

## **The Ghost and the Machine: Minds and Spirits in Darrieussecq**

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Abstract: Darrieussecq's novels are filled with ghosts. A phantom husband appears to the wife he left behind. A sibling lost in early childhood becomes a face at the window or a stranger on a train. Twice Darrieussecq has her narrators recount the story from beyond the grave. How does the strong presence of the supernatural in her writing relate to the scientific aspects of her fiction, which explore technological advances and scientific theories with rationalist enthusiasm? In particular, how do these disembodied spirits square with a resolutely materialist view of the mind, which embodies consciousness in the neurons of the physical brain? The prominent theme of consciousness in Darrieussecq's fiction is intriguingly entwined with that of ghosts. As the return of repressed memories, or as outward manifestations of mourning in the living, Darrieussecq's representation of ghosts draws on traditional psychoanalytic understanding of the mind, while troubling the texts' overt reliance on a cognitive model of consciousness. This paper aims to unpick the literal and figurative implications of the spectres in the text, in order to see how they shape the model of the mind that Darrieussecq presents to her reader.

'The ghost in the machine' is Gilbert Ryle's derisive term for Cartesian dualism, the theory that the mind is an immaterial substance that is different in kind from the material brain and existing outside the physical, spatial reality in which the brain exists. Ryle defines his epithet as follows:

The official doctrine, which hails chiefly from Descartes, is something like this. With the doubtful exception of idiots and infants in arms every human being has both a body and a mind. Some would prefer to say that every human being is both a body and a mind. His body and his mind are ordinarily harnessed together, but after the death of the body his mind may continue to exist and function. Human bodies are in space and are subject to mechanical

laws which govern all other bodies in space. But minds are not in space, nor are their operations subject to mechanical laws. Such in outline is the official theory. I shall often speak of it, with deliberate abusiveness, as ‘the dogma of the Ghost in the Machine’.<sup>1</sup>

The problem with this dualist view of the mind, as Ryle sees it, is the same question first raised by Descartes’s astute pupil, Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia, in objection to his theory: how can a mind lacking any material attributes causally interact with a material body? Unconvinced by Descartes’s suggestion that the pineal gland can be moved directly by the will of the soul, or by later dualists who posited God as intermediary to bridge the gap, Ryle and other materialist philosophers do away with the ghost altogether. Rather than a simple machine needing an immaterial operator, the brain *is* the mind, a mind/brain. It a single physical substance, in which the personal conscious experiences of thoughts and sensations arise directly from the electro-chemical activity of the physical organ, and require no outside factors to account for their existence.

Modern philosophy has now reached a ‘consensus of sorts’, according to Daniel Dennett, in favour of materialism, and the materialist mindbrain is the foundational assumption on which the new sciences of consciousness – neurology, psycholinguistics, clinical and evolutionary psychology – are built.<sup>2</sup> Dualism, for all that, has not withered away: most religions, for instance, involve belief in an immaterial soul which is linked to our corporeal existence during our lifetimes but can continue to live on independently and consciously after the death of the body. And

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<sup>1</sup> Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London: Penguin, 1949), p. 17

<sup>2</sup> Daniel C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (1991) (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 37

also important for our purposes is the widespread superstition that an immaterial consciousness can survive the death of the physical brain in the form of a ghost.

Darrieussecq is a declared atheist, but she is not without superstitions: ‘La nuit je crois aux spectres, le jour je suis cartésienne’, she says.<sup>3</sup> Where consciousness is concerned, though, it might be suggested that the belief in ghosts is actually more Cartesian than her daytime rational scepticism. Her view of the mind is specifically anti-Cartesian in its adoption of the materialist model of cognitive science. Thoughts, sensations and emotions are firmly placed within the physical brain; Darrieussecq refers knowledgably to the brain areas, neuronal and hormonal systems that are presented as underlying her characters’ conscious experiences.<sup>4</sup> This is not to say, of course, that the functioning of the brain forms part of the characters’ own subjective awareness: as Shirley Jordan puts it, ‘we recognize [in her work] the integrity of unique subjectivity which evokes “spirit” and “soul” rather than machine’.<sup>5</sup> (Ryle’s mindbrain model, in fact, rejects the term ‘machine’ as strongly as it does ‘ghost’, arguing that the metaphor is too reductive to describe the complex, autonomous system through which physical processes give rise to conscious experience.) The issue is one of, to use the philosophical term, *supervenience*: the idea that consciousness, while not presenting its biological causes to the subject’s own awareness, nevertheless emanates directly from electro-chemical activity in his/her brain. Two hypothetical matching brains in an exactly identical state must, the theory goes, be undergoing an identical conscious experience.

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<sup>3</sup> Entretien (with Becky Miller and Martha Holmes, 2001), *Site Marie Darrieussecq*, <http://www.uri.edu/artsci/ml/durand/darrieussecq/fr/entretien2001.html> [last accessed 01.07.09]. In the same interview, she declares: ‘Je suis athée, féministe, et européenne.’

<sup>4</sup> For an exploration of influences on Darrieussecq’s writing from neurology, clinical psychology, and other areas of cognitive science, see Simon Kemp, ‘Darrieussecq’s Mind’, *French Studies*, 62 (2008), 429–41.

<sup>5</sup> Shirley Jordan, ‘Un grand coup de pied dans le château de cubes’: Formal Experimentation in Marie Darrieussecq’s *Bref Séjour chez les vivants*, *MLR* 100 (2005), 51–67 (p. 63).

The pervasive presence of ghosts in Darrieussecq's fiction might seem at odds with this stance: if a ghost is a disembodied individual consciousness, surely the mind cannot therefore be merely a function of neurological activity, but must rather be a separate, immaterial substance? In this essay, I wish to show that Darrieussecq's ghosts do challenge and modify the cognitive view of the mind her fiction presents, although perhaps not in the way we might expect.

Ghosts feature prominently in five of Darrieussecq's seven novels and several of her short stories. In four of the novels the ghost is that of a lost family member, a recurring theme in Darrieussecq's work linked to a family tragedy from her own past. In *Naissance des fantômes* (1998), the unexplained disappearance of the narrator's husband at the start of the novel is complemented by his ghostly reappearances towards the end. *Bref séjour chez les vivants* (2001), *Le Pays* (2005) and *Tom est mort* (2007) each centre on the effects on surviving family members of the death of a young boy: in the first, the boy reappears to his sister as a face at the window at night, in the second, the narrator is suddenly convinced that an adult figure in a dark train carriage is her brother who died in infancy; and in the third, a bereaved mother believes she has captured the voice of her son's ghost on tape. *White* (2003) functions rather differently in that its two protagonists, who are each haunted by past traumas of their own, have their stories narrated by the nameless, homogenous multitude of ghosts who have made Antarctica their home. Lastly, narrating ghosts feature in two short stories from the *Zoo* collection (2006): the narrator of 'Noël parmi nous' (2002) is a ghost of the adult who would have existed had her childhood self not been killed in a road accident; the narrator of 'Encore là' (2005) is starving to death with anorexia, and appears to continue narrating past the point of her own death.

How do these spirits fit with Darrieussecq's view of the mind? First of all, it is important to note that, while dualism may be a superfluous hypothesis to a cognitive view of the mind, it is not ruled out by it. One can take an interest in neurology while retaining a belief in an immortal soul. Dualism is rare, but not unknown, among cognitive scientists themselves. One such is John C. Eccles, who declares his belief in the self as a divinely implanted soul in the final chapter of his book, *Evolution of the Brain: Creation of the Self*, while admitting that the belief has no connection to the neurological, Darwinist view of mind detailed elsewhere in the text.<sup>6</sup> The book heads the list of works consulted in researching *Bref séjour chez les vivants* which Darrieussecq supplied to Jordan for her article on the novel.<sup>7</sup>

Even given this proviso, it is questionable how many of Darrieussecq's ghosts would fulfil the definition of a disembodied consciousness. Those ghosts who are not narrators of their stories appear only to those suffering the loss of the loved one concerned, and the reader is invited to interpret them as hallucinatory wish-fulfilment or symbolic externalization of the longing of the bereaved. The narrator of *Le Pays* expresses this most clearly in its final lines:

Les fantômes ne rôdent pas dans les limbes. Ils n'existent que dans la rencontre. Ils n'ont d'autre lieu que leur apparition. Quand ils disparaissent, c'est totalement. n'ont pas de vie intérieure, ils n'ont pas de vie quelque part, ils n'ont ni psychologie ni mémoire. Ils ne souffrent pas. Ils naissent de notre hantise, qui les allume et les éteint, oscillants, pauvres chandelles. Ils ne sont que pour nous.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> John C. Eccles, *Evolution of the Brain: Creation of the Self* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 239.

<sup>7</sup> Jordan, p. 62n.

<sup>8</sup> *Le Pays* (Paris: POL, 2005), p. 297.

Marie Rivière's verdict might stand for the three other novels of lost family members as well. The appearance of the ghostly husband in *Naissance des fantômes* coincides with the wife's overwhelming need to feel his presence. The apparitions of Pierre in *Bref séjour* as a half-glimpsed face and half-heard voice, or later as a vision in the oxygen-starved brain of a drowning woman, can easily be rationalized in a sceptical interpretation.<sup>9</sup> In *Tom est mort*, the ghostly voice of the son is heard by the grieving mother alone; in one episode, her husband, who is present and hears nothing, raps her skull with his fist, screaming that the voice is in her head; the narrator will eventually acknowledge that he is right.<sup>10</sup> While some ambiguities remain, to which I shall return later, it is not difficult for readers to interpret these ghosts as nothing but the mental projections of the living. It would seem harder to do so, however, in the cases of ghosts that are endowed with the capacity to narrate their own experiences. Where Darrieussecq presents us with narrating spirits, though, the experiment deliberately stops short of creating an individual immaterial consciousness. The short story 'Encore là' plays with the borderline of life and death: in the final passages the narrator's son and his babysitter, standing at the narrator's bedside, appear to believe she has passed away, while only the reader is privy to her silent protests: the question is left open, however, as to whether we are seeing the last flickers of consciousness in a dying brain, or a lingering soul that will continue beyond the confines of the story. The might-have-been narrator of 'Noël parmi nous' tells us she is married, living in Paris, and has arrived at the parental home where we see her by TGV, having apparently been invited to visit in a telephone conversation with her mother. Only in the final lines, as the rest of the family arrive, do we learn from the mother that the narrator in fact died in childhood:

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<sup>9</sup> *Bref séjour chez les vivants* (Paris: POL, 2001), pp. 283–84, 306.

<sup>10</sup> *Tom est mort* (Paris: POL, 2007), p. 142.

Lorsque la famille débarqua, la veille de Noël, je les vis ôter les draps des meubles, ouvrir les pièces et aérer. Une de mes plus jeunes nièces demanda qui j'étais, sur la photo de la cheminée:

‘J'ai rêvé qu'elle était vivante,’ dit ma mère en baissant la voix, ‘mariée à Paris, que nous parlions au téléphone et qu'elle venait passer Noël parmi nous.’<sup>11</sup>

The ending is something rather more interesting than a Hollywood-style twist revealing the protagonist was a ghost all along, since we perhaps do not have a ghost narrator at all, but instead the mother's mental projection turned inside out, given a voice and form that can look back at the person who imagined it. It is essentially the same situation as the ghost of Paul seen by Marie on the Eurostar in *Le Pays*, who also arises out of Marie's speculations of the hypothetical adult her brother would have made, only here a perspectival experiment switches the points of view to have the hypothetical person observe the real one.

An experiment in point-of-view is a clear motivation for the narrative instance in *White*, Darrieussecq's only sustained ghost-narration to date. As a narrative device, the Antarctic ghosts enable the writer to blur narrative genres with a homodiegetic narrating voice which nevertheless has ‘omniscient’ access to characters' minds. Darrieussecq's next novel *Le Pays*, will perform a related experiment in blurring the conventions of first- and third-person narration. Although the ghosts of *White* can slip into the protagonists' minds to read their thoughts, they appear to have few thoughts of their own: we learn nothing about them, and at no point does any individual self

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<sup>11</sup> ‘Noël parmi nous’ (2002), in *Zoo* (Paris: POL, 2006), pp. 203–217 (p. 217).

arise out of the undifferentiated *nous*. In this they are clearly of a different status to the ghost of Peter's sister Clara in the same novel, who has individuality but is once again presented as a simple projection of Peter's memories and nightmares. Despite their lack of individual characteristics, there are also some indications of a reading which equates the ghosts with the protagonists' unconscious fears. Darrieussecq says of the novel:

Je pense que les gens arrivent à s'aimer et à se toucher quand ils ont enlevé entre eux le rideau de fantômes. C'est peut-être une banalité, mais le livre met ça en scène: comment on évacue les fantômes, comment on arrive à être à deux.<sup>12</sup>

This is supported by the last pages of the novel, where the love between Peter and Edmée, and the fresh start implied in her conceiving their child, trigger a change in the narrative instance: an impersonal voice takes control and the *nous* of the ghosts becomes *ils* as past and present anxieties lose their hold on the protagonists' minds.

As with the inside/outside narrative instance afforded by the ghost-narrators of *White*, formal and stylistic motivations are discernable behind many of the ghostly encounters Darrieussecq stages. In interviews she talks frequently about her interest in discovering new forms of expression in order to avoid the habitual labels with which we discuss mental life. She claims her first four novels were:

une lutte pour arriver à dire le réel en contournant les lieux communs et en particulier les lieux communs de la psychologie. Dans *Naissance des fantômes*, au lieu d'écrire « je me sentais très angoissé parce que mon mari est

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<sup>12</sup> 'Entretien avec Marie Darrieussecq', interview with John Lambeth, *The French Review* 79 (2006), 806–818 (pp. 816–17).



disparu ce soir », j’essaie, une fois que j’ai posé le problème que mon mari est disparu, qui est la phrase d’entrée, j’essaie de trouver d’autres façons, j’essaie d’ouvrir d’autres fenêtres de qu’est-ce que c’est que l’angoisse, qu’est-ce que c’est être seule [...].<sup>13</sup>

Darrieussecq’s striking use of neurological discourse to describe mental activity is perhaps the clearest example of this strategy, but ghosts too might be seen as an attempt to find an unorthodox literary rendering of her characters’ psychology.<sup>14</sup> It is a persuasive interpretation to see Darrieussecq’s work as psychological studies of loss and mourning that reject the traditions of the psychological novel. The presence of ghosts exteriorizes the emotions of the protagonist, from the trauma of the death or abandonment to the longing to see the loved one again, just as, in *Bref séjour chez les vivants*, the haunted house that swallows up a young woman in the story recounted by Jeanne to her analyst represents her own mixed feelings of nostalgia and liberation towards the family home she has left behind.<sup>15</sup>

While Darrieussecq’s ghosts are therefore not necessarily in conflict with a materialist view of the mind, they do temper her cognitive model of consciousness with interference from older theories of how the mind works. Psychoanalysis, often seen as hostile towards or incompatible with cognitive science, has a presence in Darrieussecq’s work that is strongly linked to the ghosts, as if they offered a means to coexist with the dominant cognitive paradigm of the mindbrain. Darrieussecq says in interview of her second novel:

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<sup>13</sup> Lambeth, p. 808.

<sup>14</sup> My thanks to Catherine Rodgers for suggesting this reading.

<sup>15</sup> The episode occurs in *Bref séjour chez les vivants*, pp. 260–61, and is discussed more fully in Simon Kemp, ‘Homeland: voyageurs et patrie dans les romans de Marie Darrieussecq’, in *Nomadismes des romancières contemporaines de langue française*, ed. by Audrey Lasserre and Anne Simon (Paris: Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2008), pp. 159–66.

Le titre *Naissance des fantômes* est important pour moi parce que c'était une période de ma vie où j'avais entamé une psychanalyse. J'avais vraiment l'impression d'être en train de tuer pour de bon plusieurs fantômes.<sup>16</sup>

Kathryn Robson offers a persuasive psychoanalytic reading of this novel, which also functions as a critique of Freud's ideas on mourning and melancholia. Robson argues that Freud's understanding of melancholia as 'mourning gone awry',<sup>17</sup> in which the subject fails to acknowledge the reality of their loss, is modified by Darrieussecq's representation of the protagonist's situation in *Naissance des fantômes*, as the uncertainty surrounding her husband's disappearance leaves her no fixed 'reality' to acknowledge:

In both of these texts [Darrieussecq's *Naissance des fantômes* and Régine Detambel's *La Chambre d'écho*], loss generates an urgent need to locate the other and reorient the self – a process that is delayed by the women's need to deny loss, to recreate an alternative space in which the object can, to return to Freud's terms, be 'psychically prolonged'.<sup>18</sup>

For Robson, the ghostly husband represents a melancholic stasis, in which the subject cannot relinquish the love object until the conditions are met in which mourning can take place.

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<sup>16</sup> '« Des livres sur la liberté »: conversation avec Marie Darrieussecq', interview with Jeannette Gaudet, *Dalhousie French Studies*, 59 (2002), 108–18 (p. 112)

<sup>17</sup> Kathryn Robson, 'Virtual Reality: The Subject of Loss in Marie Darrieussecq's *Naissance des fantômes* and Régine Detambel's *La Chambre d'écho*', *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 41 (2004), 3–15 (p. 6).

<sup>18</sup> Robson, p. 8.

Equally, the Freudian idea of the return of the repressed offers us a useful interpretative key to *Bref séjour chez les vivants*, in particular. The stream-of-consciousness mode of narrative shows us how the conscious minds of the protagonists skirt around or shy away from the memory of their drowned brother, Pierre, which we piece together from involuntary memory flashes brought on by what they see and hear on the day the narrative takes place. Pierre's face at the window, like his presence in the dreams and visions of the other protagonists, suggests that the buried guilt and trauma has been, in Freud's words, 'proliferating in the dark' of the unconscious until it is strong enough to break through unbidden to the conscious mind.<sup>19</sup> The narrator of *Le Pays* appears to support this psychoanalytic interpretation when she connects her vision of Paul's ghost to her having spent the day of the apparition in the company of a psychoanalyst and his analysands:

Dans cette journée londonienne, qu'est-ce qui se prêtait à l'apparition de mon frère un peu plus tard dans l'Eurostar? La présence de la vodka dans le *cranberry juice*? Le petit va-et-vient des patients de Walid, dont le travail soulevait les spectres comme la poussière sous un balai? L'exposition de ma mère à la Tate? Ou simplement le manque de sommeil? Quelque chose que je portais depuis longtemps, une impression profonde, la forme en creux d'un disparu, allait projeter dans l'espace une sorte de corps.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> 'Sie [die Triebrepräsenz] wuchert sozusagen im Dunkeln und findet extreme Ausdrucksformen'; 'It [the instinctual representative] proliferates, one might say, in the dark, and finds extreme forms of expression'. Sigmund Freud, 'Die Verdrängung' ['Repression'] (1915), in *Psychologische Schriften: Studienausgabe*, ed. by Alexander Mitscherlich and others, 11 vols (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1969–75), III, pp. 103–18 (p. 110).

<sup>20</sup> *Le Pays*, p. 236.

While the link to the psychoanalyst is given only as one among several reasons for her vision – albeit the only one specifically linked to raising ghosts – the final line of the quotation suggests that the uncanny experience is to be understood in terms of the Freudian *unheimlich*, the familiarity at the heart of an experience of the uncanny, betraying the roots of an apparently external, supernatural event in the buried past of the self.<sup>21</sup>

Darrièssecq, having undergone psychoanalysis in the 1990s as she was writing *Truismes*, has recently become a practising analyst herself.<sup>22</sup> She argues that her experiences as patient and analyst are helpful to her as a writer, not by encouraging narcissistic introspection, but by allowing her to deal with her personal phantoms privately and thus look outwards in her fiction:

Freud disait que la fin de l'analyse, c'était prendre conscience de la banalité de son cas. Se croire maudit, tenir à son malheur, c'est vivre enfermé. En fin d'analyse on peut passer à autre chose. Être libéré de soi. Entre autre effets bénéfiques, créer plus librement.

Loin de me « stériliser », l'analyse a débarrassé mes romans de leur trop-plein de névrose moi-moïste. Avant *Truismes*, mes romans étaient impubliables parce qu'ils ne concernaient que moi. J'écrivis pour régler des comptes, pour m'adresser à quelques proches. *J'expliquais*, je justifiais.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Freud describes the uncanny as 'das ehemals Heimische, Altvertraute. Die Vorsilbe "un" an diesem Worte ist aber die Marke der Verdrängung'; 'what was once homely [the German *unheimlich* has the etymological sense of 'unhomely'], long-intimate. The prefix "un-" on this word is the mark of repression'. Freud, 'Das Unheimliche', ['The Uncanny'] (1919), in *Psychologische Schriften: Studienausgabe*, IV, pp. 241–74 (p. 267).

<sup>22</sup> See Marie Darrièssecq, 'Être libéré de soi', *Le Magazine littéraire*, March 2008, p. 58.

<sup>23</sup> 'Être libéré de soi', p. 58.

While she says, ‘je ne jamais à proprement parler raconté mon analyse dans mes livres’, she does use her fiction as a metaphor, ‘pour dire mes hantises, heureuses ou malheureuses, tragiques ou drôles’.<sup>24</sup> Her ghosts reflect this: in them we see not only the influence of a psychoanalytic model of the unconscious and its relationship to consciousness, but also a narrative of the psychoanalytic cure. Darrieussecq’s characters find resolution through the unearthing of their past trauma, laying ghosts to rest by bringing them into the light of their consciousness. This is very different from the kinds of psychotherapies linked to cognitive science, which are rather less propitious for literary inspiration, involving as they do the altering of brain chemistry via anti-depressants or the imprinting of new patterns of positive thinking through Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, all the while striving to keep the spectres firmly in the dark.

For Tzvetan Todorov, the fantastic is a hesitation between two readings, suspended between rational and supernatural interpretations.<sup>25</sup> Darrieussecq’s ghosts also signal a hesitation, two separate hesitations in fact, concerning the nature of consciousness. They are a hesitation between cognitive and psychoanalytic understandings of the mind, and a hesitation between materialist and dualist approaches to the soul. We may interpret the phantoms as projections by the living that harmonize with a materialist view of mind, but we are not obliged to do so. Indeed, among all the evidence that encourages us to see the ghosts as hallucinatory symbols of loss, there is always something that raises doubts: when the phantom husband appears to the narrator of *Naissance des fantômes* at her mother-in-law’s dinner party, why does her mother-in-law also cry out? When Nore sees Pierre’s ghost in *Bref séjour*, how do we explain Ann’s simultaneous vision of a presence in the

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<sup>24</sup> ‘Être libéré de soi, p. 58.

<sup>25</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (Paris: Seuil, 1970).

room with her sister?<sup>26</sup> In comparing François Ozon's *Sous le sable* (2000) with *Naissance des fantômes* (plausibly its unacknowledged inspiration), Darrieussecq criticizes the film for making clear the imaginary status of its 'ghost':

Ce que je reproche au film d'Ozon – enfin, ce n'est pas un reproche – c'est son propos à lui, après tout – c'est qu'il me semble qu'on ne peut jamais se dire que le fantôme existe vraiment [...]. Elle est en train de faire une crise du deuil mais ça ne verse jamais du côté du fantastique. Il n'y a jamais de question sur le statut du fantôme. Elle l'hallucine. Moi, je voulais faire un livre beaucoup plus ambigu. J'ai envie de prendre au pied de la lettre mon personnage. C'est-à-dire que ce qu'elle est en train de dire et de vivre, elle le dit et le vit vraiment et il faut la croire.<sup>27</sup>

The doubt left as to the status of Darrieussecq's ghosts thus serves an important function in allowing the spectator to experience the protagonist's mind through her own subjectivity.

It is not only an intellectual hesitation between competing conceptual systems. It is also, for Darrieussecq's characters at least, an emotional hesitation. Darrieussecq's protagonists are torn between what they know of the physical basis of life, and what they yearn to believe in their grief, as we see with Tom's recorded ghost-voice in *Tom est mort*:

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<sup>26</sup> The situation in this novel is further complicated by the fact that Nore, the youngest sister, is believed by the others to be unaware of Pierre's drowning, which occurred before she was born. Hints throughout the novel, however, such as her distraction on the beach by an unknown object floating in the sea (p. 80), suggest she is aware on some level of the family tragedy.

<sup>27</sup> Gaudet, pp. 113–14.

Tom était là, avec sa voix de spectre, et parfois, sa voix d'avant, voyelles et consonnes, et mon cœur explosait.<sup>28</sup>

This desperation to see her son as something outlasting the death of his body, leaves her in cognitive dissonance: the body in the morgue both is and is not Tom, and the two viewpoints cannot be reconciled:

Tom faisait des allers et retours hors de son corps, *in and out of his body*. Que faire de ce corps-là ? Une coquille vide. Une mue comme les animaux laissent derrière eux, et qu'on trouve enroulée sur le chemin ou accrochée aux arbres, inutile, translucide, un peu dégoûtante. [...] Et d'autres fois je pensais à Tom dans ce corps. Resté pris dans ce corps. Tom-corps enfermé seul dans un tiroir de la morgue d'un hôpital étranger, loin de tout, loin de nous. Seul. Dans le froid. [...] Tom était là. Il fallait s'occuper de lui, ne pas le laisser seul.<sup>29</sup>

In one view, what is left in the morgue is not her son; it is an empty shell from which the essence of the living person has departed. But following this comes the more troubling, yet not easily dismissed, materialist view: her son has gone nowhere, as he *is* his physical body, 'Tom-corps', nothing more, and the mother, in her love for him, finds herself faced with the absurd and horrifying idea of wishing to nurture a corpse.

Finally, then, Darrieussecq's ghosts leave us in limbo. In the conceptualization of consciousness, we find ourselves in a grey area between the evidence-based theories of a scientific model of the mind and the persuasive stories of a psychoanalytic one. Living minds in Darrieussecq may primarily be seen in terms

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<sup>28</sup> *Tom est mort*, p. 149.

<sup>29</sup> *Tom est mort*, pp. 75–76.

drawn from scientific disciplines of neurology, psychology and related fields, but the haunting of these minds by the dead brings echoes of psychoanalytic ideas of melancholia, repression, and the benefits of the talking cure. Even more fundamentally, when we come to the philosophical question of what a mind *is*, the ghosts again deny us a clear answer. With Darrieussecq's characters in their grief, we are forced to hesitate between materialism and dualism, between the physical evidence of the death of the brain and the need to believe the loved one is not altogether lost.

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