the asphyxiating relation which has bound her to her mother(s). The reader also senses, however, that she feels impelled to do so, once her exposure to Marc’s penis has occurred, by an intense (if initially ambivalent) need to embrace a form of femininity to which father-love alone (signalled, in the text, by her eventual acceptance of a heterosexual relationship with Marc) affords her access. The ‘phallogocentric’ character of this femininity, which Thérèse pursues for much, if not all, of *Ravages* and which is related to her lack of a penis, is made apparent in the ‘bébé-de-la-ruelle’ episode. Significantly, this oniric sequence occurs in part one of *Ravages*, not long after Thérèse has seen Marc’s sexual organ for the first time. The events described in the dream sequence appear to be detached from those of the rest

of the novel. They are however related both to Thérèse's discovery of the 'fact' of feminine castration, which precedes the 'bébé' episode, and to the choices she makes and the path she follows once it has taken place.

LE BÉBÉ DE LA RUELLÉ: THE PENIS REGAINED

Although it is presented as a memory, this episode resembles more closely a dream or phantasm.²⁴ Within it, the narrator seems to expose to the reader Thérèse's unconscious and the œdipal desires which dominate it. The primordial, infantile character of these desires is conveyed by the fact that the heroine of the passage is the child that Thérèse was long before the events of *Ravages* take place, rather than the young woman on whose activities the rest of the novel focuses. This substitution means that the incidents occurring in the phantasm stand outside the main temporal boundaries of the novel, and constitute a flashback. An analogy is therefore established between Thérèse's past and the buried realm of her psyche, which, we sense, is on display here.

The narrative perspective of the phantasmic passage is unusual. The episode is introduced by the words 'Je ne me reposai pas. Je me souvenais . . .' (p. 58), which suggest that the narrator is simply recalling her younger/protagonistic self's recollection of her childhood, and is reproducing the memories this activity generated. However, much of the rest of the monologue constitutes a kind of *discours immédiat* in which Thérèse's *childhood* self takes the place of the narrator and speaks directly to the reader.²⁵ This mimetic technique is employed elsewhere in the novel,²⁶ usually when Thérèse is in the grip of strong emotions, but the 'bébé-de-la-ruelle' incident represents the most sustained and absorbing example of it.

As the phantasm begins, Thérèse, now a small child, is supposed to be in the fields picking 'pissenlits' for her mother's rabbits. Instead of doing so, however, she has returned to a sinister 'ruelle' (a word used in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to denote the bedchamber of a lady of quality) where, for the last three days, she has been looking after an anonymous baby which has been given to her by its mother. Thérèse's return to the 'ruelle' is in defiance of her own mother, whose anger she fears. Yet she feels impelled to transgress by the hope that the baby will return, and by an obsessive need to pick the herbs she has collected on the previous occasions from the 'jardin aux mauvaises herbes' contained within the 'ruelle':

Il faut que je cueille mon herbe comme les autres jours. (p. 60)

Je cueillirai vite mon herbe. Je peux cueillir puisque c'est le jardin aux mauvaises herbes. Je prendrai l'herbe entre les pierres. (p. 58)

Il faut que je le cueille. (p. 58)

Maintenant il faut que je vole du persil dans le jardin. (p. 61)

In *Ravages*, a number of everyday objects are transformed into sexual symbols, either because they are conventionally associated with the erotic or because of the suggestive character of their names/appearance. The ‘mauvaises herbes’ (chervil and parsley) which grow in the ‘ruelle’ fall into this category of objects, since they function as phallic substitutes — a fact which enables the reader to relate the urgency with which Thérèse seeks them out during the phantasmic sequence to the need she has begun to feel, after she has confronted castration in Marc’s hotel room, to gain access to the penis she lacks. The phallic character of the herbs is suggested in the course of the phantasmic episode itself, for example when Thérèse uses them to stroke (‘balayer’) the genitals of the baby girl whom she is attempting to ‘amuse’. This can be read as a kind of penetration as well as a simple caress, particularly since, in French erotic slang, the noun ‘balayette’ has penile connotations²⁷ (‘Le bébé ne voyait pas ce que je lui faisais. Il me regardait pendant que je balayais son amande avec mon cerfeuil’, p. 61). The sexualization of the herbs is also made clear outside the phantasm, in the second part of the novel. This section of *Ravages* contains several descriptions of efforts made by Cécile to destroy some ‘fines herbes’. Since her actions appear to constitute attempts to castrate, symbolically, the intrusive male who is destroying the ‘maison’ she shares with Thérèse, they strengthen the reader’s awareness of the phallic character of the herbs:

Elle me chatouilla la joue avec le bouquet d’aigrettes vertes:

“Vous aimez la ciboulette? Coupe, coupe”, dit-elle en regardant Marc.

Elle fourra la paire de ciseaux dans mes mains. (p. 112)

Elle m’avait donné les fines herbes, il était entre nous, elle me disait: “Coupe, coupe.” (p. 147)

Since the word ‘herbe’ has traditionally been associated with the penis in French erotic discourse, the phallic nature of the ‘mauvaises herbes’ Thérèse discovers should not surprise us unduly.²⁸ Our sense of the phallic role played by the herbs she finds in the alley is further reinforced by their names. ‘Cerfeuil’ is suggestive of the penis because it juxtaposes, phonetically, ‘cerf’, which clearly connotes masculinity, and ‘œil’, a conventional phallic symbol. ‘Persil’, the other herb Thérèse picks, since it is a reversal of ‘il perce’, signals penetration and defloration. The fact that it is these particular herbs which Thérèse finds in the alley serves to confirm the reader’s impression that they function as penile substitutes.

If Thérèse is authorized by her mother to pick dandelions in the fields (a ‘pissenlit’, although visually more penile than either ‘cerfeuil’ or ‘persil’, is semantically devoid of any phallic connotation and suggests rather a rejection of (hetero)sexuality), her search for the ‘mauvaises herbes’ is in defiance of maternal wishes, since Thérèse is not supposed to be in the alley at all. Early on in the passage, as she looks for the chervil, Thérèse tells herself: ‘Il faut que je le cueille. Non. Je penserai d’abord à la maison. A notre maison’ (p. 58). Her

words imply that, in the extraordinary world of the 'ruelle', she finds herself faced with the need to choose between either picking the phallic herbs (an act of maternal rejection) or preserving her exclusive bond with her mother(s), for which the 'maison' is a symbol, by leaving the herbs untouched. Although clearly ambivalent about doing so, Thérèse continues her treacherous search for the phallic herbs.

The 'betrayal' of her mother and their dyadic relation which this search involves mirrors a similar betrayal by Thérèse's mother, which is also evoked in the 'bébé' sequence and seems to be one of the causes of Thérèse's own defection. The mother's betrayal is constituted by her imminent marriage. In the section of the phantasm in which the mother's decision to marry (i.e. to repudiate the exclusivity of her relationship with her daughter in favour of a man) is described, the confusion of maternal and filial identities apparent elsewhere in the novel resurfaces, for example, when Thérèse articulates her desire to work for and protect her mother — particularly since her 'Je veux qu'elle se repose, je veux qu'on m'embauche dans une usine' (p. 58) recalls words spoken by the mother herself just before the phantasm begins: 'Maintenant va te reposer et éteins' (p. 58). If Thérèse's mother emerges at this particular point in the dream-sequence as a defecting/œdipal 'daughter', the focus of the episode as a whole is, none the less, *Thérèse's* daughterly defection, which takes place as she is drawn towards the herb/penis and away from the maternal orbit.

The exact nature of Thérèse's desire for the symbolic herb/phallus is complicated. Arguably, her rage at her own castration and her 'penis-envy' are so extreme here that she is seeking actually to *possess* for herself the phallic attribute she lacks, in its herbal form. If we read Thérèse's search for the 'mauvaise herbe' in this way, then it is tempting to view her activities in the 'ruelle' simply as an attempt at a kind of fantastic self-virilization, which suggests that she is in the grip of a strong masculinity complex.²⁹ This (Freudian) interpretation of her actions is supported by her 'penetration' of the baby girl with the chervil which, together with the other assaults she 'accidentally' makes upon the child's genitals, hints at a longing on her part to reject her castrated femininity, change gender identity and become masculine:

Je ne sais pas comment cela est arrivé mais cela s'est entrouvert, cela s'est enfoncé sur mon bras parce que le bébé n'a pas de culotte, parce que je le faisais sauter de plus en plus haut et qu'il retombait de plus en plus fort sur mon bras. (p. 60)

Chaque fois qu'il sursautait, mon bras s'enfonçait dans la fente. Je le portais. Ce n'était pas ma faute. (p. 61)

If, on one level, it can thus be taken as evidence that she is driven by a masculinity complex, Thérèse's pursuit of self-virilization in the 'ruelle' may also be understood in terms of her need to revenge herself against Marc. One of

the most striking things about the baby in the alley is its curious hermaphroditism. Although it is 'une petite fille', it is also referred to as 'le bébé', 'il', 'lui', etc., so that its sexual identity seems to shift. One possible reason for this is that, in spite of its feminine gender, the baby also functions, in the later stages of the phantasm, as Marc's double. It becomes his double when it repeats the unwelcome oral penetration to which he previously forced Thérèse to submit in the taxi taking her to his hotel ('Le bébé m'a frappé sur le nez, il a enfoncé son doigt dans ma bouche. Il voulait que je la suce', pp. 60–61). The identification of Marc and the baby that is established here means that Thérèse's search for the phallic herbs can be read as a sign that she is motivated less by a masculinity complex *per se* than by a hidden urge to use the herb/phallus to 'get her own back'. By arming herself with the 'mauvaise herbe' and turning herself into someone who can penetrate the baby (who is effectively Marc), Thérèse becomes capable of committing a fantastic act of violatory vengeance, by means of which she can transform the man who imposed himself upon her into a passive victim, and can recuperate her earlier sexual defeat.

Conceivably, therefore, Thérèse simply picks the herb/phallus out of a desire to achieve an inverted, *masculine* gender identity, because she cannot acknowledge her own castration and/or because she is pursuing revenge. However, the phantasm suggests equally strongly that the impulses driving Thérèse inside the 'ruelle' correspond to what, in Freudian terms, are 'normal', *feminine* œdipal desires. Her assiduous search for the 'mauvaises herbes' can be taken to indicate that she wishes for heterosexual penetration by the herb/phallus, and for the *consequences* of penetration, rather than for an actual, unmediated *possession* of the penis. Her need to 'cueillir l'herbe', in other words, may be read as a sign of sexual maturation, and of a more 'realistic' attitude towards her own castration, on her part. Thérèse's movement toward feminine normality is suggested in the following section of the dream-sequence, which occurs near the start of the passage:

Je peux cueillir puisque c'est le jardin aux mauvaises herbes. Je prendrai l'herbe entre les pierres. Je ne prendrai pas l'herbe à la terre. C'est le jardin de personne mais ils verront qu'on a cueilli du cerfeuil. Je le vois. Une branche vendredi, une branche samedi, une branche dimanche. C'est clair au milieu de la touffe. [. . .] Si je cueille, dans cinq minutes mon panier sera plein. (p. 58)

Thérèse's incantatory description of her ritualistic culling of the tufts of chervil and her vision of the full 'panier' (vagina) which she will subsequently have are strongly suggestive of the penetration she longs for. Moreover, the 'touffe' left bare and open after the chervil has been picked symbolizes her physical (and psychosexual) state after defloration has taken place. If, however, the above lines indicate that she desires (and achieves) penetration by the herb/penis, other sections of the 'bébé-de-la-ruelle' passage suggest that this is not Thérèse's ultimate goal. Elsewhere in the monologue, it becomes clear that if

she pursues penetration so keenly in the 'ruelle', it is because it represents the means by which she may acquire the *baby* that will make her femininity 'complete'. In the Freudian psychosexual schema, the wish for a baby is of paramount importance in the development of 'normal' femininity. According to Freud, the acquisition of a child is perceived by the developing female subject, once she has been exposed to the 'fact' of her castration, as the only effective way to overcome her state of lack and gain the equivalent of the penis she does not have — hence the intensity of the desire for maternity he attributes to her.³⁰ Aspects of the account of Thérèse's activities in the 'ruelle' indicate that it is indeed a baby, and the 'completed' femininity its presence will afford her, that she is really seeking throughout the phantasmic sequence as she looks for the herbs.

That Thérèse shares (here) the Freudian vision of feminine/maternal 'normalization' outlined above is suggested in the part of the sequence in which she describes the effect of her acquisition of the herbs. This occurs towards the end of the phantasm, when she defiantly tells her mother 'J'ai cueilli l'herbe. Je t'assure que j'ai cuelli l'herbe. C'est un bébé que je porte' (p. 61). Thérèse is implying here not only that penetration by the herb/phallus has proved fruitful, and that the baby she is carrying is its consequence, but also, more importantly, that it is maternity, and the phallic substitute with which motherhood will provide her, that she has ultimately been pursuing inside the 'ruelle', as she has sought out the 'mauvaises herbes'. There are indications in the monologue that the strange baby Thérèse is given becomes *her* baby and that, in her dream at least, she does accede to the form of femininity which Freud presents as both normal and complete — motherhood.

In the course of the 'bébé-de-la-ruelle' sequence, Thérèse (or rather her childhood self) appears then to move from an envious desire for the penis *per se* to a 'normal' feminine wish for the baby which represents the only form of the phallus she can realistically hope to possess. Although this movement does not evolve in a linear, sequential way, the phantasm conveys none the less an impression of development and maturation. Thérèse's willingness to embrace the œdipal process is suggested by the considerable number of imperatives contained in the passage, which indicate her sense of the ineluctability of the course she is following. The link between the events of the phantasm and those of *Ravages* as a whole is complex. On the one hand, the 'phallogocentric' feminine identity pursued in the 'ruelle' by the child Thérèse was may be viewed as a distillation of the femininity sought by her older self, via her dealings with Marc, throughout much of the novel. On the other hand, since the Thérèse of the phantasm welcomes maternity while the adult Thérèse aborts at the end of the text, the dream-sequence is clearly not a *mise-en-abyme* of the work *in toto*. If, in other words, the phantasm helps

the perceptive reader to understand more fully the nature of the gender identity Thérèse attempts to assume, particularly in parts one and two of *Ravages*, it does not tell us the whole story.

Thérèse's position *vis-à-vis* the feminine 'normality' she confronts in the 'ruelle' clearly changes by the end of her story, for reasons which I will examine presently. Her mother's, however, does not. The strength of the mother's resistance to Thérèse's pursuit of phallogentric femininity is made apparent by the description in the phantasm of her violent reaction when she discovers that Thérèse has acquired a child/penis:

Maman a pincé la robe de laine.

“Qu'est-ce que c'est que ça?

– Un bébé.

– Lâche ça, laisse ça. Défait-toi de ça. Je ne veux pas de ça.

– Je ne peux pas. On me l'a confié.”

Elle est venue sur nous.

Elle a essayé de me le prendre mais je lui ai résisté. Elle aurait dû comprendre puisque je lui disais:

“Il faut que je le porte. On me l'a confié . . .”

Plus je le répétais, plus elle voulait me l'enlever. Le bébé criait. Les doigts de maman s'emmêlaient dans la dentelle de laine de la robe. Elle a été la plus forte. Elle l'a arraché de mes bras, elle l'a jeté sur l'herbe. Elle m'a secouée, elle l'a dit trop près de mon visage.

“Pas de ça. Tu entends: pas de ça.”

J'ai cru qu'elle l'avait tué mais il remuait la tête de notre côté. (pp. 61–62)

Thérèse's mother's efforts to deny her daughter access to feminine/maternal 'normality' have been interpreted in a negative way by Leducian critics.³¹ While it is certainly possible to approach *Ravages* as another tale of inadequate motherhood, the account of maternal conduct the work contains, like that contained in *L'Asphyxie*, is complicated, and need not be read as a simple denunciation, by Leduc's narrator, of maternal oppression. Thérèse's mother's interdiction against feminine 'normality' can be taken less as a sign of maternal selfishness — although elements of the text justify viewing it as such — than as evidence that she is driven to shield her daughter from a feminine destiny predicated upon 'paramètres masculins'³² which, she believes, will restrict and enslave Thérèse. In the remaining sections of this chapter, I will explore the ramifications of the mother's behaviour. I will argue, moreover, that the abortion Thérèse undergoes at the end of *Ravages*, rather than constituting an act of submission to a mother whose aims regarding her child are purely self-interested, can be interpreted as a radical, 'anti-œdipal' gesture, which enables Thérèse to envisage a different kind of femininity, to heal the divisions to which she and her mother are subject for much of the novel, and to enter perhaps into a genuinely intersubjective relation with her maternal parent.

THE MATERNAL INTERDICTION: TYRANNY OR LIBERATION?

In those sections of *Ravages* which focus on her dealings with her daughter, the embargo the mother places upon feminine normality is so strong that it seems to penetrate Thérèse's inner being, causing her to substitute her mother's desires for her own. Rather like Mme de Clèves, whom Marianne Hirsch views as another 'dutiful daughter' incapable of eluding an internalized, and denying, maternal discourse, Thérèse 'exists only in relation to her mother's advice and admonitions'.³³ This is made apparent in two present-tense monologues contained in part one of *Ravages*. The first erupts into the narrative after Marc tries to make Thérèse masturbate him in the taxi they take to his hotel. As she contemplates doing so, the reluctance she feels appears to be a consequence less of her *own* desire to avoid exposure to his penis than of the internalized influence of her mother:

J'ai honte sur la plage du poids de leur sexe sous le jersey du maillot de bain. Les hommes en robe me rassurent, un prêtre qui surveille la baignade d'une colonie de vacances me ravit. Je touche, je comprime ce qui me faisait honte, ce que j'évitais de regarder. Je ne lui fais rien, il ne me fera rien et c'est dangereux. Je veux tout de suite une règle de vie, je veux devenir un mannequin de pureté. Me lever à six heures du matin, me coucher à huit heures du soir. Je ne peux pas l'abandonner. Je suis allée le chercher, je lui ai donné de l'appétit. Je ne peux pas le reléguer.

Je suis soulagée quand ils s'élancent vers la vague, quand ils entrent dans l'eau, quand ils me tournent le dos, quand ils font demi-tour dans l'eau et que je ne vois que leur buste, leur visage. Je lis avec tranquillité lorsque la vague les habille amplement.

Qui m'a poussée vers lui au cinéma? Moi-même. Je l'ai choisi, je l'ai voulu. J'ai de la répulsion mais je ne peux pas me détacher. Je ne suis pas coquette. Je suis timide et je me suis trop engagée. Je ne suis pas honnête et je ne suis pas malhonnête. Je déteste et je ne déteste pas le sexe. Je suis une ennemie indécise. Je lis sur la plage, je crois qu'un chien fou envoie du sable mouillé sur mon livre, je lève la tête, je les revois: ils ont quitté la mer, ils accourent le slip sec, vers le bain de soleil. Le renflement est noir, luisant sous le jersey mouillé. C'est provocant. Je ferme les yeux, je me fiance avec moi-même. Pas d'homme: "A aucun prix il ne te faut de ça", a dit ma mère. (pp. 31–32)

In this curious passage, Thérèse seems, on the surface at least, eager to reject Marc and his penis. Her eagerness is conveyed by her reference to the chaste 'mannequin de pureté' she wishes to incarnate and by her longing for a 'règle de vie' which excludes all contact with men. Yet her reflections regarding the provocative spectacle of semi-naked youths on the beach and her disingenuous observation 'je suis allée le chercher [. . .] je ne peux pas le reléguer' reveal that she is also powerfully drawn to Marc, and to the normal, œdipal/heterosexual femininity to which she is being offered access at this point. Her contradictory feelings appear perplexing, until we reach the end of the monologue, with its evocation of her mother's determined instruction 'il ne te faut de ça'. The inclusion of this indicates that whilst Thérèse is instinctively drawn to

Marc and heterosexuality here, her attraction is being blocked by a prohibitive maternal voice, which exists deep inside her and prevents her from pursuing her own instincts.

The second monologue is more visionary than its predecessor, and interrupts the narrative at the point at which Thérèse is about to succumb to Marc's efforts to penetrate her. In it, the infiltration of Thérèse's unconscious by her mother's prohibitions is conveyed more obliquely than in the previous extract:

Je ne peux pas. Je me veux jeune fille jusqu'à la fin, je me veux séparée d'eux, je me veux hors d'atteinte. Je ne veux pas qu'ils entrent dans mon trésor. Quand Cécile sera partie je serai seule, j'irai avec ma pieuvre assoupie dans mes entrailles, j'entrerai dans l'eau, je marcherai au-devant des vagues qui se creuseront et me prendront. Je ne veux pas me joindre au troupeau, je ne veux pas me perdre, je ne veux pas m'oublier, je ne veux pas être leur carpette. Je m'aime jeune fille. Je veux être une tombe surplombant la mer. Une vierge en ébène en moi veille. Je veux être honnête avec elle. (pp. 43–44)

The use here of predominantly marine imagery — traditionally evocative of the maternal³⁴ — suggests the degree to which Thérèse's actions are determined by her mother's wishes. The intensity of her desire to repudiate Marc and to lose herself instead in the watery embrace of the *mer/mère* intimates to the reader just how willing Thérèse is at this point to accede to her mother's dictates, even though this threatens her with a kind of extinction ('Je veux être une *tombe* surplombant la mer'). Our awareness of the internalized presence of the mother and her admonitory discourse is further reinforced by the reference, at the end of the passage, to the 'vierge en ébène', who, Thérèse senses, watches inside her/over her, and to whom she desires to remain 'faithful'.

Even after marriage and accession to heterosexual femininity, Thérèse is still haunted by her mother's interdiction. It adulterates her erotic pleasure, and means that she is unable to give herself unreservedly to her husband, whose sexual gratification she is keen to assure, because of the fear of pregnancy her mother has instilled in her — a fear which she likens to 'la police dans mes ovaires' (p. 269). How should the reader interpret the prohibition Thérèse's mother imposes? If we adopt a biographical approach and read *Ravages* in conjunction with *La Bâtarde*, then we might argue that the mother's efforts to prevent her child from pursuing heterosexuality and maternity stem from a reluctance to relive her own, unhappy experience of motherhood. The fact that Thérèse perceives herself, once she becomes pregnant, as her mother's 'miroir aux déceptions' (p. 311) lends some weight to this interpretation. Since, however, *Ravages* (unlike *La Bâtarde*) contains few precise indications of the circumstances in which its heroine's mother became pregnant, this reading is unsatisfactory. Other explanations of the maternal embargo, the majority of which still lead us to view the mother's conduct negatively, are hinted at more strongly within the text. It is possible, for example, to interpret the mother's

resistance to her daughter's normalization as a sign that she wishes to maintain an exclusive hold on the privileged civic status motherhood affords. This reading is justified up to a point by an exchange which occurs in part one:

- “Sais-tu d'où vient ta peur? dis-je.
 – D'où vient-elle? dit ma mère.
 – Tu as la frousse que j'en devienne une!
 – Je ne comprends pas. Achève, dit-elle. Que tu deviennes quoi?”
 Elle avait compris mais elle se faisait humble.
 “Une mère! Que je devienne comme les autres, que je sois comme les autres . . .
 – Je n'ai pas changé d'avis. Je ne changerai jamais d'avis, dit-elle. Tu n'en auras pas. Je te prie de ne pas donner des coups de pieds au lit.
 – Tu as voulu ressembler aux autres et tu y es parvenue, dis-je. A moi, tu l'interdis.
 – Je te prie de ne pas élever la voix. Je ne veux pas de scandale”, dit-elle. (p. 53)

Less conscious motives may be attributed to the mother in order to explain her behaviour. Our awareness of the identificatory aspect of her bond with Thérèse helps us to find a further (negative) way of accounting for her 'malédiction'. As my analysis of the 'berger d'Arcadie' episode indicated, one consequence of the specular nature of the mother/daughter relationship depicted in *Ravages* is that Thérèse functions as a maternal reflection. Arguably, therefore, she constitutes for her mother a means of access to a second, confirmatory mirror-image of her own self. In the light of this, Thérèse's mother's resistance to her daughter's defection can be read as a sign that she fears the narcissistic (mortal?) wound to which the loss of her daughter/mirror may expose her. The 'matricidal' effect of a daughter's movement away from her mother has been analysed by Jane Flax, who contends that 'if [the daughter] takes the male route of escape, it will, literally, kill her mother [. . .] because she cannot be a mother without her reciprocal partner',³⁵ and is articulated forcefully by Irigaray in *Et l'une ne bouge pas sans l'autre* ('Avec ton lait, ma mère, tu m'as donné la glace. Et si je pars, tu perds l'image de la vie, de ta vie').³⁶ In her discussion of *La Princesse de Clèves*, Marianne Hirsch locates matricide as a key motif within modern accounts of daughterly individuation, suggesting that in a whole range of female-authored texts 'the mother is painfully murdered so that the daughter should not need to take her place, so that she can separate'.³⁷ In part one of *Ravages*, the possibility of Thérèse's mother's death is evoked on a number of occasions. This validates, to a degree, the argument that if she strives to prevent her child's (œdipal) movement towards Marc/individuation, it is because she instinctively senses that it will bring about her own 'obliteration'.

The entangled character of the bond between Thérèse and her mother does not simply transform the younger woman into her mother's confirming reflection. It also leads both women to behave on occasion as if Thérèse were her mother's *mother*, thereby highlighting the unconscious boundary/identity confusion to which mothers and daughters are prone to succumb. The ease with

which Thérèse and her mother assume each other's roles is apparent when Thérèse enters the mother's bedroom in part one. As she does so, the older woman sulkily refuses to embrace her errant daughter and hides beneath the bedclothes, provoking Thérèse into pretending to abandon her mother 'comme si elle était [son] bébé' (p. 47). The way in which the two women oscillate between maternal and filial positions is also suggested in part three when Thérèse reflects 'Ma mère est mon enfant que je réchauffe sous mon jupon' (p. 315). Thérèse's 'maternal' stance *vis-à-vis* her mother is most noticeable in those parts of *Ravages* in which her mother's marriage provides the focus. In these sections, it is the mother who is presented as a defecting, oedipal daughter, bent on substituting father-love for mother-love, whilst Thérèse is transformed into an abandoned, resentful mother-figure. Given that Thérèse and her mother appear to lack a definitive sense of the position each occupies, or is supposed to occupy, within the maternal/filial relation, it is conceivable that the mother's hostile reaction to Thérèse's defection stems from an unwillingness to be deprived of the 'maternal' care her daughter's presence affords. The way in which the mother solicits Thérèse's protection and reassurance in parts one and three of *Ravages* lends support to this particular reading, which confirms Flax's argument that women often become mothers 'to regain a sense of being mothered themselves' and pressurize daughters 'to provide the care [they] themselves had lacked in their childhood'.³⁸ None the less, this and the other explanations of the maternal embargo outlined above must ultimately, and for two reasons, be deemed incomplete.

Firstly, the interpretations of Thérèse's mother's conduct discussed so far are insufficient because they remain implicit. It is certainly possible to find hints that the mother resists Thérèse's pursuit of normality because she dreads losing sociosexual privilege, or fears the narcissistic wounding to which the disappearance of her daughter/mirror might expose her, or wishes to preserve the care of a daughter who is somehow her 'mother' too. However, there is nothing in the text which encourages us to opt definitively for any of these readings. Secondly, and more importantly, they ignore the 'reading' the mother herself makes of her own interdictory behaviour. Since it is Thérèse who narrates *Ravages*, we have little chance of discovering, objectively, the mother's perspective on the events the work describes. Because the novel is a first-person narrative woven by her daughter, the desires which dictated Thérèse's mother's behaviour at the time these events occurred inevitably remain obscure. However, the inclusion in *Ravages* of passages in which words spoken to Thérèse by her mother are reported *directly* does enable us, if we take them at face value, to gain a less intangible, and arguably more accurate, understanding of maternal motivation than we might otherwise have. In one such passage, Thérèse's mother justifies her prohibitions to her daughter in a way

which helps the reader to perceive another possible explanation of her embargo against feminine normality, and to view it in a more positive light.

The passage in question begins when Thérèse angrily accuses her mother of denying her the social and sexual status conferred upon the older woman by the fact that she is married and has produced a child. Thérèse's overriding desire at this point is to emulate her mother, embrace heterosexuality and motherhood, and become 'comme les autres' (p. 53); her mother, however, is adamant that she should not do so. Her motives seem purely repressive, until she explains to Thérèse that if she is denying her access to a femininity which she herself has adopted, it is because she is seeking to protect her daughter from what she knows to be a form of 'esclavage': 'Je te portais et je me disais: "Si c'est une fille, ce ne sera pas une esclave!"' (p. 54).

This remark may be treated as further evidence of an egotistical reluctance on the mother's part to relive, through Thérèse, distressing aspects of her own life — particularly since she states that she has experienced motherhood as a 'calvaire' (p. 49). However, given the way in which feminine sexual 'normality' and female enslavement are presented as synonymous in part three of *Ravages*, it is more productive to read it positively, and to view Thérèse's mother's interdiction as a sign that she is attempting to shield her child from harm. An element of the 'bébé-de-la-ruelle' phantasm reinforces our impression that her intentions are actually quite laudable. It occurs as Thérèse, having returned to the 'ruelle' to wait for the reappearance of the baby, considers what her mother would do if she found her with it (i.e. discovered that her daughter had not after all renounced her pursuit of 'normal', œdipal femininity). Thérèse's reflections, although potentially ironic, indicate that her mother's actions, for all their violence, are designed to protect her ('Maman me l'a pris mon bébé. Si maman savait que je suis ici elle me battrait. Elle me battrait pour ma santé', p. 60). Since it is primarily the existence, within *Ravages*, of an association between (œdipal) femininity and 'esclavage' that encourages us to accept Thérèse's mother's own explanation of her prohibition and to read it as largely (if not exclusively) altruistic, we need to explore the ways in which this association is established, and to investigate the nature of the enslavement within which Thérèse's search for 'normal' femininity gradually entraps her.

WOMANHOOD AND SLAVERY

Ironically, it is Marc who draws Thérèse's attention to the fact that she has been transformed into an 'esclave' by the femininity she has assumed as a result of his phallic intervention and her desire for the penis he possesses and she lacks. He does so after her attempts to prevent him from working and force him to make love to her have exasperated him. His words ominously echo the reference to

'esclavage' made by Thérèse's mother in part one of *Ravages*, and are obviously intended to remind us of it:

Je couvris de baisers le bas de son pantalon.

"De l'espace, du large! Va dans ton coin! Mes clichés viennent trop vite.

– Tes clichés viennent trop vite. C'est ma faute. Veux-tu que je les remue? Je ne prendrai aucune initiative. Tu commanderas. Je ferai de mon mieux."

Marc se pencha encore sur les cuves: il sortit les plaques noires et blanches, il les plongea dans la cuvette au-dessous de l'eau courante.

"Les esclaves, ça m'a toujours répugné, dit-il. (p. 245)

The enslavement to which Thérèse is made subject by her entry into a sexual order governed by the phallic sign takes two forms. The first involves her in a servile dependency upon the penis/'sceptre' she venerates. If Thérèse is prepared to prostrate herself before Marc, it is because he alone can offer her the valorizing, phallic 'recognition' that she, clearly alive to her status as female 'castrate', requires. This is made apparent by her quasi-religious adoration of his sexual organ ('Le voir jusqu'à ce que j'en meure, jusqu'à ce que je descende tout droit dans le fond de la terre en le voyant toujours. Le voir [. . .] Tant besoin de le voir prisonnier délivré. Tant besoin de voir sa douce folie d'orgueil. [. . .] Je le vois, je l'aime et c'est pour lui que je me traîne aux pieds de Marc', p. 201). Thérèse's dependence on Marc's penis is exacerbated by the fact that he, obsessively protective of his narcissistically overvalued member, is increasingly eager to deny her access to it. In part one of *Ravages*, when she has not yet embraced a feminine normality predicated upon castration and penis envy, he is evidently gratified by the interest it arouses in Thérèse. Indeed, the text implies that her manifestations of nascent desire in his hotel room transform her, in his eyes, into a confirming mirror that is no less reassuring than the real mirror his room contains and assuages his abiding castration anxiety — which reinforces the point made by Virginia Woolf that women serve the male sex 'as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size':³⁹

Il regarda dans la glace:

"Quelle barbe!"

Il la flattait avec le revers de la main.

Marc . . .

– Vous voulez que je me rase?

– Non, ne vous rasez pas. J'ai triché tout à l'heure. Je vous ai vu.

– Nu?

Il monta sur le lit avec son châle enroulé autour du corps.

"Oui: nu."

Il se laissa tomber.

"Que voulez-vous qu'on y fasse? Un homme c'est un homme." (p. 43)

However, once they are married and her 'normalization' appears complete, the situation changes. Marc comes to perceive Thérèse's feminine 'otherness' as a

threat to his masculinity, and to view her need of him as castratory instead of gratifying. Her sexual overtures, whose emasculatory aspect seems clear even to Thérèse herself ('Je le prends par les cheveux, je l'embrasse avec tant de brutalité qu'il me semble que je le décapite', p. 205),⁴⁰ begin to terrify him, and lead him to react to his wife in a way which makes the extent of his fear of castration very obvious ('Tu me posséderais si je ne me défendais pas. Combien de fois t'ai-je répété que je voulais mes coudées franches?', p. 226). Confronted with the threat of emasculation, Marc turns from Thérèse to a more comforting human mirror/double, his friend Paul, with whom he enjoys a relationship that is deeply, if undeclaredly, homoerotic. Paul, as Thérèse realizes when she observes the pleasure the two men find in each other's company, provides her husband with the narcissistic reassurance he requires, and which she is no longer able to offer ('Paul rit et Marc noyé dans la béatitude sourit distraitemment [. . .]. Marc baissa la tête. Le rayon dirigé sur la fente de son pantalon, c'est la fumée de la cigarette d'un homme qui se sent homme', p. 218–19). Marc's gradual withdrawal of the sexual interest for which she hungers leaves Thérèse in a state of humiliating subjugation, which she articulates after he disingenuously accuses her of losing the strength of character she possessed when they first met:

–J'étais détachée de toi. Je ne peux plus me détacher de toi. Si tu voulais comprendre, si tu essayais de comprendre . . . Je ne peux pas me détacher de toi. Je ne peux pas. Toi, quand c'est fini, tu te lèves, tu t'habilles, tu siffles, tu pars, tu disparais. Pour moi c'est la nostalgie qui commence. Je ne cesse jamais de te vouloir, toi, avec ta chair, avec tes plaintes. (p. 226)

The 'esclavage' to which Thérèse is exposed in part three of *Ravages* is not simply sexual. The second aspect of the servitude which emerges as an integral part of the œdipal femininity she assumes is revealed once she discovers that she is pregnant. Thérèse learns that she is carrying Marc's child after they have separated and his departure has led her to attempt suicide. When she tells him the news, he reacts with joy, even though their relationship has deteriorated and she is reluctant to keep the baby. The way in which he expresses his desire for paternity illuminates the real function, within a 'phallogocentric' sexual order, of the motherhood awaiting Thérèse — and reveals the enslaving nature of the maternal state which, Freud suggests, should make her 'complete'.

Marc makes two significant observations to Thérèse regarding the consequences of her conception. The first concerns the baby in her womb, of which he says 'Ce serait gentil un petit garçon qui me ressemblerait' (p. 304). This comment suggests that Thérèse has become for Marc a kind of maternal breeding ground, a means to reproduce and immortalize his own masculinity, and endorses Irigaray's argument that in the sociosexual order as it stands, the mother merely represents a 'matrice — terre, usine, banque — à laquelle sera

confiée la semence-capital pour qu'elle y germe, s'y fabrique, y fructifie, sans que la femme puisse en revendiquer la propriété ni même l'usufruit, ne s'étant que "passivement" soumise à la reproduction'.⁴¹ Her pregnancy has transformed Thérèse, in Marc's eyes, into 'matière pour reproduction';⁴² something which, if inherently worthless, has 'valeur d'usage'⁴³ since it permits him to acquire a male child, a second self. His other self-congratulatory remark, 'Après tout je suis un homme' (p. 304) suggests moreover that his pleasure at Thérèse's potential production of a son does not simply stem from the fact that it will enable him to reproduce himself *physically*. As we saw above, Thérèse's post-marital accession to feminine 'otherness' meant that she ceased to function for Marc as a reassuring mirror, in which his 'phallicity' was confirmed. If he is now able, in her presence, to assert his masculinity as he did in part one, this is likely to be because she has become once more a suitable 'miroir pour redoublement'.⁴⁴ The metamorphosis he perceives in her is indubitably the consequence of his (unconscious) belief that her acquisition of a child/penis will make of her a 'phallic mother'; that is, a phallic *double* instead of a threatening feminine other, and therefore a source of renewed specular gratification.⁴⁵ Furthermore, it is probably also the case, although his remarks confirm this only indirectly, that Thérèse's future maternity delights Marc because it offers him the possibility of (re)gaining a form of (sexual) access to his *own* mother. Marc's mother is dead and therefore lost to him. If Thérèse bears a (male) child 'qui [lui] ressemblerait', then he will find his mother again in his wife and will at last be allowed to satisfy the taboo (because incestuous) desire for the maternal parent which, Freud informs us, remains with the male subject throughout his life.⁴⁶

The above discussion makes apparent how, and why, Thérèse is transformed into an 'esclave' in part three of *Ravages*. Her 'esclavage' is clearly a function of her pursuit of a model of femininity which, even in the 'bébé-de-la-ruelle' episode, emerges as restrictive — because Thérèse equates the 'ruelle' which symbolizes the œdipal identity she embraces inside it, with enclosure and discomfort ('J'ai froid. Je ne peux pas sortir de la ruelle. [...] Il fait froid dans une ruelle en été', p. 58). More specifically, her state of subjugation derives from her humiliating need for the penis she venerates, her 'amour [...] servile du père-mari [i.e. Marc] susceptible de le lui donner',⁴⁷ and her eventual metamorphosis, once she becomes pregnant, into a 'matrice/miroir' whose purpose is to guarantee 'le pouvoir du père de se reproduire et de se représenter, de perpétuer son genre et son espèce'.⁴⁸ Fortunately for Thérèse, the servitude to which her (œdipal) defection exposes her does not prove to be enduring. This is because two of the experiences she undergoes permit her gradually to recognize and reject her own 'esclavage', and to evolve towards a different state of being.

THÉRÈSE'S ABORTION: THE PENIS REPUDIATED

The first of these formative experiences occurs before Thérèse's discovery that she is pregnant, when her marriage is disintegrating. Having learnt from Marc that he intends to leave and to deny her further access to the phallic valorization he provides, she responds by trying to commit suicide. Despite the fact that her abortive attempt to asphyxiate herself initially represents a gesture of helplessness, it ultimately emerges as productive because it seems to enable her to develop a sense of the pernicious character of the femininity she has assumed. Thérèse's nascent perception that her pursuit of normal, heterosexual femininity has resulted in her own enslavement is conveyed implicitly at this stage, in the account we are given of a visit she and Marc make to a market after she has recovered from her unsuccessful attempt at self-destruction. During the visit, Thérèse sees a string of dead rabbits, whose female, martyred bodies, with their shamelessly open 'cuisses', offer a tableau of feminine sexual subjection which mirrors her own state. The inclusion in the narrative of this spectacle, and the way in which her vision of it is presented, hints that Thérèse is beginning to intimate the 'esclavage' to which she has succumbed:

Il y a la parade militaire et de l'alignement de music-hall dans cette revue des martyrs. Je veux parler de régiments de lapins dépouillés, suspendus à la barre fixe, offrant l'effusion de leurs cuisses ouvertes comme des femelles chavirées. Ces cadavres cuiront à la casserole. (p. 273)

It is not however until Thérèse discovers that she is going to have a child that her awareness of the restrictive character of the sexual order she has entered is consolidated and articulated explicitly. If her prospective maternity is a source of satisfaction to Marc, it clearly causes Thérèse to see that her accession to motherhood will transform her into an 'ouvrière/machine',⁴⁹ a cog within a 'procès de spécula(risa)tion du sujet masculin'⁵⁰ that allows no place for *her* autonomy and desire. That she is alive to what the production of a child/penis signifies and that she rejects the fate which lies in store is made clear when she inwardly declines the maternal 'mask' of mediatory functionality Marc evidently wishes her to assume, and opts instead to abort:

"Tu l'es de combien?

– Quatre mois et demi", dis-je accablée.

Il me regarda.

Aurais-je le masque? Je n'ai pas le masque, je n'aurai pas le masque.

"Je ferai mon devoir", dit Marc. (p. 303)

Thérèse's abortion may be interpreted in a number of ways. If we choose to read her mother's interdiction as negative and inescapable, and to view Thérèse as her mother's creature, then her decision to abort must be understood in terms of her incapacity to ignore (destructive) maternal dictates. Elements of the conclusion of *Ravages* validate this reading, notably Thérèse's

observation that she has 'sacrificed' everything to and for her mother, her perception that her miscarriage constitutes a 'cadeau de reine' she must offer the mother (p. 311), and her comment to the latter 'Nous avons fait ce que tu voulais. C'est l'essentiel' (p. 318). None the less, Thérèse's decision to expel her unwanted foetus may be interpreted in a more positive way. It can be viewed as a transgressive act of liberation, by means of which a noxious model of (phallogentric) femininity is abandoned by Thérèse and her 'esclavage' is finally shattered.

Freud's vision of feminine development suggests that the acquisition of a (male) child enables a woman eventually, and belatedly, to overcome the lack to which she is subject, and to satisfy her abiding desire for the penis. The child a woman bears symbolically stands in for the phallic member which she does not originally possess, and which her discovery, in infancy, of the 'fact' of her castration leads her to envy. In *Ravages*, the Freudian penis/child equivalence⁵¹ is clearly acknowledged and accepted (as much of Freud's theory of femininity *seems* to be accepted). Marc's sexual organ is variously represented as a 'prisonnier qui voulait naître' (p. 31), a 'prisonnier délivré' (p. 201), and a 'petit tombé du nid' (p. 231), and the foetus the abortion eventually detaches from inside Thérèse is likened to two objects which are obviously phallic symbols: a 'lame barbouillée' and a 'langue coupée' (p. 238). The full, radical significance of the novel's endorsement of the Freudian baby/penis equation only becomes apparent however once the reader learns of Thérèse's decision to abort. Given the phallic status of the foetus she is carrying, Thérèse's determination to destroy it cannot simply be understood in terms of a (conscious) desire on her part to bring to an end an unwanted pregnancy. She is clearly also, at a deeper, symbolic/unconscious level, finally rejecting, as she rejects the child/penis, the œdipal trajectory she has followed, a trajectory of which the baby she ejects is both the logical end-product and the phallic emblem. That she becomes able to perform this act of repudiation undoubtedly reflects the insights regarding her sexual subjugation she is afforded after her failed suicide attempt, and her subsequent realization that the maternity she faces will serve only to exacerbate her 'esclavage'.

We are encouraged to interpret Thérèse's abortion as a symbolic expulsion of the phallus and as a step on the road to a different kind of femininity by the fact that on several occasions she declares that she wishes to miscarry in order to 'redevenir une jeune fille' (pp. 304, 306), i.e. to reassume the identity that was hers *before* her œdipal movement towards Marc and 'esclavage'. The inclusion, at the end of *Ravages*, of images of rebirth and renaissance intensifies our impression that once she has expelled the baby/penis she becomes free to embrace a new, albeit unspecified, form of womanhood that lies (potentially) outside the phallogentric/œdipal order. These images dominate the account we are given of Thérèse's penultimate conversation with her mother, which occurs

in the clinic where she is taken after septicaemia has set in and where she finally loses her child:

Je sentis la masse de coton et de bandages.

“Je ne boiterai pas?

– Tu courras, tu voleras”, dit-elle.

Je soulevai le drap:

“C’est mon sang?

– C’est ton sang. Tu seras toute neuve”, dit ma mère. (p. 330)

The reference to ‘sang’ that Thérèse makes here is particularly significant. The reason for this becomes apparent once we return to an earlier stage in her story and read her above remark in conjunction with another section of *Ravages* in which blood is evoked. In part two, Thérèse visits the countryside, in order to sell lace and establish some distance between herself and Cécile, her ‘mother/lover’. In the course of her visit, during which she displays her wares to another mother and daughter pair, blood (specifically menstrual blood) emerges as the symbol of woman’s capacity to transcend the servitude (phallogocentric) femininity and motherhood impose upon her:

Maintenant, mère et fille, il faut que vous m’achetiez du jour Venise. Je vendrai après leur avoir expliqué leurs rêves: l’eau sale mène aux ennuis, les fleurs seront des pleurs, les enfants sont des présages de tourment, mais le sang, femmes, le sang c’est notre victoire. (p. 160)

The words ‘le sang, femmes, le sang c’est notre victoire’ convey the powerful message that as long as a woman bleeds every month, her womb remains empty of the penile substitutes (‘enfants/présages de tourment’) whose production ensures her (definitive) containment within a phallic economy that reduces her to the status of man’s ‘matière pour reproduction, miroir pour redoublement’. Although the ‘sang/victoire’ association means little when we encounter it in part two, our recollection of it helps us, after we reach the point in *Ravages* at which Thérèse aborts and bleeds once more, to interpret her freshly-flowing blood as a sign that she has defeated the feminine ‘esclavage’ which has enclosed her. Her mother’s comments ‘tu courras, tu voleras’ and ‘tu seras toute neuve’ increase our sense that this is the case, and suggest that both women are aware of the transformation the younger has undergone. The exchange between mother and daughter strongly indicates that Thérèse is extricating herself from a sexual order that has damaged her and is being ‘reborn’, through the anti-œdipal act of abortion.

All of the above enables us to view Thérèse’s termination of her pregnancy as a (victorious) rejection of a phallic/œdipal feminine psychosexual identity rather than as a (weak) gesture of submission to a mother who is selfish and restrictive. It is important none the less to recognize that although it does not constitute a capitulation, the abortion Thérèse undergoes does allow her to effect a kind of ‘return to the mother’. That this accompanies her ejection of the

baby/penis is suggested by Thérèse's account of the circumstances in which she awakens from the torpor that engulfs her after she aborts: 'Je revenais au monde et, à deux pas de mon lit, ma mère dans leur fauteuil se tournait les pouces. Je n'avais plus mal et je la revoyais' (pp. 329–30).

Thérèse's words indicate that she is reaffirming her relationship with the mother from whom her defection to Marc has distanced her. This may initially appear surprising, since at the very end of *Ravages* the bond between the two women seems irretrievably shattered and Thérèse seems to have reached a 'Mirror Stage'⁵² that is indicative of a definitive *separation* from her mother:

"Viens", dit-elle.

Elle m'entraîna dans le couloir. Elle me soulevait de terre.

Je volais, j'étais guérie. Nous dépassâmes les portes des malades. La clinique se reposait. Ma mère me poussa en avant. Je me trouvai devant un miroir.

"Ta petite taille. Tu as retrouvé ta petite taille", dit-elle.

Pour la première fois, ses paroles n'avaient pas de résonance en moi. J'étais seule. Enfin seule. (p. 330)

The contradiction which the juxtaposition of the above, almost contiguous extracts apparently reveals is, however, only superficial. That is because the solitude to which Thérèse accedes at the end of *Ravages* is a complex state that does not in reality exclude her mother, or mean that the lost bond between the two women is not recuperated in some form. Earlier sections of the novel's conclusion — notably the account we are given (in yet another of Thérèse's monologues) of the hyperlucid reflections which penetrate her consciousness as she slowly loses the fœtus she has carried — make this clear.

In the monologue in question Thérèse appears initially, as she does at the very end of *Ravages*, to be embracing a state of absolute solitariness and to be refusing future involvement in any kind of relational attachment at all ('J'avale du propydon, je vois clair en arrière. Que de détours, quel marivaudage tragique pour ne pas m'avouer que je veux être seule, dormir seule comme je souffre maintenant', p. 327). However, once Thérèse elaborates upon the nature of the solitude for which she is opting it becomes evident that this is not as straightforward as we might think:

Bébé sanglant, j'étais la promesse de mademoiselle la solitude aux yeux de verglas. Que d'inventions pour me détourner d'elle. "Si je guéris, mademoiselle, nous aurons froid ensemble sur une table d'altitude. C'est là que nous nous allongerons et que nous nous serrons". (p. 327)

These hermetic lines suggest that in choosing 'solitude', Thérèse may seem simply to be envisaging a state of splendid isolation but is actually turning towards a partner/companion from whom she has been detached by her own (œdipal) 'inventions'. The partner in question is a woman 'aux yeux de verglas', to whom she will regain access once she has been 'guérie' by her abortion. This fact makes it possible to read her remarks as a declaration of her willingness to

turn back to her mother, whom she has previously repudiated and of whom 'mademoiselle la solitude' may be taken as a symbol. Various aspects of the text enable us to interpret the female figure Thérèse's imagination conjures up as a maternal double, and to view the phantasmic encounter Thérèse envisages as a sign that a 'return to the mother' is being instigated. For one thing, an earlier mention of the 'acier' (p. 318) in Thérèse's mother's eyes means that we are reminded of her when the frosty orbits of 'mademoiselle la solitude' are evoked. Secondly, Thérèse's vision of the embraces she and 'mademoiselle' will exchange after her abortion-cure ('Si je guéris, [. . .] nous nous serrerons') can be understood in terms of a mother/daughter reunion, since their (curiously) celebratory character calls to mind another celebratory rite, the 'fête' Thérèse's mother announces that she and her daughter will share once the termination of Thérèse's pregnancy is assured ('Tu guériras et nous ferons une de ces fêtes', p. 321). Thirdly, the reference to the coldness which Thérèse believes she and 'mademoiselle la solitude' will encounter on their 'table d'altitude' intensifies our sense that her prospective meeting with 'mademoiselle' constitutes a symbolic *renouement* with her abandoned mother. This is because, almost immediately after she makes this reference, coldness is evoked again, in connection with the situation she and her mother found themselves in while Thérèse was still unborn ('Vous me l'avez dit, ma mère, pendant neuf mois, ensemble nous avons pleuré, ensemble nous avons grelotté', p. 327). The parallelism of 'nous [Thérèse + Mlle la solitude] aurons froid ensemble' and 'ensemble nous [Thérèse + her mother] avons grelotté' (like that which links 'Si je guéris, [. . .] nous nous serrerons' and 'Tu guériras et nous ferons une de ces fêtes') strengthens our impression that in addressing personified solitude and articulating her desire to (re)form an allegiance with her, Thérèse is expressing a desire to renew the mother/daughter tie.

Thérèse's embrace of solitariness does not then entail a continued refusal of her mother, even though the last words of *Ravages* ('J'étais seule. Enfin seule') seemingly hint that it does. However, the sense of solitude which abortion affords Thérèse can be taken as a sign that its cathartic character has enabled her to overcome the more *restrictive*, fusal aspects of her bond with the mother. That this is the case is indicated by the penultimate sentence of *Ravages*: 'Pour la première fois, ses paroles n'avaient pas de résonance en moi'. This suggests not that Thérèse has separated from her mother completely, but that the two women are less oppressively entangled each with the other than they have been hitherto. Our impression that Thérèse's abortion-cure affords them access to a state in which they are neither divided nor bound inextricably together, but rather coexist 'contiguously', is intensified when we turn to a later segment of Thérèse's description of her ejection of the baby/penis. Here her 'return to the mother' is suggested poetically, and is presented in a more evidently positive way than in the 'mademoiselle la solitude' passage:

Si je guéris [. . .], je reviendrai avec un ruban pour ma prison. Avec un ruban simple comme le ciel. Les plaines sont ma prison qui respire à l'aise. J'ai mal. Je suis seule, je suis la statue qui veut se remettre debout dans la plaine. J'ai trop mal. Je guérirai. Je serai le marbre de la plaine. (pp. 327–28)

This extract, like much of the end-section of *Ravages*, is extremely intricate. In it, Thérèse seems to be declaring that once her abortion/*guérison* is complete, she will recuperate the lost mother/daughter tie ('je reviendrai avec un ruban') and will do so joyously because, whereas her bond with her mother had previously represented a 'prison', it will henceforth constitute a much freer space (a 'plaine') in which she will be able to breathe and which will not oppress her ('Les plaines sont ma prison qui respire à l'aise'). The renewal of the maternal/filial tie that she envisages, since it will no longer impose stifling entanglement, will enable her to recover from the ravages of her phallic 'esclavage' (i.e. 'se remettre debout dans la plaine') and is therefore cause for celebration. Her vision of herself as an erect marble statue is suggestive, here, of the strength and vitality she evidently believes *renouement* with her mother will afford her, and not of paralysis or sterility. The statue clearly functions therefore as a positive symbol, which stands in contrast to the negative images of the 'berger d'Arcadie' and the 'mannequin de pureté' that were associated with Thérèse earlier on in *Ravages*, when her relationship with her mother was at its most difficult.

Maternal/filial reunion is a complex and potentially problematic phenomenon. In her analysis of Duras's *Le Vice-Consul*, which she reads as an allegorical quest for the mother, Marcelle Marini argues that mother/daughter reintegration represents, for the daughter, a quasi-suicidal act, because 'retrouver la mère, ce n'est pas (re)trouver enfin son identité, c'est se perdre corps et biens'.⁵³ Marini's point is that the recuperation of the mother/daughter tie involves the daughter in a return to a primal state of fusion with the mother which denies her access to individual subjectivity. In moving back towards her mother at the end of *Ravages*, Thérèse does not however (in spite of her poignant remark 'Je veux mourir dans ton lit', p. 315) appear to be succumbing to the self-immolation Marini evokes. What she is presented rather as trying to do is to end the 'exile' that the Œdipal Family Romance imposes upon daughters (and mothers). This exile — described by Irigaray as 'une extradition, une expatriation, hors de [. . .] (son) économie désirante'⁵⁴ — becomes the lot of the daughter once a break in her primordial relation with her mother is effected by her discovery of castration and her concomitant movement towards father-love. It is an exile to which Thérèse evidently feels she has been exposed, and which, at the end of *Ravages*, she may be considered to be rejecting in favour of an attempted recuperation of her lost (pre-œdipal) bond with her mother.

The primordial phase of Thérèse's relationship with her mother is signalled symbolically in *Ravages* by the period she calls 'Avant'. 'Avant' stands for the

time which predated Thérèse's defection to Marc and which also preceded her mother's 'treacherous' marriage to Thérèse's stepfather. 'Avant' signifies an idyllic stage in Thérèse's dealings with her mother when their relationship was completely exclusive and, moreover, verged upon the erotic — as Thérèse's various accounts of the rituals she performed in childhood for her mother (her 'frottage' of the mother's 'steps', for instance) suggest.⁵⁵ It constituted a kind of 'all-female pre-œdipal realm',⁵⁶ a time during which Thérèse had no thought of defecting to the phallic male and embracing a feminine destiny/identity circumscribed by 'paramètres masculins', and neither, if she is to be believed, did her maternal parent.⁵⁷ Thérèse clearly perceives her abortion as the means by which 'Avant' may be resurrected, since after she has visited a second abortionist and begun to miscarry she tells her mother 'C'est comme avant [. . .]. Je laverai les pierres de notre maison pour toi. Tu auras trois pierres bleues. C'est comme avant' (p. 310). Consequently, her decision to abort may be interpreted as an attempt to revive a buried, privileged relation between herself and her mother that was characterized by *total* feminine exclusivity. Since 'Avant' lies deep in the past, since the kind of return to origins Thérèse seeks is generally deemed to be unrealizable, and since, more importantly, her mother never repudiates her own husband (who is none the less curiously absent throughout the novel), Thérèse's efforts to recuperate the exclusivity of the 'pre-œdipal' realm appear unrealistic. However, because her mother seems to discern and even to share her daughter's nostalgic desire to reinstate the past ("Tu te souviens de ma grippe espagnole? Tu ne quittais pas mon lit. Comme tu m'aimais! Tu avais huit ans", dit-elle avec nostalgie', p. 312), Thérèse's project is perhaps less fantastic than we might suppose. While the open-ended nature of the conclusion of *Ravages* means that we cannot, ultimately, judge the success of her endeavours, this final part of the novel reads none the less like a contemporary reworking of the Demeter/Kore myth, in which a mother and daughter are restored to each other after an intrusive male has separated them, and the 'essential female tragedy' of mother/daughter exile is reversed.⁵⁸

While *Ravages* appears at first simply to endorse Freud's (descriptive? prescriptive?) account of the evolution of feminine sexual 'normality', the ending of Thérèse's story means that it may also be read as a work of considerable feminist significance, in which a phallogocentric model of gender evolution is reversed, and the 'loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter' intrinsic to that model is presented as undesirable and (potentially, at least) resolvable.⁵⁹ *Ravages* may, moreover, be deemed 'feminist' because its conclusion implies that women — daughters and mothers — need be able to access an intersubjective, differentiated relation *with each other*, as opposed to coexisting in fusional mode, or abandoning each other altogether, or functioning merely as commodities placed in the service of male subjects bent on self-reproduction (a fate Thérèse very nearly embraces). What

Ravages ultimately calls for, arguably, is the advent of a new status quo, in which 'the daughter [might] situate herself in her identity with respect to her mother',⁶⁰ and in which the existence/necessity of a 'généalogie féminine' (a recognized order of mother-to-daughter relations) might be acknowledged.⁶¹ In other words, the 'message' of the closing pages of Leduc's novel may be taken to have an instinctively Irigarayan flavour. Irigaray argues that under patriarchy, 'le lien entre mère et fille, fille et mère doit être supprimé, au bénéfice de la relation fils-père, de l'idéalisation du père et du mari comme patriarches',⁶² which means that women (daughters) lose the possibility of interrelation/encounter with a female (m)other. She contends moreover, especially in texts published in recent years (notably *Ethique de la différence sexuelle* (1984) and the essay 'La Limite du transfert'),⁶³ that because women are accorded, in the patriarchal order, no identity or space outside the maternal function, i.e. the place of the mother, they cannot avoid entering into rivalry with each other for possession of it, or achieve (mediated) relationships amongst themselves. The consequence of all of this, for Irigaray, is an unethical state of affairs, in which 'subject-to-subject relations between women',⁶⁴ particularly mothers and daughters, are precluded — because women simply interact as competitors (for the maternal place) and/or as non-subjects, deprived of the possibility of individuation and exchange 'entre elles'.⁶⁵ The remarkable thing about *Ravages* is that in it, Violette Leduc seems — focusing as she does on issues of mother/daughter division, rivalry and 'exile' — to articulate an intuitive awareness of the kind of problems Irigaray's theoretical work foregrounds, and appears, furthermore, to indicate one (admittedly extreme and individualistic) way of overcoming the loss/competition/fusion which, for Irigaray, currently dog the mother/daughter bond.

A feminist interpretation of *Ravages* of the kind I have offered, sustained as it is by detailed references to the text, is only one of a number of interpretations invited by the novel. That this is so reflects the fact that *Ravages* is an ambiguous work, whose complexities cannot be adequately contained in any single reading. This is less true of *Thérèse et Isabelle*, the text which began life as the prologue to *Ravages* but was subsequently transformed, after Gallimard's censorship, into a separate novella. Of the three works which make up my corpus, it is *Thérèse et Isabelle* which is most likely to appeal to the feminist critic who turns to female-authored texts in order to discover new or liberatory images of womanhood and female-to-female interaction. As we shall see in chapter three, this novella, unlike the two other works I have already discussed, actively and consistently celebrates female bonding, and depicts a 'good' feminine relationship that neither belongs to the realm of infantile fantasy (like the relation between the heroine of *L'Asphyxie* and her 'good' mother/grandmother) nor represents (like the bond between Thérèse and her mother in *Ravages*) a lost and only potentially recuperable idyll. In chapter

three, the pertinence of an Irigarayan approach to Violette Leduc's work will be re-examined.

NOTES

1. Jacob Stockinger, *Violette Leduc: The Legitimizations of 'La Bâtarde'* (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1979), pp. 111–12.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 124.
3. This reading is favoured by Dominique Aury, who interprets the end of *Ravages* as a 'retour à la docilité envers sa mère' on the part of its heroine, of whom she comments 'elle se fait avorter purement par soumission à sa mère' ('Les Enfants perdus', *La Nouvelle Revue française* (July 1955), pp. 116–17 (p. 116)). Charles-Merrien takes the same line, suggesting that it is above all Thérèse's abortion which signals her defeat by her mother. According to this critic, the birth of a child would have allowed Thérèse to emerge from a state of dependency *vis-à-vis* her mother and liberate herself, but Thérèse's decision to terminate her pregnancy, to 'rester petite fille' and 'demeurer en fusion avec sa mère' (op. cit., p. 87) indicates her incapacity to place her own welfare above that of her mother. The mother's aim, in Charles-Merrien's view, is to ensure that Thérèse remains 'purifiée de toute souillure masculine' (ibid.) so that she herself is not reminded of the unfortunate experience of men and maternity which she has had in the past. Thérèse aborts, for Charles-Merrien, because she knows that 'pour satisfaire sa mère, il faut donner la mort, car porter la vie entrainerait sa colère, son rejet et son abandon' (ibid., p. 85). While the reading Charles-Merrien offers is coherent, Thérèse's mother's embargo against heterosexuality and maternity can be interpreted differently — as I shall demonstrate.
4. Roland Barthes, *Le Plaisir du texte* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1973), p. 75.
5. Marianne Hirsch, 'A Mother's Discourse: Incorporation and Repetition in *La Princesse de Clèves*', *Yale French Studies*, 62 (1981), 67–87 (p. 73).
6. Cécile's identification with Thérèse's mother is suggested in various ways. Remarks addressed to Thérèse by both women are strikingly similar. After Thérèse comes home in part 1 of *Ravages*, after spending the night with Marc, her mother comments 'Ce que tu as pu me tourmenter!' (p. 49) and when Thérèse has provoked a miscarriage in part 3, she tells her daughter 'Tu me feras toujours peur' (p. 311). At the start of part 2, Cécile, finding Thérèse outside their 'pavillon' with her eyes bandaged, cries 'Ne me fais pas peur', and comments 'Tu me feras toujours peur' (p. 75). Later in part 2, Cécile tells Thérèse 'Tu veux me faire peur, tu veux me tourmenter' (p. 156). The parallel between the mother and Cécile, Thérèse's 'mother/lover', works on a vestimentary level too. Before their final conversation, at the end of part 2, Thérèse buys Cécile a sea-blue headscarf, decorated with 'des ancras, des gouvernails, une étoile, des points cardinaux' (p. 165). When Thérèse's mother visits her after her miscarriage, her headgear closely resembles that offered Cécile by Thérèse, since she wears 'un fichu bleu décoré de poissons blancs' (p. 318). Furthermore, both women are associated by Thérèse with a stage in her life described as 'Avant'. At the start of part 2, when Thérèse and Cécile discuss the fleas that have infested their home, Thérèse observes to Cécile 'Nous allons tuer ces puces, je dormirai et tu me retrouveras comme avant', to which her 'mother/lover' replies 'Avant quoi?' (p. 79). At the end of part 3, as she prepares to abort, Thérèse informs her mother 'C'est comme avant [. . .]. Je laverai les pierres de notre maison pour toi. Tu auras trois pierres bleues. C'est comme avant' and the latter, echoing Cécile, asks 'Avant quoi, mon petit gueux?' (p. 310). On two occasions, Thérèse finds herself with her mother, before a mirror. When Thérèse stands in front of another mirror with Cécile, in part 2, she reflects that 'tous nos amours sont un même prolongement' (p. 180). This indicates that, on a symbolic level at least, her relationship with Cécile and her bond with her real, biological mother, are indissociable, and that Cécile and the real mother, like the mothers of *L'Asphyxie*, are facets of a single maternal entity.
7. Jane Flax, 'The Conflict between Nurturance and Autonomy in Mother-Daughter Relationships and within Feminism', *Feminist Studies*, 4 (February 1978), 171–89 (p. 173).
8. Marianne Hirsch, 'Review Essay: Mothers and Daughters', *Signs*, 7 (1981), 200–22 (p. 206).
9. Nancy Chodorow, 'Family Structures and Feminine Personality' in Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (eds), *Women, Culture and Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), pp. 42–66 (p. 48).
10. See Chodorow, op. cit., and Flax, op. cit. See also Chodorow, 'Gender, Relation and Difference in Psychoanalytic Perspective', in Alice Jardine and Hester Eisenstein (eds), *The Future of Difference* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1987), pp. 3–19, and Flax, 'Mother-Daughter Relationships: Psychodynamics, Politics and

Philosophy' in *ibid.*, pp.20–40. See also Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978) and Luce Irigaray, *Et l'une ne bouge pas sans l'autre* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1979).

11. Chodorow (who belongs to the (non-Kleinian) object–relations school of psychoanalysis, and relies only indirectly on Freud) focuses on the influence upon gender-identity evolution and mother/daughter interaction of social and cultural factors. Luce Irigaray's analysis of the mother/daughter relation reflects the more philosophical approach to psychoanalysis which has been adopted in France, and owes more to the Freudian account of sexual identity as an *unconscious* — and unstable — construct. Irigaray also relates women's lack of intersubjective individuation/boundaries to the (non)place allotted the female 'subject' within the symbolic order under patriarchy — a polemical stance absent from Chodorow's work. Both women, however, foreground the importance of a girl's pre-œdipal bond with her mother and come to similar conclusions regarding the undifferentiated character of the mother/daughter relation. For a helpful account of the differences between Irigaray and Chodorow, see Margaret Whitford, 'Rereading Irigaray', in Teresa Brennan (ed.), *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 106–26 (pp. 110–13).
12. Chodorow, 'Family Structure and Feminine Personality', p. 58.
13. 'Mothers tend to identify more strongly with their girl babies. They do not seem to have as clear a sense of physical boundaries between themselves and their girl children as do mothers of boys. Women in therapy have frequently said that they have no sense where they end and their mothers begin, even in a literal, physical way.' (Flax, 'The Conflict between Nurturance and Autonomy', p. 174.)
14. Irigaray, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
15. In part 1, when Thérèse is trying to decide whether to make love with Marc, she senses the presence within herself of a watchful, statue-like figure, a 'vierge en ébène' (p. 44), which evidently symbolizes her mother and her interdiction against sex. The mother/statue association is reinforced by words the mother herself utters, during her row with Thérèse:
Ma mere tourna la tête du côté de sa pendule Directoire:
"Je n'ai pas fermé l'œil.
— C'est que tu l'as voulu.
— Une mère, en quoi crois-tu que c'est fait? En marbre?" (p. 49)
16. For Flax, the 'painful bind' Thérèse finds herself in is the direct consequence of the symbiotic mother/daughter bond and is the lot of all daughters. 'The Conflict between Nurturance and Autonomy', p. 178.
17. This expression is taken from Jane Gallop's *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: the Daughter's Seduction* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 56. Gallop employs it, in her discussion of Irigaray's *Speculum, de l'autre femme* (1974), in order to evoke the appeal of the phallic father for the œdipal daughter once she discovers castration, her (taboo) desire to seduce the father, and the seduction exercised by Freud, the 'Father' of psychoanalysis, over even his most recalcitrant daughter, Irigaray. Its relevance to Thérèse's story will become apparent in the following pages.
18. Leduc underwent psychiatric treatment and was certainly familiar with Freud. She had read the 'Destin' section of *Le Deuxième Sexe I*, in which Beauvoir analyses Freud's views on femininity, and describes this essay in glowing terms in a letter to Beauvoir dated 30 May 1949 (reprinted in *Les Temps modernes*, October 1987, p. 13).
19. Thérèse actually sees his penis earlier, when Marc forces her to have oral sex in a taxi. The description of this scene was removed by Gallimard editors, however, and replaced by lines of dots (p. 34). Those elements of it that remain indicate none the less the extreme significance of Thérèse's very first sight of Marc's sex: 'J'étouffai mon cri. "C'est la première fois", dis-je' (p. 34). Beauvoir, shocked by Gallimard's censorship, wrote to Sartre: 'Dure journée avec Violette Leduc. Elle sortait du lit où elle s'était jetée avec 39 de fièvre après l'entretien avec Lemarchand. [...] La scène du taxi scandalise littéralement les gens: Queneau, Lemarchand, Y. Lévy, j'ai l'impression que ça les blesse en tant que mâles' (Simone de Beauvoir, *Lettres à Sartre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), p. 424).
20. 'The castration complex of girls is [...] started by the sight of the genitals of the other sex. They at once notice the difference and [...] its significance too. They feel seriously wronged, often declare that they want 'to have something like it too', and fall victim to 'envy for the penis', which will leave ineradicable traces on their development and the formation of their character and which will not be surmounted in even the most favourable cases without a severe expenditure of psychological energy. [...] The discovery that she is castrated is a turning point in a girl's growth. Three possible lines of development start from it; one leads to sexual

inhibition or to neurosis, the second to a change of character in the sense of a masculinity complex, the third, finally, to normal femininity.' (Freud, 'Femininity', *SE*, 22, pp. 125–26.) For Freud, line three develops as follows. The girl who has recognized her 'castration' extends it to other females and finally to her mother as well (*ibid.*, p. 126), is 'driven out of her attachment to her mother through the influence of her envy for the penis' (p. 129), turns to her father 'with the wish for the penis which her mother has refused her and which she now expects from her father' (p. 128) and 'enters the Oedipus situation as though into a haven of refuge' (p. 129).

21. In the conversation between Thérèse and her mother in part 1, the mother appears inanimate and prostrate, despite her anger. Her passivity, which arguably hints at Thérèse's new sense of her mother's castrated state, is illuminated by her last words to Thérèse in this part of *Ravages*: 'Maintenant va te reposer et éteins. Que je me repose aussi' (p. 58). Thérèse twice becomes aware of physical defects in her 'mother/lover' which also convey her awareness of maternal castration:

Sa robe de toile remontée au-dessus des genoux ne cachait plus ses jambes taillées dans le bloc. Je lui pardonnais ma cruauté lorsque je regardais ses mollets. Oui, ses imperfections me bouleversaient.' (pp. 87–88)

Cécile revint dans la chambre. Ses escarpins neufs enlaidissaient ses pieds, ses jambes gainées de soie étaient trop grosses. Les défauts physiques de Cécile étaient si généreux qu'ils m'inspiraient de la générosité. (p. 144)

- Significantly, perhaps, Freud treats feet and shoes as fetish objects that function, for men, as 'substitutes for the absent female phallus' (Freud, 'Fetishism', *SE*, 21, pp. 147–57 (p. 155)).
22. Voyeurism and erotic possession are linked by numerous psychoanalytic critics, because of the eye/penis parallel Freud establishes in 'The Uncanny', Lacan's reference to the 'privilegé du regard dans la fonction du désir', and his assertion that 'le domaine de la vision [est] intégré au champ du désir' (Lacan, *Les Quatre Concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1973), p. 80). The theme of voyeurism is central to Lacan's *œuvre* and will be re-examined.
23. Reading Marc's actions in terms of the voyeuristic gratification M. de Nemours derives may seem far-fetched. However, other parallels between *Ravages* and *La Princesse de Clèves* — a text which Leduc admired — justify doing so. I shall allude to these later on.
24. 'Le fantasme se distingue du rêve par son degré bien supérieur de logique et de cohérence. S'il prend sa source dans les pulsions inconscientes, il a subi une élaboration secondaire plus poussée que celle du rêve, qui lui permet de s'intégrer à la vie diurne et d'accéder à la conscience sans avoir besoin de l'état de moindre vigilance offert par le sommeil.' (Madeleine Borgomano, *Duras: une lecture des fantasmes* (Paris: Astre, 1988), pp. 114–15.)
25. 'La différence capitale entre monologue immédiat et style indirect libre, que l'on a parfois le tort de confondre, ou de rapprocher indûment [est que]: dans le discours indirect libre, le narrateur assume le discours du personnage, ou si l'on préfère le personnage parle par la voix du narrateur, et les deux instances sont alors *confondues*; dans le discours immédiat, le narrateur s'efface et le personnage se *substitue* à lui'. (Genette, *Figures III* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), pp. 193–94.)
26. See *Ravages*, pp. 31–32, 43–44 and 221–24.
27. See Pierre Guiraud, *Dictionnaire historique, stylistique, rhétorique, étymologique de la littérature érotique* (Paris: Payot, 1978), p. 157.
28. See *ibid.*, p. 385. Guiraud's sources are Alfred Delvau, *Dictionnaire érotique par un professeur de langue verte* (1864); and J.-P. Leroux, *Dictionnaire comique, satyrique, burlesque, libre et proverbial* (1752).
29. 'By [masculinity complex] we mean that the girl refuses, as it were, to recognize the unwelcome fact [of her castration] and, defiantly rebellious, even exaggerates her previous masculinity [sic], clings to her clitoridal activity and takes refuge in an identification with her phallic mother or her father.' (Freud, 'Femininity', *SE*, 22, pp. 129–30.)
30. 'The wish with which the girl turns to her father is no doubt originally the wish for the penis which her mother has refused her and which she now expects from her father. The feminine situation is only established, however, if the wish for a penis is replaced by one for a baby, if, that is, the baby takes the place of a penis in accordance with an ancient symbolic equivalence.' *Ibid.*, p. 128.
31. See note 3.
32. According to Irigaray, in the patriarchal sociosexual order of which Freud's discourse is an exemplary product, feminine sexuality is represented in terms of, and circumscribed by, an androcentric norm — which means that women are denied knowledge of/access to their

- identity and desires: 'La sexualité féminine a toujours été pensée à partir de paramètres masculins. [...] Les zones érogènes de la femme ne seraient jamais qu'un sexe clitoris qui ne soutient pas la comparaison avec l'organe phallique valeureux, ou un trou-enveloppe qui fait gaine et frottement autour du pénis dans le coït, ou un sexe masculin retourné autour de lui même pour s'auto-affecter. De la femme et de son plaisir, rien ne se dit dans une telle conception du rapport sexuel. Son lot serait celui du "manque", de l'"atrophie" (du sexe), et de l'"envie du pénis" comme seul sexe reconnu valeureux' (Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1977), p. 23).
33. Hirsch, 'A Mother's Discourse', p. 78.
 34. Bachelard explores the symbolic association of the sea and the mother in detail — see *L'Eau et les rêves* (Paris: José Corti, 1947).
 35. Jane Flax, 'Mother-Daughter Relationships: Psychodynamics, Politics and Philosophy', p. 37.
 36. Irigaray, *Et l'une ne bouge pas sans l'autre*, p. 20.
 37. Hirsch, 'A Mother's Discourse', p. 77.
 38. Flax, 'The Conflict between Nurturance and Autonomy', p. 174.
 39. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Grafton Books, 1977), p. 35.
 40. Thérèse's sense of the castratory nature of her behaviour emerges from her reference to her 'decapitating' embraces — Freud equates decapitation with emasculation in 'The Taboo of Virginity', *SE*, 11, pp. 191–208 (p. 207).
 41. Irigaray, *Speculum, de l'autre femme* (Paris: Minuit, 1974), p. 16.
 42. Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un*, p. 147.
 43. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
 44. *Ibid.*, p. 147.
 45. As Irigaray argues in the opening section of *Speculum, de l'autre femme*, 'La Tache aveugle d'un vieux rêve de symétrie' (pp. 8–162), the Freudian model of psychosexual development constructs femininity in such a way that at several phases of her evolution the female subject is not theorized as feminine at all, but rather as a pseudo-male. In the Freudian system, the pre-œdipal little girl, as yet unaware of her 'castration', is 'really' a little man (a 'fact' which helps us understand perhaps why the latently homosexual Marc does not initially feel threatened by Thérèse), and the mother who has acquired a child-penis is a 'phallic mother' — for her pre-œdipal offspring at least. Thus, according to Irigaray, the Freudian system, and the economy of which it is a symptom, are predicated upon a 'vieux rêve du "même"' (p. 27) and are fundamentally 'hom(m)osexual'. This helps the reader to grasp why Marc, clearly a 'Freudian' *par excellence*, stops dreading castration and feels able to assert his phallic masculinity once Thérèse becomes pregnant. The point is that by entering a state that will furnish her with a penile substitute, she ceases (in Freudian terms, as Irigaray reads them) to incarnate threatening female otherness and is reabsorbed into phallic 'sameness'.
 46. 'A boy's mother is the first object of his love, and she remains so too during the formation of his Œdipus complex and, in essence, all through his life.' (Freud, 'Femininity', p. 118.) According to Irigaray, the (taboo) desire for the mother which continues to drive the male subject can find satisfaction once his wife has a son because he becomes (as Marc clearly hopes to become) a 'père qui reconnaît en ce garçon, son fils, un même que lui' and, in consequence, a 'père [...] re-produit, re-présenté, re-mis au monde, re-materné, re-désiré, par sa femme plus que jamais devenue, redevenue sa mère' (*Speculum*, p. 94).
 47. Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un*, p. 23.
 48. Irigaray, *Speculum, de l'autre femme*, p. 89.
 49. 'La femme, dont il est impossible de suspecter l'intervention dans le travail d'engendrement de l'enfant, [devient] l'ouvrière anonyme, la machine, au service d'un maître-propriétaire qui estampillera le produit fini.' *Ibid.*, p. 21.
 50. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
 51. See 'On the Transformation of Instincts with Special Reference to Anal Eroticism', *SE* 17, pp. 125–33.
 52. The 'Mirror Stage' denotes for Lacan that moment of self-recognition experienced by a young child as it perceives and identifies with its own image in a mirror for the first time. Although the 'stade du miroir' does not give the infant a true image of itself, since its totalizing effect obscures the 'impuissance motrice' in which the baby still finds itself, this phase of human development is vital because it affords the subject a first (if illusory) sense of coherent, individuated identity. In other words, the Mirror Stage represents a 'situation exemplaire [...] où le je se précipite en une forme primordiale' (Lacan, 'Le Stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je telle qu'elle nous est révélée dans l'expérience psychanalytique', *Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), pp. 93–100 (p. 94)).

53. Marcelle Marini, *Territoires du féminin* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1977), p. 128.
54. Irigaray, *Speculum, de l'autre femme*, p. 47. Irigaray argues that whereas men 'remain in continuous relation with [their] first object, with [their] first love', i.e. with their mother, women, who are obliged by the œdipal process to break their libidinal attachment to the mother and can retrieve it via displacement far less easily than men, are exiled from the mother's body and consequently from themselves (Luce Irigaray, 'Women's Exile' (interview with Couze Venn), *Ideology and Consciousness*, 1 (1977), 62–76 (p. 76)).
55. Pièr Girard locates in Leduc's *L'Affamée* a primordial mother/daughter erotic idyll which resembles that evoked in *Ravages*, a 'relation privilégiée entre la mère et la fille, relation qui fut très vite désavouée, reniée par Berthe et de ce fait non seulement inavouable pour l'auteur mais aussi mise au secret dans les ténèbres et les cadavres qui jonchent le récit' ('L'Affamée de Violette Leduc', *Topique* (January 1985), pp. 113–28 (p. 121)).
56. Hirsch uses this phrase to describe the country retreat in which Mme de Clèves lives with her mother before going to court — which, for Hirsch, symbolizes 'the œdipal realm the Princess must enter if she is to grow up' ('A Mother's Discourse', p. 76). Hirsch's association of the pre-œdipal with the pastoral is illuminating, since in *Ravages* 'Avant' is also linked with (idyllic) rurality. Thérèse tells her mother in part 3, 'Je peux gratter la terre. Je peux voler pour toi dans les champs. C'est comme avant' (p. 310) and reflects in part 2, as she observes the mother and daughter pair to whom she sells lace: 'Gérer une ferme avec ma mère . . . Mon paradis perdu' (p. 160).
57. The 'fidelity' Thérèse imputes to her mother during 'Avant' is evoked in the 'bébe-de-laruelle' episode, even (ironically) as the mother is about to marry ('Elle dit que nous vivrons toujours ensemble, que nous ne nous quitterons jamais' (p. 61) and is articulated in another flashback to the past in part 3, in which the voyeuristic activities of a suitor, Aimé, are the focus: 'Ma mère entrain dans sa vingt-neuvième année, ma mère ne voulait pas voir le jeune homme debout dans les branches. Que le visage de ce gamin était grave et féminin . . . "Ta mère est-elle chez elle? — Oui, Aimé. — Que fait-elle ta mère? — Elle se lave les dents, Aimé. — Elle est seule? — Elle est seule parce que je suis venue sous l'arbre, Aimé. — Tu crois qu'elle m'entend, tu crois qu'elle me voit? — Elle ne vous voit pas, elle ne vous entend pas, Aimé. Elle n'aime que moi'"' (p. 325). The fact that Aimé spies on the mother in the same way that Marc spies on Thérèse in part 2 reinforces our impression of the boundary/identity confusion between the two women, and intensifies our sense that the female characters in *Ravages* are never entirely disentangled and separable from each other.
58. Adrienne Rich, *op. cit.*, p. 237.
59. *Ibid.*
60. Margaret Whitford, 'Introduction to section III', in Whitford (ed.), *The Irigaray Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 157–64 (p. 159).
61. The concept of a feminine genealogy is central to Irigaray's recent work. She contends that it is currently unrecognized and nonfunctional, because the 'official' genealogical basis of patriarchy is the father/son relation, which always supersedes and renders invalid that binding women.
62. Irigaray, *Ethique de la différence sexuelle* (Paris: Editions de minuit, 1984), p. 106.
63. First published in 1982, 'La Limite du transfert' is reprinted in *Parler n'est jamais neutre* (Paris: Editions de minuit, 1985), pp. 293–305.
64. Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 182.
65. For a comprehensive account of why Irigaray argues that women's lack of a space/identity outside the maternal function precludes intersubjective relations between them, see Whitford, 'Rereading Irigaray'. The Irigarayan link between woman's confinement within the place/identity of the mother and her status as non-subject works as follows. As Diana Fuss explains, for Irigaray, the consigning of woman to the maternal function transforms her into 'the ground of essence, its precondition in man [. . .] the ground of [his] subjecthood'. This in turn means that woman is 'not herself a subject' — precisely because her role is to enable man's access to/possession of subjectivity. (Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking* (Routledge: New York and London, 1989), p. 71.)