

**Magical Allegory in Marie Darrieussecq's novel *Pig Tales* (1996):  
Piggy Debauchery in Postcolonial France**

***Sallie Muirden***

This article presents an analysis of Marie Darrieussecq's first novel *Pig Tales*, which was initially published in France in 1996, where it became a bestseller. *Pig Tales* was subsequently translated into many languages, bringing the novel and its young French author international acclaim. In the process of making a case for reading the novel as an allegory, early sections of the article examine the ways in which *Pig Tales* displays allegorical characteristics. Subsequent sections consider aspects of post-feminist, postmodern and postcolonial France that Darrieussecq may be responding to, and satirising, through the use of her central allegorical trope — the representation of a human being as an animal.

In *Pig Tales* a young woman narrator living in near-contemporary Paris slowly turns into a pig.<sup>1</sup> The reader is encouraged to assume that the unnamed female narrator's transformation into a four-legged beast is a consequence of her amoral lifestyle. She works in a classy massage parlour, where she has recently become a sex worker. While the narrator — who has an Alice-in-Wonderland ingenuousness about her — slowly becomes

more beast than human, a parallel transformation is happening in her society, for it is becoming more rightwing as consumer capitalism reaches its exploitative and impersonal extreme. The 'citizens' of Paris democratically elect a fascist leader, civil war breaks out, and innocents are slaughtered by the profligate elite for fun. The call-girl narrator ends up eating dead human beings for survival, assisting in the murder of others, and even committing murders herself. Obscenity, nightmare and barbarism overtake what we usually understand to be a 'civilized' community.

*Pig Tales* can arguably be considered an allegory for three main reasons. First, the action happens at one remove from the non-fictional social reality being alluded to. Secondly it is a text whose fantastic and extremist reconstruction of social reality *comments* on normal social reality from start to finish, offering possibilities for instructional persuasion of readers, particularly as a statement about degenerate western lifestyle. Thirdly, the novel is about people changing into animals. According to Jenni Calder, "in allegory, emblematic animals are used to illustrate aspects of human behaviour".<sup>2</sup> And commonly it is the more deleterious aspects of human behaviour that are highlighted.<sup>3</sup>

### **Shall I compare thee to a pig? : historical, symbolic and cultural resonances**

*Pig/Cochon* is a term of abuse in French culture as it is in many others, and *grosse truie* (fat pig or sow) is a common insult directed at French women. The association of pigs with uncleanness may well have originated in the Old Testament, but in the Book of Leviticus (which was the foundation for Judaic dietary law) pigs were regarded as unclean only because they did not chew their cud. Their association with 'dirty scavenging habits' derives from later times when humans became preoccupied with matters of hygiene and aesthetic concerns, such as table manners.<sup>4</sup> But some Muslims and orthodox Jews still regard pig-meat as unclean for human consumption today on religious grounds.

Peter Stallybrass and Allon White's historical study of the transcoding that takes place between high and low cultures in early modern Europe, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, is of interest to us here.<sup>5</sup> Their first chapter, "The Fair, the Pig, Authorship", considers the carnivalesque and the central symbolic role of pigs at the fairground, from medieval times to our own. The pig, like the fair itself, was both reviled and celebrated. In Stallybrass and White's reworking of the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin and Edward Said, repression of the low-Other (a reaction of disgust) can only ever produce an inversionary, balancing resistance (resulting in a reaction

of desire).<sup>6</sup> “It was precisely the ambivalence of the pig, at the intersection of a number of important cultural and symbolic thresholds, which had traditionally made it a useful animal to think with,” say Stallybrass and White.<sup>7</sup> Stallybrass and White also observe that in classical Greek and Latin times, *porcus* or *porcellus* were slang terms for the female genitalia and that prostitutes were called pig merchants in Attic comedy.<sup>8</sup> The cultural and linguistic association between pigs and female sexuality, and between pigs and female prostitution, is thus an ancient one. The pig was chosen as the animal that best represents a vulgar view of female anatomy and economically directed female sexual behaviour in misogynist societies of the past and Darrieussecq’s novel evokes these literary-cultural influences particularly through the satirically alignment of the present-day narrator’s sexual habits with those of a pig. At one point the narrator’s (transforming) human sexual anatomy is even compared with a sow’s vulva:

As for me, bending forward, I had what you might call an unparalleled view of my vulva, and I thought it was dangling rather strangely. I don’t want to burden you with the details, but the greater labia were hanging down a mite lower than normal, which is why I could see them so well. In *Woman’s World or My Beauty, My Health*, I don’t remember exactly, I’d read that the ancient Romans’ favourite – and choicest – dish was stuffed sow’s vulva. (Darrieussecq 47)

Stallybrass and White find further anatomical points of comparison between pigs and humans. They say that the pig’s symbolic appeal at the fair can be partly attributed to the pig’s having physical similarities with the human species. The pig has sensitive pink skin that sunburns, just like humans.<sup>9</sup> It can eat a range of foods, just as humans can. Darrieussecq certainly makes use of the close dermatological relationship between pigs and humans at the point in the tale when the narrator, initially possessing a “marvelous complexion”, is afflicted by allergic reactions and acquires red skin and spots.<sup>10</sup> This complaint is also a common human one, which a multi-million dollar skincare industry, including the cosmetic firm the narrator works for, is ostensibly trying to redress.

While there is a hint of the troubled spotty adolescent in this early portrait of the narrator, the developing trend will be to divest her of individuality, by withholding her name, by withdrawing her status as a human being and as a political ‘subject’ with civic rights. As she becomes more of a pig, she becomes less of a woman whose ‘difference’ to, and ‘equality’ with the male sex has previously been legislatively and politically affirmed in Western Europe. She enters the realm of the imaginary being and loses her civic rights. It is not a coincidence, but it is certainly ironic, that two fables with

strident political messages enclosed in them, *Pig Tales* and George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1942), convey their messages through the actions of beasts (or part-beasts) that have been divested of any authentic political *subjectivity* in the terms that we know it.

### **A literary precursor: *Animal Farm* and political allegory**

There is no doubt that Orwell, in writing *Animal Farm*, chose to make his animal dictators pigs to reduce their claim on humanity. To make a character a pig is to summon the stereotype that associates pigs with greedy, uncouth behaviour. While Orwell's pigs, Napoleon and Snowball, have superior intelligence and cunning, they have no more complexity than characters in children's stories partly because Orwell employs the tone and vocabulary used in children's stories, and partly because his characters remain two-dimensional, lacking the capacity for introspection. When a human changes into a non-human creature in literature, there is often a simplification of personality involved in the transformation. "For allegory to work its focus must be sharp. If the edges become blurred, credibility is shaken," says Jenni Calder explaining the logic behind simplistic characterisation in *Animal Farm*.<sup>11</sup>

There is typically a degree of didactic crudity and mocking caricature in allegory. Indeed caricature may be essential to the form. Unlike more direct political writing, allegory has a metonymic nature where symbols represent real things in the outside world. Allegories are likely to live longer than straight political writings because the symbols used in allegory can have multiple and universal interpretive meanings. Caricature in allegory — pigs for humans — is not only about reducing political content to its essential elements, but also about highlighting those essential elements. While the allegorical magical energies in both short novels are dystopic, they nevertheless operate as forms of anti-authoritarian power.

Orwell's novel is specifically a satire about communist politics in the Soviet Union, one in which the author laments the indivisibility of power and authoritarianism. While Stalin is covertly lampooned in *Animal Farm*, we might conclude that fascist dictator Edgar and xenophobic religious nut, Marchepiède are send ups of the French far right in *Pig Tales*, and that Darriussecq perhaps had in mind the politician Jean-Marie Le Pen and representatives of the Front National (FN) party when she was writing her satire. *Pig Tales* is indeed a cautionary tale, predicting a fascist dictatorship for France if corruption and exploitation prevail.

### Post-feminist politics: allegorical representation of the female body

The commercial success of *Pig Tales*, and its popularity among adult readers, suggests that Darrieussecq is offering a human-into-beast allegory in an inventive new way, both thematically and stylistically. In terms of content, Darrieussecq may have tapped into contemporary female resentment about the patriarchy in a post-feminist era, in particular the patriarchy's continued control over what women do with their bodies.<sup>12</sup> Darrieussecq is thus articulating what her female readers are experiencing and wanting to have verbalised for them. The female narrator in *Pig Tales* demonstrates a post-feminist subjectivity.<sup>13</sup> She has unconsciously absorbed feminist ideology from an earlier generation, for example the precept, 'women's body, women's right' and finds herself fulfilling such a tenet with a post-feminist twist, 'I have no qualms about selling my body. I may even enjoy working as a prostitute!' The latter sentiment is unlikely to be embraced by an earlier generation of feminists who fought so hard to earn women equal rights.

Unlike *Animal Farm*, *Pig Tales* is a feminocentric work. It is also much less of a purist political tract.<sup>14</sup> Darrieussecq's text conflates the libidinal and the political, showing how sexuality and gendering are controlled and influenced by socio-political factors.

An obvious difference between magical transformation in *Pig Tales* and that in *Animal Farm* is that in *Pig Tales* the changes to the characters happen in reverse; from human into four-legged human-pig, rather than from pig into two-legged pig-human. In *Animal Farm*, the animals who rebel have apparently always possessed human attributes, the capacity to talk and reason, and we are not given an explanation of how the physical transformation of the pig leaders into upright human beings affects them psychologically. There is no interior focalisation in *Animal Farm*. The narrator tells us very little about the feelings of the animals and we never learn what it might feel like for Napoleon and his henchmen to stand up on two legs and use their forelegs as arms.

By way of contrast, Darrieussecq's first-person "autodiegetic" narrator devotes a huge amount of space to describing how her woman-into-sow metamorphosis affects her biologically and psychologically.<sup>15</sup> The text exaggerates and thus draws attention to women's widespread experience of their body as an alarming machine, never quite in their control, subject to sizeable growths (breasts, pregnancy) and monthly discharges and reminders of loss (periods, miscarriages) as well as fluctuating hormonal changes. The text represents the politics of post-feminism, by using the body of the ingénue as a site of grotesque rebellion and exaggeration of

the social codes of feminine beauty, hygiene, sexuality and reproduction. The narrator is plagued by irregular periods, (indicating the onset of her piggy metamorphosis) recognisably a common female complaint, and she describes her mixed relief when her periods return after a lengthy absence. "I was exhausted and no longer had the heart for anything. It's hormonal apparently. My period was exceptionally heavy, a real tidal wave, enough to make you think it was another miscarriage."<sup>16</sup>

In *Pig Tales*, Darrieussecq also articulates women's everyday preoccupation with, and sometimes traumatic experience of weight-gain, whether feared as a symbol of unattractiveness or as a sign of unwanted pregnancy. The reader is given an intricate, almost scientific, certainly graphic record of the narrator's physical transformation from the beginning of the novel, when she begins to put on weight, through the degrees of mutation and malfunction, including loss of speech and aptitude for thought, her bizarre pregnancies and miscarriages, the acquirement of sow proportions, sow hormones and dietary obsessions, piggy snout and corkscrew tail. Eventually the narrator finds herself pretty much consigned to a standard pig form, though she can use her trotter to write the novel she is writing about her tribulations, the one we are reading, if she puts her mind to it, and with much mental effort she can even make herself turn back into a human for a short period of time.

The reader is prepared for the narrator's porcine incarnation by a number of narratological surprises, which produce an effect I shall call 'defamiliarisation', followed by textual repetition and reinforcement of such behaviour and circumstances, which produce an effect I shall call 'familiarisation'. What initially seems strange, for example, when the narrator grows hair on her back, a third teat, and goes into heat, eventually seems plausible.<sup>17</sup> In fact, the reader learns to prepare for and anticipate the physical changes that occur as a sign of the narrator's increasingly depraved and dehumanised habits and living circumstances. The reader is unfazed by the appearance of the 'incredible' because the boundaries between real and unreal have been slowly, subtly and smoothly erased. The reader is already engaged with the story when the allegorical tropes begin to work their magical seesaw of estrangement and gradual acceptance.

### **The European female in decline: is her amorality self-inflicted or socially produced?**

The narrator of *Pig Tales* starts out as an apparently normal, attractive young woman, desiring pretty clothes, a boyfriend and a job to pay for her independent lifestyle. Her fatal flaw is probably her lack of education,

which, she says, is responsible for her inability to concentrate on things.<sup>18</sup> Her inarticulateness in social situations makes her particularly defenseless against the predatory inclinations of others. She has no learned skills to offer the marketplace, unlike her teacher boyfriend, Honoré, and is portrayed as being gullible enough to be exploited by a disreputable cosmetics business. Darrieussecq presents her narrator happily accepting employment after the director of the company she will be working for sexually assaults her at the interview. "The director of Perfumes Plus was holding my right breast in one hand, and the job contract in the other."<sup>19</sup>

It takes the narrator a very long time to realise that she must desist from morally corrupt behaviour to redress her physical malignancy. Like the stupidly trusting animals (horses and chickens) in *Animal Farm*, the narrator lacks the intellectual acumen to unravel the precipitous, cause-and-effect relationship between her amoral behaviour and her monstrous physical decline. In fact, it is because she is incapable of self-appraisal, or of actively resisting her patriarchal and social oppression, that the conflict manifests in terms of outrageous bodily transformation. Perhaps Darrieussecq has decided that a comic resolution has more avant-garde literary value than showing her character going through a process of earnest self-evaluation and redemptive change.

The narrator does, however, make an attempt to return to normality with her Arab cleaner-boyfriend: "I gave myself a week to lose additional pounds, stand up perfectly straight, perhaps manage to wear a touch of makeup, and speak clearly".<sup>20</sup> This self-healing program takes place in a hotel with automatic showers. The *cleaning* man and the self-disinfecting *showers* both sound promising in terms of exorcising the narrator's piggy attraction to the sordid; but fate, rather than loss of willpower, conspires to impede her attempt to go back to being a normal human on this occasion.

It is my belief that Darrieussecq is condemning the *social circumstances* that the narrator finds herself participating in, rather than condemning the *woman*. There is a sense that the female narrator has very sincere, if unexamined, emotions for others and an abundance of empathy which she expresses for her lost babies, the boyfriends, Honoré, the Arab cleaning man who loves her, and Yvan the werewolf, the great love of her life. For example, when the narrator gives birth to multiple pig-babies, her response is protective and tender: "I licked the poor mites as carefully as I could. When they grew cold, I felt as though I couldn't go on. I curled up in a ball and didn't think about anything any more."<sup>21</sup>

### The influence of postmodern philosophy and aesthetics in *Pig Tales*

Shirley Jordan has commented on the narrator's mutable, unstable characterisation in *Pig Tales*, describing the narrator's relationship with her transforming physical self as "sometimes joyous — sometimes painful".<sup>22</sup> While the narrator is frequently alarmed by her bodily changes, her animal side sometimes delights in pleasuring and soiling itself. At these moments, a 'body for body's sake' ethos rules: "It did me good to go back to the pigsty, where I could let myself go."<sup>23</sup> We have almost a parody here of the French feminist philosophers' concept of female *jouissance*, the latter Cixous', Irigaray's and Kristeva's celebration of the whole bodily sphere of pleasuring available to women.<sup>24</sup> Darrieussecq gives us instead the perverted underbelly of female *jouissance*, a banal autoeroticism that mocks rather than glorifies the woman experiencing acute pleasure and pain.

Towards the end of her unsatisfying erotic journey, the narrator meets her soul-mate, Yvan (the director of another cosmetic firm called Moonlight Madness) who is a werewolf and consequently afflicted by a similar transformative complaint. Vulnerably human and animal in turns, the pair are shackled to forces apparently outside of their control. Their love affair is lengthy and blissful, adding a satirical fairy-tale quality to the text.<sup>25</sup> Their doomed relationship — Yvan feeds off human flesh when the moon is full and is eventually caught and shot dead — advances the narrator towards an appreciation and acceptance of her lusty, sow-proportioned self.

As a fully formed pig near the end of the novel, the narrator is allowed to wallow in wholesome, truffle-rich, dirt-of-the-forest, and arguably achieves a 'wholeness' of being she did not have in her earlier fully human or hybrid states.<sup>26</sup> It could be said that at this point she 'comes clean', for as Mary Douglas asserts in her anthropological study of the religious laws classifying clean and unclean meats, "to be holy is to be whole, to be one; holiness is unity, integrity, perfection of the individual and of the kind."<sup>27</sup> Whether the narrator becomes 'dirtier' or 'holier' (clean) in her human-into-animal apotheosis might not be a point that the reader wishes to draw a firm conclusion upon, having grown accustomed to the narrator's poetically ambiguous states of fluctuating being.<sup>28</sup>

There seems to be no end to, or explanation for, the many strange situations that overtake the narrator. The action unfolds with speed, restless energy and carnivalesque farce. Postmodernism's "fluid, discontinuous and skeptical" influences are apparent in Darrieussecq's aesthetic and stylistic mannerisms.<sup>29</sup> Both the central character and the fictional storyline are constantly altering, rupturing, bifurcating and mutating in a rollercoaster

ride that carries the narrative discontinuously along and might leave some readers with vertiginous, epistemological overload. In the space of one hundred and thirty-five pages, and a short time in her life, the narrator has nearly every situation imaginable confound and disorientate her. In addition to turning into a pig and being sodomised by countless men, she has a miscarriage, an abortion, is chased and harassed by a right-to-life proles- tor, is nearly shot, raped and drowned at a pool party, ends up in a mental asylum, gives birth to piglets, becomes an advertising mascot for a right- wing political party, lives in sewers among crocodiles and piranhas, is exor- cised in a cathedral with spirals, whips and crosses, watches her lover, the werewolf Yvan, murder countless pizza boys and then, later, herself mur- ders her mother and her former pimp-boss — to save herself from being slaughtered and cut up for ham sandwiches. If this is a representation of the fate of the modern woman, it is certainly presented in a manner of hy- perbolic excess that breaches all scientific laws of possibility.

*Pig Tales*, according to Adelheid Eubanks, “stresses the characteristic aspect of identity to be a *process* instead of a static energy.”<sup>30</sup> Postmodern magical allegory in *Pig Tales* seems to function in accord with Fredric Jameson’s description of the nature of contemporary allegory which, he says, refuses a “one-dimensional view of the signifying process” and tradi- tional allegory’s predilection for “one-to-one table of equivalences”.<sup>31</sup>

If allegory has once again become somehow congenial for us today, as over against the massive and monumental unifications of an older modernist symbolism or even realism itself, it is because the alle- gorical spirit is profoundly discontinuous, a matter of breaks and het- erogeneities, of the multiple polysemia of the dream rather than the homogenous representation of the symbol. (Jameson, 324)

When a human being goes through a momentous transformation in the mi- crocosm of the text, this appears to be symptomatic of the need for mo- mentous socio-political change in the macrocosm outside the text. Dar- rieu-secq uses hyperbole to deface the realist world, to intensify its abhor- rent aspects, rather than to improve it. While the continual rather than spo- radic use of a symbolic mode creates allegory, the continual use of irony creates the dark glow of satire.

A telling example of Darrieu-secq’s use of irony/satire happens when the narrator, as a pig in a red dress, is photographed for a right-wing politi- cal billboard advertising political change “for a healthier world”.<sup>32</sup> In the bill- board, the narrator is celebrated as being wholesome because she can pass for a pig. The paradoxical play on the narrator’s ‘sickness mistaken for health’ trope begins at the start of the novel when her youthful “radiance”

and “robust health” were so highly praised by desiring males.<sup>33</sup> It continues throughout the text with the ‘sickness mistaken for health’ trope taking on a wider significance as Edgar’s ruling political party’s policies and actions can also be understood in these terms.

### **The feminist ideal in crisis and third-world panaceas in postcolonial France**

As a first-world subject who has grown up in fictional version of contemporary France — supposedly a place where feminist ideals have been espoused for nearly thirty years — the narrator of *Pig Tales* is living in a privileged realm. The narrator *should* be able to avoid or resist sexist exploitation, but her supposed feminist freedoms have been capitalised on and perverted by chauvinists, sexual predators and patriarchal ruling authorities. Indeed the men the narrator encounters at the pool, in her workplace, in the abortion clinic, in the hospital, in the church and within the political party, all seem to have retained control of what she does and doesn’t do with her body. Darrieussecq’s narrator, as representative of the post-feminist woman, appears to exist in a society which is no more liberated for the average under-educated, middle-class female than it was forty years ago. The narrator’s characterisation “appears to indicate that bodies of feminist knowledge have not percolated down to the ordinary woman”, comments Shirley Jordan.<sup>34</sup> This is probably why Darrieussecq never comes to the aid of her suffering narrator. Instead she intends to strip her of feminine charms and the right of self-determination as a kind of reparation for her vanity, her moral and intellectual feebleness and her failure to live up to the feminist ideal.

On page five, the narrator visits ‘Aqualand’, an aquatic centre that is almost a brothel in itself, “You can earn a good living at Aqualand, but I’d never gone in for that...”<sup>35</sup> Indeed Aqualand is quite probably a mocking allegorical reference to a real aquatic centre named Aquaboulevard currently operating in Paris. In the change rooms of Aqualand, the narrator encounters some rich Muslim women. Darrieussecq sets up an insightful comparison and constructive interplay between images of a first-world woman and third-world women in this scene, an interplay which debunks stereotypical first-world/third-world paradigms. The ‘modestly attired’ Muslims are wearing long, veiled, bathing costumes. They make a fuss of the scantily clad narrator when they meet her in the showers, and give her gifts of perfume and coins.<sup>36</sup> The narrator says she feels safe with them. The communal, nurturing presence of the Muslim women contrasts strongly with the narrator’s self-absorbed isolation. They also provide a foil to the uninhibited ex-

pression of the narrator's sexuality. For example, she makes love to her boyfriend Honoré, whom she has only just met, within hearing of these women, inside a boutique change-room. The narrator's empathy for the Muslim women extends even further. While they are protective of her, she is protective of them. She is indignant about the racist treatment the women receive from a French shopkeeper:

Still, when the Muslim women had gone, after charging about five thousand euros on their Internet cards, this *très chic* saleslady sprayed some perfume all through the store, before our very eyes. I would never, I told Honoré, ever allow myself to be guilty of such bad taste if I ran a highclass boutique. (Darrieussecq, 7)

Muslims provide the main nurturing the narrator receives in the novel. The narrator has two subsequent encounters with North African men (one is black, the other is Arab, and they might both be black and Arab — the text does not make this point clear) who treat her kindly and respond with tolerance and/or concern to the disfiguring metamorphosis that has overtaken her.

Arabs and Africans are a salient, if marginal, presence in *Pig Tales*. Darrieussecq engages with elements of reinvented postcolonial France, in particular the North African diaspora back to the European centre, a partial legacy of the French colonial empire. The Parisian Arabs and Muslims fictionalised in *Pig Tales* are presented as being subject to persistent racism. They are never, however, depicted as poverty-stricken underdogs. While the narrator's relationship with the Muslim women and the Arabic cleaning man are ephemeral, she has a number of encounters with an African Marabout who plays a much more significant role in her life.

The Marabout, a "rich Muslim holy man", rents the narrator's services from Perfumes Plus for one whole week at an exorbitant price.<sup>37</sup> He must take her home to his loft in the African quarter, as the racist director of Perfumes Plus won't have blacks fornicating on his premises. The Marabout is the first client to care about the narrator's physical decline and the first with whom she is able to discuss what is happening to her. He tries to heal the narrator's skin allergies — the beginnings of her physical change — with burning ointments, and makes her drink liqueur made from pelicans' eyes. He also tries to hypnotise her.<sup>38</sup> However, the Marabout's witchdoctoring charms, potions and ointments have little or no positive effect. And the Marabout sometimes seems more sinister than benevolent. When the narrator leaves at the end of a week, the Marabout pinches her on the breast, causing a bruise that turns into a teat. Far from healing the narrator, the Marabout's cures seem to be contributing to the acceleration of her decline.

The Marabout tells the narrator to return if her symptoms get worse, but it is not until much later in the story, when she has become a fully formed pig, now owned by political dictator Edgar, that she meets the Marabout again. The Marabout appears at fascist Edgar's debauched party and tries to stop the killings of innocent children:

The marabout said, "Repent brothers," and he waved some sort of large golden spiral at everybody. The whole crowd fell flat on their faces; some women crawled to the marabout to kiss the hem of his garment, while other people had shaking fits. (Darrieussecq, 96)

The Marabout recognises the pig as his former concubine and takes her home with him, this time with the honorable intention of making her human again. Before the pair leave the party, the Marabout tells Edgar that the narrator's metamorphosis into a pig is the result of witchcraft: "I've seen this kind of witchcraft before, in my country", he says.<sup>39</sup> Back in his large Parisian loft, the Marabout arranges for the last surviving rhinoceros in Africa to be killed, to make powdered horn to use as a cure for the narrator. The Marabout is just as ruthless as the Europeans with respect to endangered species, it would seem. The narrator does start to change back into a human with application of the rhino powder, and her corkscrew tail withers. She starts fooling around with the Marabout sexually again, which is the signal to the reader that any improvement will be short-lived. The Marabout is soon arrested and the narrator finds herself without a protector and at the mercy of perverted and hostile others once more.

The Marabout's attempts at curative witchcraft are therefore tokenistic. Darrieussecq treats both the holy man and his hapless magical treatments with nearly as much contempt she treats the rest of her dysfunctional cast. While the Marabout is a foreigner in Paris, he is nevertheless part of the same despotic, patriarchal class as Edgar and the manager of Perfumes Plus. However, the Marabout's kindness towards the narrator is sincere, despite his initial exploitative erotic interest in her. In *Pig Tales* third-world knowledges offer benign treatments of European sickness when western cures appear to be non-existent. Darrieussecq's numerous references to African/Arab migrants reflects the degree to which they have entered the consciousness of Parisian society and have become an everyday part of the community. And the narrator of *Pig Tales* treats Africans and Arabs in the same way as she treats most people she comes into contact with, neither distancing herself from them, nor idealising them.<sup>40</sup>

The Marabout's diagnosis of "witchcraft" to explain the narrator's monstrous transformation falls back on a primitive belief-system, an interpretive code of black (evil) magic versus white (good) magic.

The Marabout's books on zombies and men changing into wild animals belong to African tribal folklore and will never adequately explain the socio-political subversions and aesthetic imperatives of postmodernism which is Darrieussecq's European literary heritage.<sup>41</sup>

## In Conclusion

The Marabout's diagnosis of "witchcraft" can be easily rejected by the reader, for we can assume the reader has already attributed the narrator's predicament to 'comic, contrived, authorial artifice'. The Marabout's magical charms are never going to heal the narrator of *Pig Tales* because, in the end, her bestialization is due to the fact that she is being used, emblematically, to represent a widespread contemporary social disease which has become a way of life for many and is not going to be easily eradicated. The ultimate narrative purpose of the allegorical ruse in *Pig Tales* is not about good overcoming evil, as in medieval allegory; the allegory is essentially about exposing false consciousness on a mass scale. In presenting a dark side-effect of women's perceived right to do with their bodies what they will, Darrieussecq's novel may well intend to expose the corruption of a feminist ideal. The novel laments the sundering of the human body from its spiritual needs by consumer capitalism and the lure of instant material and sexual gratification.

The young narrator ends up with less freedom than she began with and it is her final fate to be segregated from the rest of humanity. She is happy in the woods eating truffles with an amorous wild boar, though it is certainly a matter of regret that the narrator can only infrequently "show a human face."<sup>42</sup> In the final scene, the sow and the boar, symbols of poor man's peasant cuisine of sausages and bacon, consume *la grande bouffe* of the truffle. Darrieussecq is perhaps satirising entrenched French class distinctions here, which, according to Pierre Bourdieu, operate in the culinary arena through the systematic and regulatory enforcement of opposition between tastes of necessity (sausage and potatoes) and tastes of luxury or freedom.<sup>43</sup> The narrator and her pal eat the rich foods that will make them fatter still and turn them into *bon vivants* — formerly the privilege of the wealthy *gourmand*. Seen from this angle, magical allegory in *Pig Tales* does indeed intend to shock a younger generation of misguided women into standing up for themselves, and arresting their own decline into moral lassitude and spiritual corpulence!

University of Melbourne

smuirden@netspace.net.au

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The title in French is *Truismes*. We know the city where nearly all of the action takes place is Paris because of the references to Pont-Neuf and Paris that come towards the end of the novel. See Marie Darrieussecq, *Pig Tales: A Novel of Lust and Transformation*, trans. Linda Coverdale (London: Faber & Faber, 1997) 104, 109, 111.
- <sup>2</sup> Jenni Calder, *Animal Farm and Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1987) 6.
- <sup>3</sup> The above allegorical characteristics are also common to the fable, but the fable is less likely to offer a direct critical commentary about the extratextual world. Allegory and fable can both be cautionary tales that demonstrate a moral, and consequently *Pig Tales* can be discussed with reference to both generic categories.
- <sup>4</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966) 54-55.
- <sup>5</sup> Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen, 1986) 4-6. Transcoding is Fredric Jameson's term for mediating among different theories. "Transcoding is a process of translation that allows us to move from one theoretical paradigm to another, taking the best that each has to offer." Hardt and Weeks, introduction, *The Jameson Reader*, 20.
- <sup>6</sup> Stallybrass and White, 4-6.
- <sup>7</sup> Stallybrass and White, 44-45.
- <sup>8</sup> Stallybrass and White, 44-45. Punning is also part of the Bakhtin "carnavalesque" say Stallybrass and White.
- <sup>9</sup> Stallybrass and White, 45.
- <sup>10</sup> Darrieussecq, 8.
- <sup>11</sup> Calder, 18.
- <sup>12</sup> According to Elaine J. Hale and Marnie S. Rodriguez, post-feminism emerged during the 1990s. In their article, "The Myth of Postfeminism", they posit four post-feminist claims: "(1) overall support for the women's movement has dramatically eroded because some women (2) are increasingly antifeminist, (3) believe the movement is irrelevant, and (4) have adopted a "no, but." version of feminism." *Gender & Society*, 17 (2003) 878.

- <sup>13</sup> Kate Holden's memoir *Under My Skin* (Melbourne: Text, 2005), about a prostitute who expresses no moral qualms about what she's doing, advocates a similar post-feminist line.
- <sup>14</sup> There is however, in *Pig Tales*, some use of Orwellian 'police-state' vernacular, with Parisian versions of "The Great Trials", "Free Citizens" and "New Citizens" alluded to on page 111.
- <sup>15</sup> "Autodiegetic" is Gérard Genette's narratological term for the narrator who plays the central character in the tale they are narrating. Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, trans. Jane Lewin (New York: Cornell University Press, 1980) 245.
- <sup>16</sup> Darrieussecq, 34.
- <sup>17</sup> Darrieussecq, 29.
- <sup>18</sup> Darrieussecq, 52.
- <sup>19</sup> Darrieussecq, 2.
- <sup>20</sup> Darrieussecq, 78.
- <sup>21</sup> Darrieussecq, 79.
- <sup>22</sup> Shirley Jordan. "Saying the unsayable: identities in crisis in the early novels of Marie Darrieussecq," *Women's Writing in Contemporary France*, eds. Gill Rye and Michael Worton (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 144.
- <sup>23</sup> Darrieussecq, 130.
- <sup>24</sup> *Jouissance*, the psychoanalytic term, originates in Lacan. A reference that succinctly summarises Irigaray's, Cixous' and Kristeva's mutual and respective adaptations of the concept of jouissance can be found in *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*, eds. Gayle Greene and Coppélia Kahn (London: Methuen, 1985) 84-86.
- <sup>25</sup> This part of Darrieussecq's tale is similar in subject-matter and mood to some of Angela Carter's revisionary feminist fairy-tales which blur the boundaries between human and beast, such as "Peter and the Wolf" *Black Venus* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1985), 79-87.
- <sup>26</sup> The truffle is a rare, highly calorific vegetable and expensive culinary delicacy in France. It only grows under certain trees and must be sniffed out by trained, truffle-hunting dogs.
- <sup>27</sup> Douglas, 54.
- <sup>28</sup> Mary Douglas's explanation of the workings of ambiguity in social discourse are useful here. She says: "But it is not always an unpleasant experience to confront ambiguity. Obviously it is more tolerable in some areas than in others. There is a whole gradient on which laughter, revulsion and shock belong at different points and intensities. The experience can be stimulating. The richness of poetry depends on the use of ambiguity, as Empson has shown." Douglas, 37.
- <sup>29</sup> Terry Eagleton lists these qualities, among others, as examples of postmodernism in *Literary Theory* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 201.
- <sup>30</sup> Adelheid Eubanks, "The Pleasure of Being a Pig: Marie Darrieussecq's *Pig*

*Tales*," *The South Carolina Modern Language Review* 1 (2002): 44.

- <sup>31</sup> Jameson, "Third-world" 324. Jameson is not talking about *Pig Tales* in this reference, or any recent fiction, but about the political satire of Chinese fiction writer Lu Xun, who allegorised the disintegrating China of the late post-imperial period. He is comparing modern allegory to the earlier use of allegory by John Bunyan in the seventeenth century, and others.
- <sup>32</sup> Darrieussecq, 55.
- <sup>33</sup> Darrieussecq, 14, 16.
- <sup>34</sup> Jordan, 146.
- <sup>35</sup> Darrieussecq, 4.
- <sup>36</sup> The Muslim women at the metropolitan baths evoke the myriad sensual representations of exoticised women (in bathhouses and harems) by French artists during the late nineteenth-century, such as Jean-Leon Gerome's painting 'The Great Bath' and Jean August Dominique Ingres' painting 'The Turkish Bath'. In *Pig Tales*, it is the western woman who is both naked and the object of the Muslim women's ocular indulgence. An inverse paradigm of the colonial's 'desire for the Other' is thus operative in Darrieussecq's playful parody of 'orientalism'.
- <sup>37</sup> Darrieussecq, 31.
- <sup>38</sup> Darrieussecq, 33.
- <sup>39</sup> Darrieussecq, 98.
- <sup>40</sup> The exception is Yvan the werewolf, the great love of the narrator's life, whom she puts on a romantic pedestal.
- <sup>41</sup> Darrieussecq, 98. One is reminded of Frantz Fanon's assertion that underdeveloped countries' obsession with witchcraft is a passive means of avoiding facing the real threat of colonial imperialism. "Believe me, the zombies are more terrifying than the settlers." *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1961, trans. Constance Farrington (London: Penguin Books, 1967), 43.
- <sup>42</sup> Darrieussecq, 135.
- <sup>43</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 177.