

Darrieussecq's *Truismes* : a Feminist "*Elle-iade de notre temps*"¹

- 1 Critics of Marie Darrieussecq's first novel, *Truismes*², published in 1996, tend to complain about the narrator's vacuous naïveté. She remains, in one claim, "un personnage principal somme toute assez divertissant, mais désespérément vide"³. In another claim, the narrator's "stupidity" makes it difficult to care about her. According to this critic, the narrator's detachment; her interiorized patriarchal values and misogynistic attitude, even toward herself; her failure to question her own transformation into a sow; all make it difficult for the reader to connect with such a character⁴. In her exploration of various interpretations of this controversial text, such readings are signaled by Shirley Jordan as those that would cast the narrator as "unpardonably lighthearted and too insouciant to denounce the social order"⁵.
- 2 Indeed, the narrator's apparently innocent, even ignorant, non-judgmental account of her ordeal at the hands of a dystopic patriarchy gone to extremes, would seem to suggest a "Candide-like naïveté"⁶ that risks frustrating the reader. Yet the title itself cues us to look for more beneath the surface of this misleadingly simple text. The word "truismes" suggests not only the English "truisms", or insultingly obvious verities, but the French word for sow, "truie", announcing the narrator's transformation. Although its precise etymology remains obscure, the word "truie", as the *Petit Robert* suggests, may come from the low Latin, "porcus troianus": Trojan or stuffed pork, in allusion to the surprise and deadly contents of the Trojan horse. As though to make sure that the etymological presence of a stuffed sow (inscribed in the word "truisme") has not escaped the reader, the narrator mentions having read that the ancient Romans' favorite dish was "vulve de truie farcie" (T 58). This image of a sow's stuffed vulva, with its doubly feminized resonance (the female sex organ—"vulve"—of a female pig—"truie") also doubly signals—through "truie", with its Trojan etymology, and "farcie" —the idea of a concealed Trojan stuffing to be consumed with unsuspecting and deadly delight⁷.
- 3 Pursuing this idea of a trap laid by a putatively "naïve" narrator for her readers, I would like to argue for *Truismes* as, indeed, a "porcus troianus", a stuffed Trojan sow filled with far denser, richer, indeed far more dangerous, meaning than has been realized⁸. We recall that for the Greeks, the Trojan horse operates as the key to Troy, allowing the assaulting Greeks access to the city after nine weary years of war; it provides the long-awaited solution, the entryway to victory. Appropriately enough for a text as complex as *Truismes*, the image of the Trojan sow is thus packed with contradiction and paradox; it evokes both trap and threshold, defeat and victory. Most importantly for my purposes in arguing for the narrator's naïveté as a ruse for sophistication, the Trojan sow also bespeaks deceit and revelation. Read in this way, *Truismes* becomes a literary, linguistic and literal odyssey, episodic and perilous, as the narrator survives various encounters and adventures in a long and highly ironized return home; for the adventures of this female Odysseus, loosely but suggestively intertwining with those of her heroic male counterpart, culminate in no happy reunion with long-patient, long-faithful loved ones.

- 4 Read as female odyssey through the abuses of patriarchy, *Truismes* becomes even more powerful as social critique once we see through the ruse of the narrator's naïveté. For this naïve pose is subtly contradicted by the narration's self-conscious manipulation of idiom and cliché, suggestive of a clever, tongue-in-cheek, ironic awareness. In the opening paragraph, for example, the narrator apologizes for "cette écriture de cochon" (T 11): an expression we take to be figurative, just as we take it to be self-deprecatory, for it occurs in a paragraph of apology. It is only subsequently that we discover, however, that the narrator's writing is indeed, literally, that of a sow. The densely tongue-in-cheek play and manipulation of the reader here betray an astute lexical sensibility, visible at other moments in the text. Referring to the marabout's subsequent interest in the services offered by the perfumery's hostesses, the narrator exclaims, in pointed manipulation of the porcine register, "Je voyais qu'il en profitait, le cochon" (T 79). Confronted by her companion Yvan's werewolf transformation while they wait for a pizza delivery to assuage his dangerously growing hunger, the narrator opens the bedroom door and tiptoes out—using an idiom only too appropriate for the situation: "je suis sortie, si je puis dire, à pas de loup" (T 128). A similar moment of lexical density, of play between figural and literal meaning, occurs when the narrator refers to the television hubbub caused by her mother's effort to find her daughter. She mentions Yvan's conviction that it's all a plot to find *him* for his fortune as the vanished CEO of the highly successful company, Loup-Y-Es-Tu. According to (werewolf) Yvan, the narrator tells us, "on graissait la patte à ma mère pour faire sortir le loup du bois en quelque sorte" (T 132). Such self-conscious play with figural, idiomatic and literal meaning betrays a more alert manipulation of narration than might be expected from a "naïve" narrator.
- 5 Such sophistication is further implied by the narrative's dense intertextuality; Darrieussecq "entraîne dans sa valse le poids de l'histoire littéraire", as Alistair Rolls puts it⁹—inscribing in various ways not only *The Thousand and One Nights*, the French 18th-century novel, Lamartine, Proust, Apollinaire and Sartre, just to list a few examples—, but also, the epic that particularly interests me here: *The Odyssey*¹⁰. Why, in particular, a sustained intertextual dialogue with *The Odyssey*¹¹? In what follows, I argue that *Truismes*' negotiation of *The Odyssey* is both ludic and sober, in ways that succeed in realizing opposing objectives. The novel succeeds in suggesting that wanderings through late-capitalist patriarchy are no less heroic than Odysseus's travails; yet, paradoxically, it also succeeds precisely in undercutting male-centric heroism. It is only once we restore hitherto overlooked linguistic and literary resonance to the narrating voice that *Truismes*' full valence as feminist riposte to *The Odyssey* becomes apparent¹².
- 6 And such valence, beginning with the novel's etymological inscription of Troy—and thus, through it, implicitly, the heavily masculinized genre of the epic—, emerges through the novel's manipulation of the epic in supple, dynamic, and recombinant fashion. I am arguing that a highly self-conscious ironization of so "macho" a form as the epic is part of the novel's critique of patriarchy. One might object, however, that parody itself can be an equally male-centric discourse, or that such attentiveness to epic, however mordant, only confirms epic's own cultural centrality and power as form. Yet, as though to keep the parody from becoming too slavish, too controlled by its target text, *Truismes* regularly slips from parody to sober, poignant parallelism to ludic pastiche. Such dynamism effectively assures an intrinsic independence for

Truismes, and keeps it from being reduced to the secondary, dependent status of parody. The very suppleness, I argue, with which narrating practice here negotiates the patriarchal canon—in ways that preserve its own distance and independence from its literary ancestor—is part of the ruse of a sophistication masquerading as naïveté.

- 7 To begin with ways in which Darrieussecq's narrative intertwines—by turns, sardonically, impertinently and soberly—with *The Odyssey*, we notice the trope of wandering. Evicted from their apartment by her boyfriend, the narrator—in various phases of her transformation into a sow—finds herself progressively sojourning in the successive venues of a faceless motel, the sewers of Paris, the bridges of the homeless, an insane asylum, and the crypt of a cathedral before being rescued by her dream companion, Yvan. Such wandering, coupled with porcine transformation, evokes Circe's transformation of wanderer Odysseus's men into swine¹³. Odysseus himself, of course, escapes such a fate, thanks to the gods' favor; it is, moreover, Odysseus's own wily bargaining with Circe that restores their human forms to his men. Highly emblematic of the epic and heroic, singular, male individual, this episode in particular demonstrates Odysseus' essential privilege and superiority. Not, himself, subject to the fate of the many, Odysseus is frequently, instead, the one who saves the many through ruse and cunning, in the *Odyssey's* repeated dynamic. Odysseus's heroic stature, I would suggest, thus seems parodied in the helpless narrator's destiny to remain a lowly sow; yet, in a curious ambiguity that renders *Truismes* more complex and powerful—more independent of its target text—than parody, she ultimately finds within such a fate a contentment that eluded her while in her human state. In the novel's final lines, the narrator describes her simple happiness: "Rien n'est meilleur que la terre chaude autour de soi quand on s'éveille le matin, l'odeur de son propre corps mélangée de l'odeur de l'humus, les premières bouchées que l'on prend sans même se lever, glands, châtaignes, tout ce qui a roulé dans la bauge sous les coups de patte des rêves" (T 158). Such simple, sensual contentment in the narrator's state as lowly sow would seem to question any reading that might limit Darrieussecq's narrative to a parody of *The Odyssey*; whereas *being* a sow seems to poke fun at Odysseus's heroic superiority, the narrator's simple happiness in her animal state would appear to render her not only different, as Odysseus's "other", but superior in her difference; what good is epic heroism, we are prompted to ask, if it comes at the price of a sense of well-being? In this way, while *Truismes* at times appears to parody *The Odyssey*, it effectively establishes distance from that text in valorizing happiness over heroic dignity.
- 8 In another suggestive echo of *The Odyssey*, the narrator finds her customers at a perfume boutique to be increasingly appreciative of her plumpness, an early sign of her transformation into a sow. As her sales mount, she accepts compliments and bouquets—confessing painfully, however, that she arranges the flowers in a vase in the storeroom, contemplates them at length, then eats them (T 35). We recall that one threat to Odysseus's return to Ithaca is yet another seduction, that of the Lotos, the honeyed plant that induces forgetfulness of homeland (O 148). Odysseus, of course, in another demonstration of heroic leadership and mastery, sternly bundles his lotos-eating men into their ship, and departs (O 148). The narrator, while she does succumb to the heady, lotos-like scent of her flowers—"C'était leur parfum, sans doute. Ça me montait à la tête" (T 36)—nonetheless pastiches Odysseus's heroic willpower in saving one or two blooms—as what she calls "une petite victoire sur moi-

même" (T 35)—to wear in her décolletage. We see, however, that such self-discipline backfires when her customers, seeing their flowers at her breast, leap upon the narrator, seize the flowers in their own teeth, and consume them with bovine satisfaction (T 36). In fact, this lotos-eating passage in *Truismes* serves to launch the narrator's meditation on the depraved sexual behavior of her customers (T 36). Her own self-restraint, in refraining from eating *all* the flowers, thus ironically only releases the narrator's customers from any vestiges of their own, launching them into sexual predation. For Odysseus, of course, the Lotos-eating episode consolidates power, authority, self-discipline, and resolve. For Darrieussecq's narrator, as an early symptom of her transformation, such "lotos"-eating only opens wider the floodgates of her exploitation by a similarly powerful, authoritative, yet most decisively *unrestrained*, patriarchy.

- 9 An equally biting echo of *The Odyssey* takes place at the waterpark Aqualand, a hedonistic site of artifice and exploitive erotic and sadistic pleasure where the narrator, abandoned in disgust by her boyfriend, bursts her too-snug bathing suit in the course of her evolving transformation. She hides herself as best she can under a pink vinyl mangrove tree, but young boys cruelly throw her into the water where she remains, effectively stranded by her near-nudity. We recall that Odysseus is twice the prisoner of an island seductress, first of Calypso, then of Circe. In suggestive parallel, Darrieussecq's narrator becomes helplessly marooned within Aqualand's heavily eroticized landscape. Odysseus, however, all the while nostalgic for home, is nonetheless allowed to enjoy—even to manipulate and exploit—his own seduction, spending seven (active, no doubt) years with Calypso. The narrator of *Truismes*, however, is cast out and ridiculed as a misfit within such practices, just as she no longer "fits" into her scanty bathing suit (T 62). Effectively marooned within the erotic paradise of Aqualand, the narrator, under the pink vinyl mangrove tree, is victim rather than master of cruel and conflicting codes of sexual exploitation and exclusion: precisely the codes Odysseus manipulates to the advantage of his own erotic pleasure.
- 10 For a somewhat more ludic engagement with *The Odyssey*, we might turn to a recognition scene in which the narrator, like Odysseus, returns to reclaim her due. In an earlier plump, rosy and robust phase of her transformation, the narrator became a poster girl for a political candidate and his Nazi-esque platform. Subsequently, believing that she has only to show up for candidate Edgar again to provide work, the narrator returns to his office, explaining who she is—to bursts of mocking laughter. Yet there is also a failure of recognition from the narrator herself, for she does not recognize the political assistant who "discovered" her. The scene delivers a tragicomic misfiring of all the dramatic marks of recognition and authenticity that attend upon and legitimize Odysseus: the faithful dog who waits twenty years for his mater's return and dies when that return proves too momentous to bear; the aged nursemaid who washes his feet and discovers a familiar scar: "joy and anguish seized her heart; her/filled up with tears; her throat closed, and she whispered,/ with hand held out to touch his chin: *You are Odysseus!*" (O 368). In *Truismes*, when political-candidate Edgar ultimately recognizes his now exceedingly plump, sow-like poster child (the narrator), it is in no such tones. Rather, she is imprisoned and starved, released only to provide diversion for a depraved soirée. As a site of debauchery, pleasure and gluttony, this gathering figures the abuses and exploitive self-indulgence of

Penelope's suitors, who convene each day to devour Odysseus's substance. Ludically skewering Odysseus's moral outrage, the narrator, however, rather than denouncing the debauchery, joyfully plunges in—indeed, raising eyebrows as she devours exotic and costly delicacies such as bits of sliced giraffe (T 105). In a highly self-conscious moment emblematic of the lexical and intertextual density for which I am arguing, the narrator tells us that she cried “de reconnaissance pour tous ces gens qui me donnaient à manger” (T 105). Her “reconnaissance” here also lexically reinforces and confirms the scene's interplay with precisely that most searing and climactic of moments in *The Odyssey*, recognition. Yet the most pointed allusion of all in this return-and-recognition episode is the behavior of a woman in a designer gown who, sobbing, embraces and kisses the strange sow released into the party: “elle sanglotait et me tenait des propos incohérents [...] On se vautrait par terre toutes les deux et elle avait l'air de m'aimer beaucoup” (T 106). Odysseus himself might have envied such a welcome from his long-faithful wife; and the uncomprehending narrator finds herself rolling on the floor with this sobbing, elegant, unknown and adoring Penelope. Again, *Truismes'* parodic bite seems here to slip toward a more comic tenor.

- 11 In what I would suggest might be read as the Cyclops episode of *Truismes*, we find again a mobile, protean negotiation of *The Odyssey*. Odysseus, of course, fights *his* man-eating, half-man, half-monster, the giant Cyclops—whereas, in a pointed twist, the narrator falls in love with her own such monster, the werewolfish Yvan; and she at last finds momentary fulfillment and companionship in *her* version of Odysseus's various erotic idylls. Never mind that in his monthly wolf transformation, Yvan is compelled to gobble up pizza-delivery men; as the narrator laconically tells us, “moi je mangeais la pizza, Yvan le livreur” (T 129-130). Before such a convenient system is derived, however, the narrator herself narrowly escapes Yvan's growing hunger; threatened with imminent death at the jaws of her lover, she does not so much parody Odysseus as match his own cunning. In perhaps her ultimate dismantling of the wily and macho Odysseus, the narrator borrows her life-saving ruse not from him, but from a woman, Sheherazade—explicitly eclipsing the heroic masculine model for a feminine (and feminist) model in one of the text's most Odyssean episodes of survival on wits alone. Stalling for her life, she distracts Yvan with a vast and lyrical all-encompassing discourse:

J'ai commencé à lui parler à mi-voix. Je lui ai parlé de la steppe, de la neige d'été sur la taïga, des forêts gauloises, du Gévaudan, des collines basques, des bergeries cévenoles, de la lande écossaise, et de la pluie, du vent. [...] Je lui ai parlé des rêves des enfants, des cauchemars des hommes, je lui ai parlé de la Terre. Je ne savais pas d'où je sortais tout ça, ça me venait, c'était des choses que je découvrais très au fond de moi, et je trouvais les mots même les plus difficiles, même les plus inconnus. (T 128)

- 12 Her pointedly *un-masculine* Sheherazade-like ruse succeeds, and the pizza order arrives just in time. “Je n'ai même pas eu le temps de dire bonjour au livreur. La pizza a giclé en l'air. On ne pouvait distinguer le sang de la sauce tomate » (T 129). As the pizza flies into the air, along with the delivery boy's blood, the episode concludes with a final cheeky elbow to *The Odyssey* and epic heroism. Having barely managed to escape with her life, the narrator's reaction is a deadpan understatement à la James Bond or Indiana Jones. With a “cool” that Odysseus himself might have envied, she delivers the requisite, hypermacho sort of line imposed by this narrow-brush-with-death scenario: “Je me suis dit que décidément c'était très pratique, la livraison à

domicile" (T 129). Epic heroism is effectively pastiched by such a fallen, Hollywoodian form of hyper-heroic understatement.

13 However, in addition to such parodic moments, the narrator negotiates *The Odyssey* in more sober and sympathetic parallel, as well. Like Odysseus, she sojourns in the underworld, a site marked in both texts by maternal mourning, and by rebirth and renewal of the protagonists. Taking refuge in the sewers in a futile attempt to save her litter of six piglets, the narrator is overcome by grief when she loses them, curls into fetal position, and regresses to senselessness within the womb-like environment¹⁴. Only the nibbles of sewer piranhas force her instinctively to flee back toward the world in forced rebirth, obliging her also to realize how much she nonetheless wants live (T 92). Similar revelation, illumination and renewal mark Odysseus's own visit to the underworld to take counsel from Tiresias, who foretells that Odysseus will alone return to Ithaca, all his men lost. The underworld episode becomes in each text a moment of repositioning and resituating within one's own narrative; to this end, it is construed as a maternal, womb-like site of loss, mourning and renewal, as though to prepare yet more decisively for the protagonist's rebirth. Odysseus, not knowing that his mother has died in his absence, is approached in the underworld by her shade, who tells him that she died of grief for him. Yet again, however, differences between *The Odyssey* and *Truismes* would seem to lend extra nuance, extra resonance, to the narrator's tale. We notice that no underworld Tiresias points the way for her; that she must navigate her difficult course alone. And we notice that while she herself undergoes a death of sorts—out of grief for her deceased young—no mother has died of grief for *her*. While the narrator's mother indeed tragically seeks her daughter, tearfully publicizing her loss on television talk shows, it is purely to avail herself of the fortune she believes the vanished Yvan has left her daughter.

14 Ultimately, *Truismes*'s relationship to *The Odyssey* remains at times biting, at times cheeky, at times poignant, at times parallel: contrasts perhaps best emblemized by each protagonist's relation to the blade. From the novel's opening epigraph, describing a scene in a Norwegian narrative where a boar's throat is slit, even as the boar only belatedly realizes he is dying, slaughter is the constant literal and figurative threat to the narrator. When she at long last, like Odysseus, returns home, it is not ultimately, however, to the welcoming arms of faithful loved ones, but to her mother's knife; for the mother, now trafficking in black-market pork, only too hastily prepares a knife and basin for the sow she nonetheless claims to recognize as her daughter. On the other hand, Odysseus returns home to manipulate his own powerful bow and with it, pierces his wife's suitors through their throats; when he has used his last arrow, he takes up a spear. Indeed, Odysseus is so adept at the manipulation of blade, arrow and spear that at one point in *The Odyssey*, he is addressed as "old knife" (O 200). The erotic implications of such gifts are clear. Indeed, the bargain with Circe that liberates Odysseus's swine-transformed men is an erotic one. "Put up your weapon in the sheath", entreats Circe, exhorting Odysseus to exchange one blade for another. "We two shall mingle and make love upon our bed" (O 175). And Odysseus, exacting her promise not to make use of such a situation for further sorcery, consents. Again, the different blades of the wily Odysseus resonantly figure the many and various spears of exploitation—sexual, social, political, culinary—that must constantly be dodged by Darrieussecq's narrator, who always finds herself on the wrong side of the knife. Moreover, the various blades of the Odyssean intertext lend

extra resonance to the throat-slitting topos that haunts, in Rodgers's formulation (AE 53), Darrieussecq's novel. The epigraph—by Norwegian Nobel-winner Knut Hamsun—details a boar's belated realization, as the blade plunges into his neck, that he is being slaughtered. Such throat-slitting recurs in various ways in Darrieussecq's narrative: her boyfriend Honoré slits her guinea pig's throat; a former perfumery customer of the narrator is discovered dead, her throat cut; werewolf Yvan's decapitated victims demonstrate throat-cutting to extreme; and the narrator's return in sow form to her mother results in being approached—by her mother and the narrator's former boss, the perfumery owner—with a knife and copper basin to collect blood (T 147). Just as late-capitalist patriarchy has figuratively slit the throats of women throughout the narrative, the narrator herself is literally about to fall under the knife: victim to the blade so masterfully wielded by Odysseus.

- 15 Yet, in a feminist reversal read by Cotille-Foley as emblematic of *Truismes*' project, the narrator rises up on her hind legs and snatches the revolver drawn by the perfumery owner. Emphasizing the "retournement" of the narrator's act, Cotille-Foley writes, "son geste ultime répète la stratégie narrative employée dans le roman. Tout comme l'arme du proxénète retournée contre lui, la description de la métamorphose est une caricature de l'image stéréotypée de la femme retournée contre le système sémantique qui l'a inventée"¹⁵. In this densely emblematic scene, rather than snatching the knife—a weapon demanding force to be used successfully—the narrator—fittingly enough for this gesture of "retournement"—appropriates for her own ends that *different* weapon: a revolver, available for successful use without (male) strength. Such a gesture is particularly resonant for my effort here to explore the dynamic with which *Truismes* turns textual signifiers *against* textual semantics, or, feminist signifiers against the "système sémantique" of so patriarchal a genre as epic. As Cotille-Foley suggests, "la réussite du roman réside dans son retournement des signifiants contre le système sémantique dont ils sont le produit"¹⁶.
- 16 Suitably enough, the text closes in characteristic fashion with a densely meaningful image of "retournement", combining the literal and the figurative in an interplay announced as early as the title, "Truismes". The narrator reminds us that Yvan had learned to control his werewolf transformations precisely by limiting them to nights of the full moon. Such Bakhtinian, carnivalesque occasions permitted both the release of dangerous, pent-up energy, and the subsequent restitution of his human form. Contrary to Yvan's purposes, however, the narrator herself now cranes toward the full moon to recover not an animal form, but her human one—as though it's now the human form that's the monstrous one, and needing occasional release to be kept in check. Moreover, this implicitly monstrous human form is allowed such release only in order to write. In learning to master her transformations, the narrator tells us, "J'essaie de faire comme me l'avait montré Yvan" (T 149). But in specifying the difference between herself and Yvan as to *which* form (human or animal) needs controlling, she yet again hints at her own sophistication by straddling literal and figural registers. Her tongue-in-cheek use of the idiom "à rebrousse-poil" craftily manipulates lexical density as she alludes to the werewolf Yvan's "poil", or pelt, in referring to an approach that works "against the grain" of Yvan's: "à rebrousse-poil de ses [ceux d'Yvan] propres méthodes" (T 149).
- 17 Consonant with such a figure of reversal, Darrieussecq's feminist odyssey, "*Elle-iade de notre temps*", works "à rebrousse-poil" to *The Odyssey* in many suggestive ways.

As noted above, the novel's epigraph recounts the slaughter of an unsuspecting boar in a novel by Knut Hamsun. Is it merely a curious coincidence that the French word for boar, "verrat", is also the German word for "betrayal"? Hamsun was a Nazi sympathizer, escaping a verdict of treason by a Norwegian court only by virtue of having received the Nobel prize¹⁷. The epigraph chosen by Darrieussecq is thus resonant with treachery, both in its use of the word "verrat" as well as in the implicit reminder of Hamsun's pro-Hitler activities. From the outset, then, Darrieussecq's text is imbued with disloyalty—yet not only as theme. Beyond its depiction of dystopian patriarchy's betrayal of women, *Truismes* willfully and adroitly "betrays" the unwary reader, as well. Far from a "divertissement vide" (AE 72), far from any putative "vacuité discursive de la protagoniste" (LCV 174), Darrieussecq's textual Trojan sow—like its ancestral equine gift ending the Trojan war—is stuffed ("farcie") with rich and rewarding, if dangerous, surprise.

Margaret Gray
Indiana University

NOTES

- ¹ The formulation "*Iliade de notre temps*" is used by Mathias Enard to describe his novel *Zone* (Actes Sud, 2008).
- ² Marie Darrieussecq, *Truismes*, P.O.L., Paris, 2000 ; henceforth T.
- ³ Isabelle Favre, "Marie Darrieussecq ou lard de la calorie vide", *Women In French Studies Vol. 8*, 2000, p. 175 ; henceforth LCV.
- ⁴ Catherine Rodgers, "Aucune évidence: Les Truismes de Marie Darrieussecq", *Romance Studies*, 2000, June, Vol 18 (1), p. 69-81; henceforth AE.
- ⁵ Shirley Jordan, "Saying the Unsayable : Identities in Crisis in the Early Novels of Marie Darrieussecq", In *Women's Writing in Contemporary France: New Writers, New Literature in the 1990s*, edited by Gill Rye and Michael Worton, Manchester ; New York , Manchester University Press, 2002, p. 146.
- ⁶ Jeannette Gaudet, "Dishing the Dirt : Metamorphosis in Marie Darrieussecq's *Truismes*", *Women In French Studies*, Vol. 9, 2001, p. 182.
- ⁷ In a further etymological layer of meaning, the term for "pig" in Greek and Latin also functioned as slang for female genitalia; see Cotille-Foley's discussion drawing on Stallybrass and White's analysis of transgression (Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1986, p. 44; quoted by Nora Cotille-Foley, "Métaphores, métamorphoses et retournements symboliques dans *Truismes* de Marie Darrieussecq : mais qui finit à l'abattoir ?" in *Women In French Studies*, Vol. 10, 2002, p. 195). While I am not disputing the resonance of such an etymology for Darrieussecq's novel, I am more interested in the literary associations inscribed by the word "truie" than in a slang usage that only reinforces what the novel recounts overtly.
- ⁸ Other readers have sensed this presence of "deeper", hidden meaning in *Truismes*. See, for instance, Alistair Rolls's exhortation to "dig" beneath the surface for the reward of the buried truffle: "Méfions-nous des truismes dont le texte est littéralement truffé. Pour trouver nos solutions, nous allons chercher derrière les jeux de mots, au-dessous des lignes" (Alistair Rolls, " 'Je suis comme une truie qui broute': Une Lecture pomologique de *Truismes* de Marie Darrieussecq", *Romanic Review*, 2001 Nov, Vol. 92 (4), p. 480 ; henceforth TQB).
- ⁹ TQB, p. 480.
- ¹⁰ Examples of intertextual echoes include Sheherazade's life-saving ruse in the Arabic classic, *The Thousand and One Nights*, reprised in an episode to be explored further ; Proust's madeleine might be inferred in "la truffe si sublime qu'on oublie tout"; in "la racine du marronnier producteur de la nausée", we might discern, as Rodgers points out, Sartre's novel; however, the "fascination [the narrator] has for dirt may even go further than that of Roquentin in Bouville since she does not hesitate to roll in it" (Michel Lantelme, "Darrieussecq's Pig Tales: Marianne's Misfortunes at the Turn of the Millennium", *Romanic Review*, 1999 Nov. 90 (4), p. 531). The popular and vulgar television show "Un Seul Etre Vous manque" reprises a line from Lamartine. Yvan's CEO luxury apartment—site of his brief idyll with the narrator—is near the old Pont Mirabeau, site of Apollinaire's lyrical meditation on the passage of time and of love.
- ¹¹ Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Robert Fitzgerald, NY, Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1963; henceforth O.

-
- ¹² Indeed, Darrieussecq's explicit interest in the notion of a textual "trap"—what she calls a "roman-leurre"—is demonstrated in her essay exploring "La notion de leurre chez Hervé Guibert: Décryptage d'un roman-leurre, *L'incognito*", *Nottingham French Studies*, 34.1 (1995). Certain lines seem just as pertinent to *Truismes* as to the Guibert novel Darrieussecq herself is discussing as critic: "Le livre prend souvent ainsi la forme d'un carnaval, grotesque et comique, mais le rire se fait grinçant si l'on arrive à déchiffrer l'énigme que le narrateur nous propose" (83). Hints of this enigma, suggests Darrieussecq, abound in Guibert's novel, signaling that "ce dont on parle n'est pas forcément ce dont il s'agit" (88). This notion of enigma is developed as "une possible suspension du sens littéral au profit d'un autre sens, figuré ou caché, 'incognito' (84). The dynamic presence of an "incognito" meaning, of course—in the "roman-leurre" that is Darrieussecq's own novel—is precisely the argument I'm making in these pages.
- ¹³ As Rolls suggests, quoting an article in *L'Humanité* of 3 January 1997, the very mention of the word "metamorphosis" appends an entire intertextual literary history, including Kafka, Ovid, Homer and Joyce; to this list, Rolls adds Orwell (*Animal Farm*) (TQB, p. 480).
- ¹⁴ In a series of comparisons, the narrator's flight into the sewers is improbably linked by Alistair Rolls to a sow's search for an underground truffle, itself linked even more improbably to the narratrice's search for truth within herself: "comme la truie creuse frénétiquement pour trouver sa truffe, le protagoniste de ce roman fouine jusqu'en son for intérieur pour trouver la source de sa vérité" (TQB, p. 486). A sow's search for truffles, however, is of an entirely different tenor from that of the narrator's fleeing from certain death, a difference captured in the very prepositions themselves that define these acts: the difference between "for" and "from".
- ¹⁵ Nora Cotille-Foley, "Métaphores, métamorphoses et retournements symboliques dans *Truismes* de Marie Darrieussecq : mais qui finit à l'abattoir ?" in *Women In French Studies*, Vol. 10, 2002, p. 205 (url : http://www.academia.edu/29061356/M%C3%A9taphores_m%C3%A9tamorphoses_et_retournements_symboliques_dans_Truismes_de_Marie_Darrieussecq_mais_qui_finit_%C3%AO_labattoir).
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 197.
- ¹⁷ In an interview, Darrieussecq explicitly refers to the need in France, at the time she was writing *Truismes*, to counter the growing power of the Right: "A ce moment-là en France on avait besoin de quelque chose, de quelqu'un, un livre qui soit violemment contre Le Pen, contre le fascisme" (John Lambeth, "Entretien avec Marie Darrieussecq", *The French Review* 79.4, March 2006, p. 814).