

## Experience and Experiment in Marie Darrieussecq

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Marie Darrieussecq (b. 1969) has firmly established herself as one of France's leading young writers, producing fourteen full-length works between 1996 and 2010, and demonstrating an erudite interest in time, memory and the subconscious, love, death, familial relationships and female identity. Born in Bayonne in 1969, Darrieussecq found fame and best-seller status in 1996 while only 27, with the publication of her first novel, *Truismes (Pig Tales)*, which sold over a million copies worldwide and was translated into forty languages, a feat which had not been achieved by a French author since Marguerite Duras and *L'Amant (The Lover)* in 1984 (Valéry: 67). Since then Darrieussecq has produced an eclectic mix of novels, autobiography, *autofiction*, short stories, a translation of Ovid's *Tristium* and *Ex Ponto* letters, a play, a treatise on literary plagiarism, a children's book, and a number of texts to accompany artists' work. She has expressed a desire to reinvigorate the French novel, declaring in an interview for *L'Humanité*: 'En tant qu'écrivain, je donne un grand coup de pied dans le château de cubes et j'essaie de le reconstruire différemment'<sup>1</sup> (Nicolas : 22). Certainly Darrieussecq's ambivalent literary reputation suggests she may have achieved this. Critics have commented on her ability to simultaneously embrace and subvert traditional elements of storytelling such as character, plot and setting.<sup>2</sup> Catherine Rodgers describes her as a writer of 'l'entre-deux'<sup>3</sup> (Rodgers 2009a: 105). Despite commercial and media success, the author has stated her desire to avoid populism (Sauvage: 65), and to write novels which demand a brave and participating reader (Terrasse: 262). It is Darrieussecq's dual appeal as both an author

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<sup>1</sup> 'As a writer, I am kicking over the tower of bricks and trying to reconstruct it differently.' All translations are my own unless specified.

<sup>2</sup> See Jordan 2005:65; Fiemeyer; Burnside; Kemp 2008:434; Rodgers 2009b:30, Rye:31.

<sup>3</sup> 'the in-between'.

concerned with capturing the essence of lived experience, and her metatextual exploration of the textual processes required to do this, which is of interest here. Darrieussecq treats human events and relationships, preoccupied with a textual expression of individual emotion and sensation. Fulfilling a trend apparent in French women's writing since the 1970s, to seek to write the unnarratable, her interest is in experiences which are not codified by language, or in which everyday expressions become redundant. In *Naissance des fantômes (My Phantom Husband)* (1998), the protagonist's husband's disappearance is: 'entièrement nouveau, sans syntaxe et sans contenu, informe'<sup>4</sup> (Darrieussecq 1999: 49). Darrieussecq proclaimed with regard to *Bref séjour chez les vivants (Brief stay with the living)* (2001): 'Cette famille n'est capable d'aborder ce deuil que par bribes, par souvenirs refoulés, en deçà du langage. Donc, la narration est impossible'<sup>5</sup> (Nicolas : 22). In *Tom est mort (Tom is dead)* (2007) the protagonist asks 'Quelle est la langue de la mort de Tom ?'<sup>6</sup> (Darrieussecq 2007: 42–3). As such, her protagonists make innovative use of language, and sometimes writing, to express their singular experience (Lambeth: 807–9). As Shirley Jordan has noted: 'The ultimate interest for the reader of her works [...] [lies] in the moments of intense identification provoked by the astonishingly original outcomes of her resolve to say the unsayable' (Jordan 2002: 153). Darrieussecq often disassociates language from the pre-established, referential meanings which distance it from lived emotion and sensation. Instead, she concentrates on the poetic function, highlighting patterns of rhythm and sound, exploiting the graphic surface of the text, and making use of narrative strategies which allow her to embody her subjects and their experiences. Yet Darrieussecq's texts can also be read as metatextual commentaries on the process of reading and the complex relationship between text and 'reality'. Her techniques bring into question the representative relationship between language and the

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<sup>4</sup> 'entirely new, without syntax or content, unformed'.

<sup>5</sup> 'This family is only capable of talking about this tragedy in bits, in repressed memories, beyond language. Therefore narration is impossible'.

<sup>6</sup> 'What is the language of Tom's death?'

external world. Rather, she uses strategies which both highlight and subvert the artificiality of established conventions in the construction of words, sentences and text in order to suggest the active role of linguistic and textual features in the process of meaning creation. In this way, the representative possibilities of language are challenged and the location of meaning is questioned. This duality: the desire to find an expression for experience, and the simultaneous problematization of that expression, recalls and rejuvenates the separation and interaction between Barthes's *texte de plaisir* and his *texte de jouissance*,<sup>7</sup> which in turn suggests the multiple reading pleasures of Darrieussecq's novels.

Barthes's concentration on the ambiguities of language in literature leads him to distinguish between the *texte de plaisir*: say-able, express-able, satisfying and comfortable for the reader; and the *texte de jouissance*: concerned with the impossibility of expressing reality and the unfinished, problematic, plural nature of language:

Texte de plaisir: celui qui contente, emplit, donne de l'euphorie; celui qui vient de la culture, ne rompt pas avec elle, est lié à une pratique *confortable* de la lecture. Texte de jouissance: celui qui met en état de perte, celui qui déconforte (peut-être jusqu'à un certain ennui), fait vaciller les assises historiques, culturelles, psychologiques, du lecteur, la consistance de ses goûts, de ses valeurs et de ses souvenirs, met en crise son rapport au langage<sup>8</sup> (Barthes: 25–6).

The *texte de jouissance* 'discomforts' because it reveals the inadequacy of socially-agreed language; it refuses to adhere to the indirect and collective nature of discourse. Yet Barthes also demonstrates the cross-over of *plaisir* and *jouissance*, the text which attains readability

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<sup>7</sup> Translated as 'text of pleasure' and 'text of bliss' by Richard Miller (Barthes 1975).

<sup>8</sup> 'Text of pleasure: the text that contents, fills, grants euphoria; the text that comes from culture and does not break with it, is linked to a *confortable* practice of reading. Text of bliss: the text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts (perhaps to the point of a certain boredom), unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language' (Miller: 14).

while nonetheless making holes in discourse, simultaneously using and undermining language: ‘la narrativité est déconstruite et l’histoire reste cependant lisible’<sup>9</sup> (Barthes: 18). Barthes focusses on the presence of this gap, or tension, between satisfying and problematic processes of reading, and suggests that this is the real *texte de jouissance*: a text that reveals both processes of reading at once (Barthes: 18–19). As Jonathan Culler puts it: ‘Avant-garde techniques, or disruptions of traditional expectations are more pleurably startling as gaps in a readable discourse’ (Culler: 99).

Taking Darrieussecq’s novels *White* (2003), and *Le Pays (The Country)* (2005) as case studies, this chapter will draw attention to the plural nature of Darrieussecq’s texts. It will simultaneously show how her work has the capacity to satisfy the desire of both narrator and reader to find expression for seemingly ‘unnarratable’ experience, recalling Barthes’s *texte de plaisir*, and how her linguistic and textual experiments constantly evoke the unfinished difficulty of expression, creating a problematic text, destabilising the reader’s certainties, and recalling Barthes’s *texte de jouissance*. In this enactment of both expression of experience and practice of experiment, both processes of reading are heightened, leading to the conclusion that Darrieussecq’s work demonstrates the co-existence of *plaisir* and *jouissance*. Furthermore, the ‘plaisir’ engendered in the reading of Darrieussecq’s novels persists, despite, and perhaps due to, her evasion of the use of socially-agreed representative codes of language. The chapter is divided into four sections which focus on Darrieussecq’s different textual strategies: her concentration on sound, her use of elliptical syntax, aspects of the lay-out of the texts, and, finally, her choice of narrative voice. In each section, I will show how Darrieussecq captures the paradox inherent in the language of literature: the inadequacy of language as an instrument of expression and the continued desire to record intensity of

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<sup>9</sup> ‘narrativity is dismantled yet the story is still readable’ (Miller: 9).

experience. First, however, I will introduce the novels and define the unnarratables they attempt to express.

Both *White* and *Le Pays* are poetic novels pledging to express identity. Michael Worton describes *White* as an ‘unfinished meditation on space, time, physicality and love’, which is in fact an apt description of them both (Worton). In both novels a young female protagonist attempts to understand, and in the case of *Le Pays*, to write, a specific place, and to comprehend her relationship with this place and her position in the world around her. In *White*, Edmée Blanco joins an isolated expedition team in Antarctica for six months in an attempt to escape the disturbing events of her past. The alien emptiness and monotony of Antarctica provide her with the space to ponder her self and her future. In *Le Pays*, the protagonist, Marie Rivière, relocates from Paris to a fictional post-independent Basque country, from where Darrieussecq hails. The text explores the notion of belonging, and sets out to re-define identity, its principal preoccupation being, as Nathalie Crom declares: ‘la question de l’appartenance (à une langue, à une terre, à une nation), sans entretenir la moindre nostalgie pour la vision classique ou traditionnelle de l’enracinement’<sup>10</sup> (Crom). Indeed, in *Le Pays* Darrieussecq directly and continuously addresses issues of local, national and international identity, desire for individuality, and rejection of group identity.

Significantly, both the novels’ subjects lend themselves to an examination of the nature and function of language, emphasising Darrieussecq’s self-expressed interest in this (Gaudet: 115; Terrasse: 266). The international environment in which *White* is set, involving characters from all over the world working together and using what Edmée Blanco calls ‘leur anglais de contrebande’ (p. 171),<sup>11</sup> encourages situations in which use of language is constantly

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<sup>10</sup> ‘the question of belonging (to a language, a land, nation), without showing the slightest nostalgia for the classical or traditional vision of a deep-rootedness’.

<sup>11</sup> ‘their international pidgin’ (Darrieussecq 2005a: 132).

highlighted and questioned. Furthermore, the unfamiliar and extreme surroundings of Antarctica demand a new vocabulary which none of the participants speak: ‘Ceux qui... y séjourneront... parlent entre eux le pidgin anglais international et se contentent de *snow*, *ice*, *white*; osent *desert* et *flat*; et dans les moments d’épanchement, *solitude*’ (p. 84).<sup>12</sup> The protagonist, Edmée, mentions several times the irrelevance and unsuitability of established words to such an inhuman place as Antarctica: ‘C’est un endroit auquel les humains ont, de visu, peu attribué de mots’ (p. 84),<sup>13</sup> and Peter Tomson, the technician and Edmée’s future lover, lamely declares: ‘Il fait si... beau dehors’<sup>14</sup> (p. 89), as he struggles for a description which captures the specificity of what he is experiencing. In *Le Pays*, Marie Rivière has returned to the country in which she was born and brought up, whose official language has changed in her absence, and which she does not speak, inevitably raising questions about the politics of language. Similarly to *White*, Marie struggles for words, this time to capture *le pays* and her relationship with it in a way which satisfies her, baldly repeating: ‘Elle ne parvenait pas à englober le pays’<sup>15</sup> (pp. 85–6; p. 88), recalling Michel Butor’s *Mobile* in its listing of facts and use of poetic images. Thus the subject of difficulty of expression, of representation, is both explicit, as an aspect of the fictional worlds Darrieussecq creates, and implicit, in the writing challenge she sets herself, as we will now see.

Darrieussecq uses innovative strategies in both *White* and *Le Pays* to embody experience: to manifest authentically the other-worldliness and extreme sensations of the Antarctic in the former, and the slippery notion of identity in the latter. J.M.G. Le Clézio, who declared *White* to be ‘sans doute le roman le plus inventif de l’année 2003’,<sup>16</sup> emphasises the innovative nature of Darrieussecq’s choices of language in the novel, and, in

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<sup>12</sup> See also pp. 17, 29, 33, 35, 71, 161. ‘...those who will stay here... will speak international pidgin English and will content themselves with snow, ice and white, or hazard a desert or flat, or when effusive solitude’ (Darrieussecq 2005a: 61).

<sup>13</sup> ‘This is a place to which visiting humans have given very few names’ (Darrieussecq 2005a: 61).

<sup>14</sup> ‘It is so... so beautiful outside’ (Darrieussecq 2005a: 65).

<sup>15</sup> ‘She couldn’t encompass the whole country’.

<sup>16</sup> ‘without a doubt the most inventive novel of 2003’.



signified and signifier, the technique also problematizes non-onomatopoeic language. In giving sounds the value of semantically established and organised words, Darrieussecq is challenging the limits of linguistic convention and what one is able to express within the limits of the representative linguistic sign.

Secondly, moving from individual words to sentences, in both texts Darrieussecq often refuses classical syntax and employs elliptical and repetitive structures. Yet this syntactic breakdown nonetheless creates meaning, allowing a more visceral, mimetic connection with reality to be made and embodying both the experience of selfhood in the texts and the incompleteness of discourse. In *Le Pays*, use of anaphora, for example, embodies the relationship between self and place. The word ‘Quand,’<sup>21</sup> with which paragraphs very frequently open, serves to position the self squarely in a concrete time and place:

Quand je sors de l’hôpital<sup>22</sup> (p. 31).

Quand Pablo est devenu fou<sup>23</sup> (p. 104).

Quand la télé locale avait émis ses premiers programmes<sup>24</sup> (p. 132).

Quand ils quittèrent le pays<sup>25</sup> (p. 140).

Quand elle partit à Londres puis à New York<sup>26</sup> (p. 158).

This plethora of concrete indicators of time and place detail the many different experiences captured in *Le Pays*, embodying the self as it moves through space and time, and the multiple

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<sup>21</sup> When.

<sup>22</sup> ‘When I come out of hospital’.

<sup>23</sup> ‘When Pablo went mad’.

<sup>24</sup> ‘When local TV had broadcast its first programmes’.

<sup>25</sup> ‘When they left the country’.

<sup>26</sup> ‘When she went to London then New York’.

situations which combine to construct a sense of self. Similarly, repetition within sentences serves to emphasise the sheer quantity of aspects which make up a country:

‘Un pays, ça dispose d’un État. Ça a des traditions frontalières. Ça mène des guerres officielles. Ça contient souvent une nation, parfois plusieurs. Ça forme un paysage. Ça supporte les conflits’<sup>27</sup> (p. 153).

In *White*, the various sensations Edmée experiences on her trip are equally expressed using elliptical and repetitive syntax. For example, the constant disturbing movement of the ice-breaker as she approaches her destination is captured using the repetition of simple terms of location as the vessel rolls: ‘poupe... proue... proue... poupe’<sup>28</sup> (p. 15), and of parts of the body as she lies in her moving bunk: ‘Tête... pieds. Pieds... tête’<sup>29</sup> (p. 18). Again, within sentences, key terms are repeated, as in poetry: ‘C’est vide d’un vide parfait, vide jusqu’à eux, un vide primal’<sup>30</sup> (p. 169). The repetition here of ‘vide’ alerts the reader to its significance and its double meaning in the novel: both of the physical emptiness of the landscape, and the state of being without encumbrance, free of the ghosts of the past, which Peter and Edmée, by the end of the novel, have finally reached. In addition to repetition, both texts also manifest a tendency to list. In the context of *Le Pays* and the protagonist’s desire to encapsulate the essence of a place, this listing suggests a cramming of information, an overload:

‘Lumière soudaine. Air, pesanteur, rupture’<sup>31</sup> (p. 234) ; ‘C’est le sol de Paris. Calcaire et silice ; humus de marronnier, fiente, carburants : ce qui s’use et ce qui pousse, ce

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<sup>27</sup> ‘A country, it has a state. It has border traditions. It wages official wars. It often contains a nation, sometimes several. It forms countryside. It endures conflict’.

<sup>28</sup> ‘poop... prow... prow... poop’ (Darrieussecq 2005a: 6).

<sup>29</sup> ‘Head... Feet. Feet... Head’ (Darrieussecq 2005a: 8).

<sup>30</sup> ‘It is a perfect nothingness of nothing’ (Darrieussecq 2005a: 131).

<sup>31</sup> ‘Sudden light. Air, gravity, rupture’.

qui fait la poussière ici comme ailleurs, graines et pollen, météores, squames, cendre<sup>32</sup> (p. 45).

Yet, again, this search for the appropriate term can equally be seen as a commentary on the language itself and its inability to capture reality. In a sense, each new signifier in fact distances the reader further from the desired signified in its evocation of multiple meanings. Nominal construction is also a recurring feature of Darrieussecq's style, described by Marcel Cressot as disassociating a phrase from either a cause (in its lack of subject), or a goal (in its lack of object) (Cressot: 193). In both novels this technique, involving a series of disjointed impressions, captures the immediacy and fragmentation of memory, increasing the poignancy of the protagonists' recollections:

‘Dans le bruit d'élytres des arroseuses, le ronron de la climatisation... les baies vitrées immenses... les ondulations de la chaleur à ras de bitume, à ras de gazon<sup>33</sup> (Darrieussecq 2003: 134); ‘La dérélition douce de la Porte d'Orléans. Le sentiment de la périphérie<sup>34</sup> (Darrieussecq 2005: 50).

The lack of analysis in each case allows the phrase its own weight, implying complexity and emotion. These arhythmic, elliptical techniques subvert normal syntactic relations and undermine the norms of grammar in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the experiences. Meaning is viscerally produced: as a result of associative relations between signs rather than socially-agreed ones, ensuring a productive rather than representative role for each sentence, and, ultimately, the text.

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<sup>32</sup> ‘It's the earth of Paris. Chalk and silica; chestnut mulch, droppings, fuel: what is worn down and what grows, what makes up the dust here as elsewhere, seeds and pollen, meteors, squama, ash’.

<sup>33</sup> ‘Through the noise of the sprinklers, the purr of the air conditioning... the huge bay windows... the waves of heat across the tarmac and the grass...’ (Darrieussecq 2005a: 103).

<sup>34</sup> ‘The gentle dereliction of the Orleans Gate. The sense of periphery’.

The third aspect of Darrieussecq's innovative textual strategy to be addressed here is her use of lay-out. Her employment of unconventional punctuation and pictorial image both add to the embodiment of experience in *White* and *Le Pays*, and bring into question the possibility of textual representation. In terms of punctuation, both novels make use of the slash as a form of punctuation: 'elles s'étaient déjà rencontrées, à un congrès art et médecine / à un dîner d'anciens lycéens / sur un plateau télévisé'<sup>35</sup> (Darrieussecq 2005: 163–4). Here, in *Le Pays*, the seemingly rather frivolous expression of multiple-choice options highlights Marie Rivière's mother's socialite existence and the narrator's own nonchalance towards it. In the following instance in *White*, the choppy punctuation captures Edmée's inexpert use of binoculars and the slashes embody the physical action of the sudden flashes of focus on different things in her field of vision: 'Noir mer / tache rouge (geranium) / noir mer / gris zigzagant du ciel / —ah: le paroi blanche'<sup>36</sup> (p. 28). Much like use of shifters, the reader's dependence on textual context in order to understand the different effects of the slash in the novels emphasises the importance of textual relations to the creation of meaning, dismissing language's role as representative tool. In the same way, hyphens are employed in order to express the monotony of American suburbia Edmée has left behind in *White*: 'une-maison-une-pelouse-une-maison-une-pelouse'<sup>37</sup> (p. 120). Similarly, Edmée's physical state is described using mathematical symbols, recalling a scientific formula:

'Depuis toutes ces semaines le corps d'Edmée c'était: gorge sèche + transpiration + extrémités froides + muscles toniques (grattage quotidien de la parabole) +

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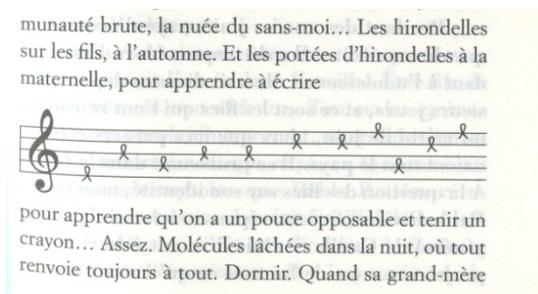
<sup>35</sup> 'they had already met, at an art and medicine conference / at a former students' dinner / on a TV set'.

<sup>36</sup> 'Black sea / red blotch (geranium) / black sea / grey zigzags in the sky / and there: the white wall.'  
(Darrieussecq 2005a: 17)

<sup>37</sup> 'house-lawn-house-lawn' (Darrieussecq 2005a: 91).

conjonctivite (ophtalmie légère) + amenorrhée conjoncturelle (perte des repères jour/nuit)<sup>38</sup> (p. 137).

The punctuation here suggests the physicality of the protagonists' existence in Antarctica and their dependence on an understanding of science for survival. At the same time, the unusual punctuation: the slashes and the hyphens, suggest that conventional linguistic code is insufficient and questions the utility of its representative qualities to expression. Furthermore, in *Le Pays Darrieussecq* by-passes the linguistic sign by making use of pictorial images to present the protagonists' pre-linguistic thoughts. Marie Rivière graphically depicts the chart with which she learned to write at school (p. 25), as can be seen in figure 1: [figure 1 near here]



Not only her non-linguistic thought process, but also her childhood lack of writing skills, are highlighted by lack of phonetic text. Similarly, she draws the split of the Transfrontalière road linking the main towns of the Basque coast (p. 98), as seen in figure 2: [figure 2 near here]

<sup>38</sup> 'For weeks now, Edmée's body has been: dry throat + perspiration + cold extremities + hardened muscles (the daily scraping of the satellite dish) + conjunctivitis (slight ophthalmia) + contextual amenorrhoea (loss of day/night references)' (Darrieussecq 2005a: 105).

La Transfrontalière se sépare en  $\Lambda$  pour relier les trois grandes villes, B. Nord, C. Ouest et B. Sud; elle forme avec la Corniche le réseau routier n° 1, un symbole

These reflections and memories are more easily represented pictorially than linguistically, thus allowing the reader to better experience the protagonist's life. The use of diagrams allows Darrieussecq to present, to manifest experience instead of describing it via language. Yet they also directly replace language and thus emphasise that language has failed. While the relationship between the socially-approved linguistic sign and referent does not allow for either free association or direct presentation, image avoids this formulaic link and thus images which replace text not only suggest the insufficiency of text, but also open up the text to multiple meanings and interpretations.

Finally, the choice of narrative voice in the novels, while bringing the reader ever closer to the protagonists' experiences, equally draws attention to the difficulty of their expression. In *Le Pays*, fragmentation of identity is expressed through the creation of referential instability. Darrieussecq makes use of both standard and bold type to express Marie Rivière's thought process, each representing a distinct voice and contributing to a sense of the difficulty of presenting a unified self. First- and third-person pronouns are also measuredly and alternately employed, sometimes commenting on or resuming the previous section, sometimes changing the subject entirely.<sup>39</sup> In addition, the narrator at times includes a *Je scinde*<sup>40</sup>: 'J/e', an effect the protagonist compares to disappearance of, or escape from,

<sup>39</sup> See Rye: 33 for a fuller exploration of the dual narrative voice in *Le Pays*.

<sup>40</sup> A split 'I'.

her ‘official’ identity: ‘Le psychologique et l’étatique, le privé et le familial avaient disparu’<sup>41</sup> (p. 13). In *White* referential instability is also created, this time by the constantly changing multiple viewpoints as the novel is narrated alternately by Edmée, Peter, and the chorus of ghosts which surround them, representing their previous lives and painful memories. The ghosts also embody social cliché, filling Peter’s head with doubt about his relationship with Edmée: “‘*Cette femme est trop bien pour toi*’... ‘*ça ne marchera jamais!*’”<sup>42</sup> (p. 164). It is the protagonists’ challenge to get rid of the ghosts, to overcome their difficult memories and find their own voices, a recurring concept in Darrieussecq’s work, and linked to the struggle for authentic means of expression. In both texts then, identity struggle is manifested in the dialogic multivocality and lack of a coordinated narrative voice. Additionally, on a metatextual level, this strategy again suggests the need for experimentation in the expression of complex experience. Furthermore, this refusal of an authoritative, unified narrator calls into question the existence of an independent and detached source of meaning, again emphasising the production of meaning through multiple elements of the text itself.

In each of these narrative techniques, the representative and socially-agreed role of language is replaced by the visceral connection of ‘embodiment’, in which signifier does not function as a referent to a pre-established signified, rather the signifier itself embodies lived experience. Darrieussecq allows us to see the layers of the text; she reveals the materiality of language, and carries out a ‘critique du signifiant’<sup>43</sup> (Barthes: 27). This refusal of social code recalls the inadequacy and discomfort of Barthes’s *jouissance*. Yet Darrieussecq concurrently succeeds in manifesting physical otherness, memory and sensation in *White* and fragmented and shifting identity in *Le Pays*, recalling the ‘dicible’<sup>44</sup> (Barthes: 36) and the satisfaction of the *texte de plaisir*. Barthes’s distinction was not about texts, but about processes of reading.

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<sup>41</sup> See also *Le Pays*, pp. 11 and 42. ‘The psychological and the non-governmental, the private and the familial had disappeared’.

<sup>42</sup> ‘That woman is too good for you!... ‘It will never work out!’ (Darrieussecq 2005a: 127).

<sup>43</sup> ‘criticism of the signifier’ (Miller: 15).

<sup>44</sup> ‘can be expressed in words’ (Miller: 21).

In the pages of Darrieussecq's novels the reader finds both satisfaction and frustration; an attempt to mimetically record emotion and experience and an attempt to metatextually dispute the possibility of doing this; Darrieussecq performs both the insufficiency of social discourse and the necessity of some form of language to the expression of the totality of individual experience. Thus Darrieussecq's work demonstrates the cross-over of *plaisir* and *jouissance*. Furthermore, her work highlights Barthes's insistence that the real *texte de jouissance* is one that reveals both processes of reading at once. Indeed the gap or the tension, and, by extension, the co-existence, described in Barthes's work, between satisfying and problematic processes of reading, is apparent in *White* and *Le Pays*. Furthermore, although Darrieussecq side-steps social code in the expression of authentic emotion and sensation, the pleasures of her texts are still multiple. In this way, Darrieussecq's novels rejuvenate Barthes's concepts, with language always in crisis but still producing *plaisir*. The experimental self-awareness of Darrieussecq's novels does not prevent their more accessible experiential pleasures. Indeed her capacity to unite experience and experiment, and *plaisir* and *jouissance* in the reader contributes to the breaking down of barriers between 'accessible' and 'challenging' reading.

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