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Body Politics in *Truismes*: “The Tyranny of Slenderness”

Julie Rodgers

Body politics is a concept that refers to the direct grip that culture has on our bodies, through the practices and bodily habits of everyday life (Bordo 16). It highlights the way in which society regulates the human body, marking it, training it, torturing it, forcing it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, and to emit signs (Foucault 25). It posits the body as a text, inscribed with symbols and meanings which express a particular cultural moment and require careful decoding (Orbach 2009:134). Body politics is concerned with examining the extent to which we try to control the body by creating boundaries and forcing performance and how we use the body, not just as a crucial locus of self-construction, but also as a means of protesting and expressing a wide range of emotions from hopes and aspirations to fears and malaise. More than ever before, the body is a complex site of display and power struggle “invested with the passion and forms of thinking and engagement which would suit the faction fighter in a political party” (Orbach 2009:73). This article focuses on the domain of women and “eating disorders” and their representation in Marie Darrieussecq’s *Truismes* (1996). It examines the relentless quest for “normalization” or a “body that fits,” which, according to Susan Bordo, is still the dominant order of the day, even in a postmodern context, especially with regard to the politics of women’s bodies (246). Using Kim Chernin’s term “the tyranny of slenderness” as a starting point, this article argues that far from being simply a pathological state or an arbitrary reaction to media images, eating disorders are an extreme and painfully debilitating embodiment of the struggle characteristic of the situation of contemporary women, a situation in which “a constellation of social, economic, and psychological factors have combined to produce a generation of women who feel deeply flawed, ashamed of their needs, and not entitled to exist unless they transform themselves into worthy new selves (read: without need, without want, without body)” (Bordo 47). This is exactly the case of the protagonist in *Truismes* whose suffering throughout the novel is both caused by and mirrored by the body.

The aim of this article is not to diagnose the protagonist in *Truismes* with a specific type of eating problem or to attempt to analyse her case medically, but rather to give a close reading of how eating disorders are represented in the novel, how they affect the protagonist, and what they tell us about women’s place in society and indeed society in general. Similarly, with regard to eating problems, it is not the disorder itself, but what it can tell us about society and the individual that is of most interest to this article. In my reading of the novel, the fluctuating metamorphosis of the narrator into a pig essentially traces the entire course of an eating disorder, from its onset, to the escalation of the problem, the subsequent hospitalization, and finally, the ambivalent “resolution.” The fact that the trajectory of an eating disorder may not be the first layer of the narrative that the reader detects is also significant in that it reflects the often secret and covert nature of eating disorders and the attitude of denial of many sufferers. By aligning the physical transformations in *Truismes* with the various stages of an eating disorder, this article offers an innovative perspective on the novel. Certainly, the body has emerged as a

central focus in previous discussions of *Truismes*; from the point of view of identities in crisis (Jordan), physical metamorphosis (Gaudet), pornography (Phillips) and the body and the fantastic (Sadoux 1998, 1999). However, this is the first article to read the novel specifically as an allegory of an eating disorder. In fact, adopting this particular stance goes some way towards accounting for the ambiguous ending of the novel, in that an eating disorder is never wholly resolved.

Susie Orbach describes the increasing phenomenon of “eating disorders” among women:

Every morning hundreds and thousands of women wake up worrying about whether it is going to be a “good day” or a “bad day” in relation to food. They feel remorse for what they ate yesterday and hope that they will have more control today. They approach the day with dread or hope according to how in control of food they feel. (1986:23)

Her most recent publication *Bodies* (2009) reveals that this pursuit of physical perfection has not relented but, rather, has mushroomed out of control with the number of patients presenting themselves with “body difficulties” in her consulting room constantly on the rise, to the extent that we are now, according to Orbach, in the midst of a body crisis in Western society where value is dangerously entwined with the presentation of an impossibly perfect exterior:

Success means looking younger every year [...]. Success means regulating the body: controlling hungers, desires, ageing and emissions. Success means seeing the body as a lifelong work. Success means anticipating faults – physical, medical and aesthetic – and correcting them. But when and if the ordinary processes of the body cannot be sufficiently restrained, which of course they can't, the body becomes a source of consternation as well as failure. (2009:111)

When problematic eating occurs there can be a number of complex factors at play: the desire for autonomy; the desire to fit in; to be attractive; to be loved; to be successful; to “get it right;” or some kind of individual psychological trauma. A woman’s obsessive monitoring of her weight, severe reduction in food intake and sometimes the accompanying bulimic bingeing has been interpreted as a reflection of society’s demands that she does not take up too much space, that she looks a certain way in order to be acceptable and that she curtails her needs in general (Bordo, Brook). Indeed, in 1991, Naomi Wolf identified the pressure placed on women in contemporary society to buy into the beauty myth and conform to a certain look as a deliberate political weapon, a violent counterforce aimed at halting women’s advancement and “operating to checkmate the inheritance of feminism on every level in the lives of Western women” (10). For Wolf, “in terms of how we feel about ourselves physically, we may actually be worse off than our unliberated grandmothers,” adding that, despite women having breached many of the power structures of society, a startling number would still prefer to “lose ten to fifteen pounds than achieve any other goal” (*ibid.*). Published almost twenty years after Wolf’s *The Beauty Myth* (1991), Natasha Walters’s *Living Dolls* (2010), confirms that “the ravages of the beauty backlash” are continuing to destroy women physically and deplete them psychologically (Wolf 19):

The imperative is to better oneself not through any intellectual or emotional growth, but through physical remaking. [...] [The] media encourage young girls to believe that good looks rather than good works are at the centre of the good life. (Walters 66)

On another level however, an eating disorder, be it compulsive over-eating or self-starvation, can also express a rebellion against dictated ideas about the perfect female

form. It can be seen as a rejection of these so-called norms, either through an attempt to disappear (through food deprivation), or to avoid all resemblance with the prescribed female form – by becoming significantly underweight or overweight, thus rendering themselves unattractive and avoiding the complications of the sexual market (Holland *et al.* 119-20). When discussing the female body and eating disorders, it is vital that we carefully read the signs written on the body, for this is where we can see not only the contradictory and intolerable demands women face in contemporary society, but indeed all that is wrong with society itself. As Bordo points out in her study of the body in Western culture, *Unbearable Weight* (1993) a woman with an eating disorder is far from simply the victim of an illness, she is the bearer of distressing tidings about our culture. In the case of *Truismes*, this certainly rings true; one could say the protagonist's conflicted body reflects the corrupt and distorted society in which she is living.

From start to finish *Truismes* can be read as a story of eating disorders. Given that the protagonist's success in procuring employment in the opening of the novel is not the result of a sound CV but rather due to the "élasticité merveilleuse" of her breasts and the high quality of her flesh, "ferme," "lisse," "rebondie" (12), as if she is a chunk of meat on sale in the butcher's, it is unsurprising that she should develop a bodily obsession. Already in the early pages of the novel, the protagonist feels the need to reveal that she has put on two kilos recently (hardly a substantial amount of weight), and we wonder, would a male protagonist give us such information so immediately? This weight increase is disclosed as if it is a dirty secret, the protagonist feels guilty about it but states that she simply could not put up with the hunger anymore (which suggests that the dieting/bingeing cycle has already been long in place before the novel commences). The only consolation about the two kilos, she tells us, is that they appear to have gone to the "right" places, "harmonieusement répartis" (13), on the hips and breasts, we imagine, and thus the weight gain, in this instance, is deemed acceptable for it leads her to comply with, rather than transgress, societal norms of the female form. It will be a different story when her weight gain is more substantial – she will be treated as an outcast by society, a mutant, literally a "fat pig." Already therefore, we can see just how carefully the female body must be monitored and kept in check lest it should cross the boundaries of what has been prescribed as desirable. In fact, the protagonist is made to feel that her body is her most valuable asset. At work, capability and intelligence is of little consequence, "l'essentiel est d'être toujours belle et soignée" (*ibid.*). And yet, if a woman's body is her most precious bargaining tool, it is not actually worth much in the grand scheme of things: as she is being fondled by her boss, the protagonist reads her work contract, "un mi-temps payé presque la moitié du SMIC" (*ibid.*).

In *Truismes*, the female protagonist is constantly under the scrutiny of the male gaze no matter where she is: at home, at work or at play. Alongside this, she is bombarded by media images of how she should look in a society where confidence and success are a result of being "belle comme dans les magazines" (15). The message that is sent out to women is that they should be in control of their bodies, and strive as the protagonist may to exert complete discipline over her body, such unrealistic aims of bodily perfection are impossible to sustain and it is bodily instability rather than control that is the most prominent feature of the narrative:

Je ne pouvais jamais être au diapason de mon corps, pourtant *Gilda Mag* et *Ma Beauté ma santé*, que je recevais à la parfumerie, ne cessaient de prévenir que si on n'atteignait pas cette harmonie avec soi-même, on risquait un cancer, un développement anarchique des cellules. (46)

The first real signs of an eating disorder taking hold occur some way into the narrator-protagonist's employment stint at the so-called "parfumerie" which is more like an erotic massage parlour or even a brothel. Business is booming and she is the most

sought-after employee, but something is awry. Her weight is steadily creeping up. She has to increase her clothes size, which is distressing for her and, in addition, more generously sized clothes are hard to procure (58), thus revealing society's fixation on bodily dimensions, the pressure women feel to fit into a particular size, and the horror that they experience when the zip just won't close. Feeling that her body is out of control, the protagonist starts to take measures to remedy what she sees as a problem but, before long, the reader begins to suspect that this is more than a simple "healthy eating" plan to improve well-being. She begins to feel sick around certain kinds of food, especially meat, that she previously enjoyed. It is as if she has trained her mind and body to reject certain types of food that are perceived as "dangerous," in that they are calorific. In addition, her periods become irregular (amenorrhea is a common result of anorexia nervosa), she suffers from stomach cramps (a digestive disorder from irregular eating?) and, the suggestion that she is pregnant, a possibility that is raised on a number of occasions in the novel but which is always very hazy, could be interpreted as her own or society's opinion of her body: she/society sees herself as being so fat that she looks/is judged as if she is pregnant. What casts doubt on her "pregnancies" are her own reservations and how she describes her changing body in terms of weight gain but also weight loss: "Je grossissais de partout, pas seulement du ventre. Et mon ventre ne ressemblait pas du tout à celui d'une femme enceinte, ce n'était pas un beau globe rond mais des bourrelets que j'avais" (29). On another occasion, she reveals the opposite taking place during one of her "pregnancies": "Mes premières semaines de grossesse [...] me creusaient les joues" (90). It is possible, therefore, to argue that her various "grossesses" refer to periods of severe body issues and disordered eating, whether it be bingeing or self-starving.

It must be noted that we have no accurate idea of what size the protagonist really is in the novel, as all references to her weight gain are her own (25) or how she imagines other people see her. Therefore, although she presents herself as grotesquely fat, we cannot take this opinion at face value for sufferers of eating disorders often have body dysmorphic syndrome and are rarely objective about what they see in the mirror. What we do know is that she is not happy with the image that she sees reflected back and she grows increasingly self-critical as the novel unfolds, caught in a web of self-loathing, dieting, and obsessing about the perfect body:

Ce n'est qu'à partir de ce moment où j'ai pris un peu trop de poids, avant même que les clients ne s'en rendent compte, que j'ai commencé à me dégoûter moi-même. Je me voyais dans la glace et, j'avais pour de bon, des replis à la taille, presque des bourrelets ! [...]. J'avais essayé de réduire les sandwiches, j'en étais même arrivée à ne plus manger le midi, tout ça pour continuer à grossir. Les photos des mannequins dans la parfumerie m'obsédaient. (26)

It is interesting to see how contentment for the protagonist depends on shape and size, the extremes she is prepared to go to in order to remould herself, and the power the media and the fashion industry hold over a woman's body and mind. It is also pertinent, however, that the judgement about her excess weight comes from herself and not those around her – at once indicative of body dysmorphic syndrome and women's compliance in the disciplining of their bodies, having so fully interiorized the notions surrounding female beauty presented to them by society. That said, to label the protagonist with "body dysmorphic syndrome" is potentially misleading as it suggests that she suffers from flawed logic or invalid reasoning. On the contrary, one could say that the protagonist is not incorrectly processing data from an external reality whose actual features are very different from her own perceptions, but, rather, is keenly aware of prevailing social attitudes towards slenderness, the pressure to be thin, and the realities of dieting (Bordo 58-59).

What follows on from this scene and lasts the entire duration of the novel is a vicious cycle of starving and bingeing. The protagonist exhibits a long list of the physical symptoms commonly associated with eating disorders, some of which have already been mentioned: hair loss (from the head); excessive body down; changes in skin; increased sensitivity to the cold following a period of food deprivation; severe lack of energy (at times she can barely walk); digestive problems; stomach pains; sight problems; and increasingly irregular periods. In addition to physical symptoms, the reader can detect a large number of other indicators of an eating disorder. The first of these is related to her behaviour around food, for example rigidly restricting consumption, eliminating entire food groups, and, as the eating disorder worsens, even eating things that are not actually food, such as flowers (50), soap (87) and paper (97), a tactic sometimes used by anorexics to give them a false sense of feeling full, to curb their appetites, or to cheat doctors when they are forced to present themselves for weigh-ins: “Je devais faire de plus en plus attention à mon alimentation, je ne mangeais presque plus que des légumes, des patates surtout, c’était que je digérais le mieux. Je m’étais prise de folie pour les patates crues ; non épluchées, il faut bien le dire” (32). Then there is the eating in secret (hiding in the park) and the “pretending” to eat properly but actually consuming only raw food: “Je mangeais des sandwichs à la patate crue. On pouvait sûrement croire à des oeufs en tranche, de loin” (51). There is also the horror that certain food inspires in her, to the extent that it makes her ill. While this horror of food tends to concern mostly pork and is thus understandable in conjunction with the more commonly accepted reading of the novel based on her actual metamorphosis into a pig, it is also symptomatic of an eating disorder to block out certain foods entirely:

Un jour, Honoré a acheté des rillettes chez un traiteur chic. Il croyait me faire plaisir en s’occupant pour une fois des courses et en organisant une petite charcuterie-partie en tête à tête à la maison. Et bien quand j’ai vu les rillettes je n’ai pas pu me retenir une seconde : j’ai vomi là, dans la cuisine. (ibid.)

And finally, there is the constant hunger that follows her everywhere, even her dreams are haunted by food: “J’avais constamment faim. J’aurais mangé n’importe quoi” (*ibid.*). This unbearable hunger leads, of course, to binges, frenzied ingesting and then expelling, when she is no longer able to control it, for as Bordo states: “Far from losing her appetite, the anorexic is haunted by it. These women experience hunger as an alien invader, marching to the tune of its own arbitrary whims, disconnected from any normal self-regulating mechanisms” (146).

In addition to bizarre eating habits, there is frantic exercise, very tellingly often in secret: “Je faisais des mouvements de gymnastique en cachette pour diminuer mes fessiers, je suivais même un cours d’aérobic, mais je n’arrivais pas à réduire la taille de mon derrière. Au contraire, j’avais encore pris du poids. On ne voyait plus que ça” (37). Alongside this is the firm belief that no matter how hard she tries, she is still fat; she has failed in her mission to regulate her out-of-control body. It is also important to mention her interaction with men. It is clear that, from the way she hands her body over to men to do with it what they will, she has little sense of self-worth. The fact that she always seems to have an attachment to a man suggests that she craves affection and recognition, and it could be that her eating disorder is tied up with this desire to be loved. Alternatively, given that we see the eating disorder take hold rapidly as soon as she gains employment in the “parfumerie,” could it be that her eating problems are linked to the sexual abuse that she suffers – that it is a bid to disappear, to make herself sexually unattractive to men? Finally, there is a conflictual relationship with her mother, which could equally be at the root of the protagonist’s eating disorder.

Now I turn to focus on two types of incident that occur in the narrative which, in my opinion, render the reading of *Truismes* as the trajectory of an eating disorder more steadfast: first, the binges, and second, what can be interpreted as periods of convalescence in a psychiatric hospital. There are many binges followed by guilt and starvation techniques scattered throughout the novel, for example, the hamburger binge at the hotel with an *homme de ménage* and the pizza binge with her lover Yvan. However, I will concentrate on two particular binge scenes, namely the banquet for the millennium celebrations and the truffle feast which is recounted towards the end. The protagonist arrives at the gala dinner following a period of self-starvation. She enters weak with hunger (“je ne pouvais plus du tout marcher, c’était la faim sans doute”) and immediately becomes fixated on the food: “je n’avais d’yeux que pour les buffets et les grosses soupières fumantes” (104). It is not long until the food orgy commences and it is interesting to note how she describes it, being fed by others rather than consuming it herself, presenting herself as completely powerless before food, and also the overwhelming effect eating has on her emotions:

Ils ont commencé à m’envoyer des bouts de cerf rôti, des tranches de girafe, des pots entiers de caviar, des gâteaux au sirop d’érable, des fruits d’Afrique, et des truffes surtout, les truffes c’est bon. Quelle fête ! [...]. On s’amusait beaucoup. Le champagne qu’on me faisait boire me tournait un peu la tête et m’a rendue sentimentale, j’en ai pleuré de reconnaissance pour tous ces gens qui me donnaient à manger. (105)

At the end of the evening she feels sick and she vomits (on purpose?), stating that it was all too much for her after “cette longue période de privations en prison” (107). The term “prison,” although referring in the novel to a period of literally being locked up, could also be read as a metaphor for her self-starvation as this is how many anorexia sufferers describe the condition, a state of being trapped. In this scene, the protagonist’s hunger surpasses her ability to regulate appetite: “J’ai recommencé [...] à pousser des cris du ventre, c’était plus fort que moi” (104). Helpless, she surrenders herself to the banquet and allows herself to be fed by those around her, for so problematic is her relationship with food that she is unable to nourish herself. Her tears of emotion on eating almost suggest a sense of liberation, which again ties in with the notion of an eating disorder as a form of psychological and corporeal imprisonment.

The truffle incident takes place towards the end of the novel when, after having lost everything - her home, her job, her husband Honoré and her lover Yvan - she is making one last journey back to her mother in search of respite. Once again, the binge occurs following a period of starvation - she feels unwell during the trek home which is more than likely due to “ne pas avoir mangé pendant si longtemps” (138). Furthermore, it is triggered by the memory of the past binge: “J’ai trouvé une grosse truffe noire et j’ai d’abord pensé à cette Saint-Sylvestre de l’an 2000 où j’en avais tant mangé” (139). Almost immediately, she is engrossed in stuffing herself full of truffles:

J’ai croqué dans la truffe, du nez le parfum m’est entré dans la gorge [...]. Tout l’hiver de la Terre a éclaté dans ma bouche, je ne me suis plus souvenue ni du millénaire à venir ni de tout ce que j’avais vécu, ça s’est roulé en boule en moi et j’ai tout oublié, pendant un moment indéfini j’ai perdu ma mémoire. J’ai mangé, j’ai mangé. Les truffes avaient la saveur des mares quand elles gèlent, le goût des bourgeons recroquevillés qui attendent le retour du printemps, le goût des pousses bandées à craquer dans la terre froide, et la force patiente des futures moissons. Et dans mon ventre il y avait le poids de l’hiver, l’envie de trouver une bauge, de m’assoupir [...]. J’ai creusé des quatre pattes, j’ai fait caca. (140)

As she gorges on the truffles, it is as if she is in a trance, outside of herself, dissociated from her physical body, a trait identified by Brook as common among eating disorder sufferers. There is the same sense of ecstasy as she eats that is present in the previous binge example followed by the familiar pattern of expelling after excessive ingesting and the feeling of being unwell: “La douleur a repris mon ventre, je suis revenue à moi” (140). Her eating disorder has become so firmly embedded now that when her stomach pains return she feels more like herself than when she is eating. As previously stated, these are just two examples of the binges that occur in the novel, all of which are succeeded by a period of re-disciplining the body, reining it back into control. The hamburger binge, mentioned at the beginning of this section, is similarly followed by a feeling of guilt at “letting herself go” and such strict regulation of food that the protagonist suffers from severe stomach cramps and fainting fits (91):

J’avais décidé de faire un effort de présentation supplémentaire. Je me suis donné une semaine pour perdre d’autres kilos, me redresser complètement [...]. Je refusais désormais les hamburgers de l’homme de ménage et il voyait d’un très mauvais œil que je ne me nourrisse plus que de salade. (90)

This is not the first time that we have access to disapproving external reaction to the protagonist’s eating habits. When she is invited to the restaurant by the *Supérieur* (a government official who agrees to meet her because she claims to have a book for Edgar, for whose political campaign she was photographed and who is now running the country), she reveals how “on a expédié le repas. Il me regardait bizarrement” (101). This would seem to suggest that perhaps it was just she who rapidly devoured her meal, rather than both of them, as the *Supérieur* certainly finds her behaviour at the restaurant strange.

Where treatment of the protagonist’s eating disorder is concerned, there are a number of occasions in the novel when it would appear that she has been hospitalized. Following her affair with an *homme de ménage* at a hotel which, as mentioned above, also involved fluctuations between guzzling on hamburgers with him and then restricting herself to salad, all the time locked away in a hotel room and unwilling to leave it until she looks “presentable,” the protagonist is brought to a place that resembles a psychiatric unit. The windows are barred, the inmates appear unstable and they all look famished (96). There is the sense that they have all been brought here against their will and it would seem that the protagonist is unwilling to engage in any “therapies” that may be available, choosing to withdraw completely from those around her. Furthermore, there are references to the fact that she is so weak in the “clinic” that she can barely stand up as well as her hair having fallen out (95), all of which strengthen the argument that her eating disorder has reached a critical stage and, as a result, she has been hospitalized. While in the “clinic” she comes across some books. At first, she eats them (as mentioned earlier, this could be a way to cheat her hunger or the staff), then she reads them, but as a distraction from food: “Je me suis mise à lire tous les livres que je trouvais, ça faisait passer le temps et oublier la faim parce qu’on était rapidement venu à bout des cadavres” (97). Rather than improve during her time in “hospital,” the protagonist deteriorates, loses even more weight (98), and eventually escapes from what has been an overwhelmingly negative experience for her.

It would appear that a second hospitalization occurs after the death of her lover Yvan, when, once again, the protagonist is taken (against her wishes) to what could be interpreted as a clinic for the purpose of this particular reading. In comparison with the previous example, prior to this second “hospitalization” she had been caught in a cycle of pizza-bingeing and limiting herself to vegetables only while living with Yvan. It is interesting to examine the protagonist’s description of the event:

Une foule de vétérinaires s’agitait autour de moi, on me faisait des piqûres, un marabou est venu m’appliquer des onguents et il a dit qu’il n’avait jamais vu un

cochon [this is how she sees herself] dans un tel état. Finalement, je crois qu'on m'a laissée pour morte. (136)

Ils m'ont mise dans une camionnette et ensuite dans une cage au zoo. J'ai hurlé pendant plusieurs jours. Je ne mangeais pas. Les visiteurs me jetaient des cacahuètes et des frites. (137)

Je me suis couchée et j'ai attendu la mort... (*ibid.*)

During this episode, there is reference to nurses and doctors, “les vétérinaires,” attempting to treat the protagonist, and others, “les visiteurs,” trying to entice her to eat, but she completely refuses to engage in what is going on around her. It would appear that the eating disorder has taken such a strong grasp now that she does not want to get better; it is part of her and she simply cannot shake it off. In fact, one could say that at this stage the protagonist is no longer simply controlling her eating, but that it is the eating disorder that is controlling her – it has become part of her, it has invaded her body and her mind, like a cancerous growth, and she is powerless before it: “J'étais de plus en plus persuadée que j'avais quelque chose au cerveau, une tumeur, je ne sais pas, quelque chose qui m'aurait à la fois paralysé l'arrière-train, troublé la vue, et un peu dérangé le système digestif” (72). At the same time, the unsuccessful outcome of her hospitalization is not solely due to her own unwillingness and inability to participate in her treatment; rather, it is the fault of the way the treatments are delivered. That is, the objectification of her body by society that led her to this state continues even within the supposed safe environment of the hospital. Those looking after her fail to see beyond her condition; they are referred to as “gendarmes” (95), as controlling and dangerous rather than caring and helpful. In the “clinics,” the main problem is that she is not treated as a subject, a person with an eating disorder, but seen only in terms of the illness itself. No-one ever asks her if she wants to go to these “clinics” – she is admitted against her will and then prevented from leaving by barred exits (96). It would seem therefore, through this overwhelmingly negative portrait of the hospital experience, that Darrieussecq is criticizing the clinical discourse surrounding eating disorders which shallowly objectifies individuals into a series of classifications and isolates the self-starving woman as a psychiatric patient rather than an individual case, as merely “an external body configuration rather than an internal spiritual state” (Brumberg 7).

Eventually the protagonist makes her escape and embarks on her final journey of the novel – the return to the mother. Although this attempt at reunification between mother and daughter proves grossly unsuccessful, by the end of the novel, we are, nonetheless, left with the sense that the protagonist may have achieved a certain peace with her body (that this only comes about when the daughter murders the mother is, of course, material for a whole other article on the mother-daughter relationship in *Truismes*). The protagonist appears to have reached a level of acceptance where her body size and appearance is concerned and to have withdrawn herself from the impossible quest for perfection:

Désormais la plupart du temps je suis truie, c'est plus pratique [...] Je ne suis pas mécontente de mon sort. La nourriture est bonne [...] Rien n'est meilleur que la terre chaude autour de soi quand on s'éveille le matin, l'odeur de son propre corps mélangée à l'odeur de l'humus. (148)

That said, this aura of harmony is ambiguous, for the protagonist also states, “je me laisse souvent aller” (*ibid.*), thus revealing an air of resignation to her “out of control” body and the harsh criticisms to which she was subjected. However, while she may be more relaxed now, she still does not see her body as “fitting in,” hence she has opted to live beyond the margins of society. This could equally be interpreted as a rebellious act, a casting off of prescribed norms and courageously deciding to live as she pleases,

allowing her body to take its natural shape and respond to its natural desires and appetites.

To conclude, this article has traced the various stages of an eating disorder as represented by Darrieussecq in *Truismes* through the medium of her anonymous protagonist and her bodily mutations between woman and sow. We have seen how the novel highlights the pressures placed on women by society to conform to a set of flawed ideals and cultural diktats concerning the female body. In addition, *Truismes* examines the consequences, both physical and psychological, of such an obsessive focus on the body and of the relentless objectification of women. It looks at how women have interiorized these flawed ideals of female beauty and, as a result, comply with, more often than contest, the tyranny of slenderness. Finally, by means of its ambiguous ending, while the novel seems to incite women to reject the restrictive and impossible notions of achieving a “perfect” body, it also alludes to the enduring nature of an eating disorder, which, although it can be managed, never fully releases its grip, biding its time until another moment of weakness comes along and it wreaks havoc on the female body once again. In this respect, in *Truismes*, the eating disorder becomes more than an individual problem; rather, it is a metaphor for modern society which inscribes itself and all its contradictions onto the female body. *Truismes* is a novel which helps us to “see differently” and “explore what culture continually presents as individual choices (or, as in the case of anorexia and bulimia, their pathology), as instead culturally situated and culturally shared. Such acknowledgment [...] must remain central to feminist politics of the body” (Bordo 300).

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