

REIMAGINING THE FAMILY?
LESBIAN MOTHERING IN FRENCH LITERATURE

Thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

at the University of Leicester

by

Robert Oliver Payne

School of Arts

University of Leicester

September 2017

Abstract

In the last two decades, gay and lesbian parenting has emerged as a highly contentious subject in France. The creation of the *Pacte Civil de Solidarité* in 1999 and the legalization of same-sex marriage and adoption in 2013 testify to the evolution of gay and lesbian parenting from a hidden practice into a public matter. The growing visibility of gay and lesbian parenting has coincided with the emergence of lesbian mothering as a literary theme. While texts portraying lesbian mothers remain small in number, the fact that most were published after 2000 suggests their being on the rise. This thesis engages with this nascent branch of French literature, focusing on ten texts published between 1970 and 2013. It thus encompasses the period from the birth of the modern gay and lesbian movement until the adoption of same-sex marriage in France. It shows how the texts both reflect changes to the family and contribute to political and theoretical debates on gay and lesbian parenting and, more broadly, to the redefining of mothering and family in twentieth- and twenty-first-century France.

Acknowledgements

There are many people whom I would like to thank for their contributions to this thesis. I first wish to express my eternal gratitude to my supervisors, Marion Krauthaker and Elizabeth Jones, for their advice, expertise, and support, as well as for sharing and fostering my passion for the subject of this thesis. I am also grateful to Nicole Fayard and Sharon Wood for their guidance during the early stages of this thesis. Nicole's final year undergraduate module, 'Gender and Power in Contemporary France', is without doubt what inspired me to pursue postgraduate research in this field. I would also like to thank Claire Jenkins and Shirley Jordan for agreeing to act as examiners for this thesis.

Other people have contributed to this thesis in ways that are more personal. I would like to thank the following colleagues and friends at the University of Leicester for being a vital source of encouragement and laughter during my four years as a PhD candidate: Adelina Hild, Aurélie Joubert, Clara Garavelli, Corinne Pelton, Emma Staniland, Inès Hassen, Karol Valderrama-Burgos, Marc Ripley, Michela Baldo, Michelle Harrison, and Sara Naylor; Marie Dehout, Simon Lambert, Sonia Alba, and Sonia Bai deserve a special mention for being the most amazing office buddies, and for putting up with the incessant chatter to which I have subjected them! Thank you also to my students for their role in making the last four years so enjoyable and memorable.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge a number of people outside university whose constant presence and support have been, and continue to be, hugely important to me: first, my best friends, Rosemary Chell and Sarah Foster; and last but not least, Mum and Dad, Laura and James, Grandma Connie and Grandad Ernie.

Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	3
Table of Contents	4
Introduction: Historicizing Lesbian Mothering	6
What This Thesis Does	14
Theorizing Lesbian Mothering	19
Early Psychoanalysis and Mothering	19
Feminism and Mothering	22
Essentialism, Constructionism, and Lesbian Mothering	29
Lesbianism, Literature, and Literary Criticism	44
Mothering, Literature, and Literary Criticism	47
Conclusion	52
Lesbianism and the Institution of Motherhood	54
Mothering as a Single-Minded Identity	56
The Mother–Daughter Relationship	65
Maternal Ambivalence	72
Conclusion	85
The Performativity of Mothering	87
Un père qui n’en est pas un? The Role of the Father in Lesbian Families	93
Lesbian Families and the Sameness–Difference Debate	106
Procréation médicalement... arbitraire	114
Conclusion	121
Beyond the Mother	123
The Role of Grandparents in Lesbian Families	125
Beyond the Family, Beyond the Narrative	135
Conclusion	145
Gender and Genre	147
The Novel	151
Writing the Self	163

Conclusion	178
Conclusion	180
Directions for Future Research	182
Bibliography	184

Introduction: Historicizing Lesbian Mothering

In the last two decades, gay and lesbian parenting has emerged as a highly contentious subject in France. The creation of the *Pacte Civil de Solidarité*, or civil partnerships, in 1999 and the legalization of same-sex marriage and adoption in 2013 testify to the evolution of gay and lesbian parenting from a hidden practice into a public matter. This process is part of a progressive deconstruction of norms of gender, sexuality, and the family that first became obvious in the nineteenth century and accelerated in the twentieth. Since the 1970s, the nuclear family has been contested by the rising divorce rate, the increase in alternative family groupings, and the widespread availability of abortion and contraception. This introduction seeks to contextualize and explain the emergence of gay and lesbian parenting by tracing the transformation of gender norms and practices since the nineteenth century.

In the nineteenth century, gender roles were largely determined by the separation between public and private spheres: men controlled the public realms of politics and the workforce, which were equated with prestige; women were associated with the supposedly trivial, private matters of the family and home. This was widely perceived to be the result of innate sexual difference: because women carried children, women had to take care of them. Since women did not belong in the political sphere, then, they did not require the same political privileges and status as men. The 1789 *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen* denied citizenship and the right to vote to women. Their economic and social dependency on men was then reaffirmed by the 1804 Civil Code, which defined women as the property of men, and by the abolishment of divorce in 1816. In practice, however, women did not always conform to the dominant image of woman as wife and mother. As Geneviève Fraisse and Michelle Perrot point out, the nineteenth century saw an expansion of female roles: women were indeed mothers, but they were also workers, and they could be single and emancipated.¹ Moreover, women exploited the widely accepted link between mothering and the health of the nation to acquire education and employment rights that would provide the impetus for the overhaul of

¹ Geneviève Fraisse and Michelle Perrot (eds), *Histoire des femmes en Occident: Le XIX^e siècle* (Paris: Perrin, 2002 [1991]), p. 14.

patriarchal gender relations in the twentieth century. The expectation that mothers take responsibility for their children's learning made women's own education necessary. However, until the adoption of the 1881–82 Ferry Laws, which made public education free, compulsory, and secular, girls' education remained unchanged from that of the pre-Revolution period.² For most of the nineteenth century, then, education continued to be gender-specific: whereas boys studied geography and mathematics, girls were prepared for domestic and family life and were, fittingly, often schooled at home. While female education thus reified the ties between womanhood, domesticity, and mothering, it was undoubtedly a vital first step towards the educational opportunities that are now open to women and the questioning of pre-existing conceptions of motherhood. Furthermore, women's participation in the workforce, although not a new phenomenon, became a subject of heated debate in the nineteenth century. Since a woman's primary duty was as a wife and mother, contributions to these debates tended to uphold the gendered separation between public and private spheres—that is, the 'prétendue opposition entre foyer et travail, maternité et salariat, féminité et productivité'.³ While attitudes towards female employment often reinforced gendered binary pairs, then, the very fact that debates began to be voiced on its acceptability and nature, and the attempt to reinforce women's roles as wives and mothers, indicates the growing presence of women in the workforce and, more widely, the nascent troubling of gender relations and roles in the nineteenth century.

The increasing participation of women in education and the workforce coincided with calls for women's rights. In 1791, Olympe de Gouges published her response to the 1789 *Déclaration*, the *Déclaration des Droits de la Femme et de la Citoyenne*, in which she demanded male–female equality, women's financial independence, and their right to enter politics, famously stating that 'la femme a le droit de monter sur l'échafaud; elle doit avoir également celui de monter à la tribune'. Although de Gouges's *Déclaration* had little immediate impact, her successors continued to press for women's rights.⁴ Significantly, the term "feminism" was coined in 1837 by early socialist thinker Charles Fourier. The advancement of women's rights henceforth became a political and social

² For a discussion of nineteenth-century female education, see Françoise Mayeur, 'L'Éducation des filles: Le Modèle laïque', in *Histoire des femmes*, ed. by Fraisse and Perrot, pp. 281–301 (pp. 281–83).

³ Joan W. Scott, 'La Travailleuse', trans. by Geneviève Faure, in *Histoire des femmes*, ed. by Fraisse and Perrot, pp. 479–511 (p. 480).

⁴ For a discussion of nineteenth-century feminists' demands, see Anne-Marie Käppeli, 'Scènes féministes', in *Histoire des femmes*, ed. by Fraisse and Perrot, pp. 575–613 (pp. 590–600).

movement formed in response to women's exclusion from politics and the misogyny of society more broadly. In particular, scientific discourse, which in the nineteenth century came to be regarded as the truth, posited the inferiority of the female body and mind.⁵ In many medical treatises, female sexuality was portrayed as a myth or pathology. The theory of evolution was used to justify sexual inequality scientifically: the function of women as perpetuators of the species precluded their occupation of roles outside the home.

The nineteenth century, then, laid the foundations for the considerable advances made towards gender equality in the twentieth century. World War One forced women to take on roles traditionally assumed by men: heads of the family, munitions workers, and even auxiliaries in the army. In Britain, women's contribution to the war effort was instrumental in the introduction of female suffrage in 1918. Although the War was, then, the 'ère du possible' for women, it was also, to some extent, 'une parenthèse avant un retour à la normale'.⁶ Although a return to "normality" was expected after the War, in reality they continued to work outside the home. In France, between 1906 and 1946 women accounted for over 35% of the working population.⁷ This underscores, again, the discrepancy between ideologies and practices of gender.

The evolution of gender ideologies was a gradual and non-linear process. Periods of the twentieth century were marked by attempts to return to a more gender-normative society, especially during and after the occupation. Replacing "Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité" with "Travail, Famille, Patrie", the Vichy government advocated a return to traditional, Catholic values. It therefore reiterated the nineteenth-century view of women as naturally suited to mothering and domesticity. Hélène Eck argues, however, that the regime's attitude towards women was not purposefully misogynistic but to reinforce the role of the family as the basis of society.⁸ The stability of society depended on the stability of the family, which in turn relied on the natural and complementary sexual difference between husband and wife. The regime thus reinscribed the link promoted in the nineteenth century between mothering and the health of the nation. Under Vichy, divorce

⁵ See Charles Sowerwine, 'Woman's Brain, Man's Brain: Feminism and Anthropology in Late Nineteenth-Century France', *Women's History Review*, 12 (2003), 289–308.

⁶ Françoise Thébaud, 'La Grande Guerre: Le Triomphe de la division sexuelle', in *Histoire des femmes en Occident: Le XX^e siècle*, ed. by Françoise Thébaud (Paris: Perrin, 2002 [1992]), pp. 85–144 (pp. 86–87).

⁷ Anne-Marie Sohn, 'Entre deux guerres: Les Rôles féminins en France et en Angleterre', in *Histoire des femmes*, ed. by Thébaud, pp. 165–95 (p. 170).

⁸ Hélène Eck, 'Les Françaises sous Vichy: Femmes du désastre – citoyennes par le désastre', in *Histoire des femmes en Occident*, ed. by Thébaud, pp. 287–323 (p. 291).

became harder to obtain, and harsher penalties were given to those who performed abortions. Although women were granted the right to vote in 1944—later than in Britain (1918), Germany (1918), and the United States (1920)—the liberation did not immediately bring about a revolution in attitudes towards gender roles. The period of modernization after the War promoted women's role not only as wives and mothers but also as consumers, most patently through advertising and women's magazines.

French women began again to push for gender equality in the wake of May 1968 and by means of the *Mouvement de libération des femmes* formed in the same year. Women's relationship with mothering—a cornerstone of pre- and post-World War Two femininity—was transformed in the later decades of the twentieth century thanks in part to declining infant and maternal mortality rates. As Françoise Thébaud explains, from the 1960s the control of the female body under previous regimes gave way to a new reproductive order favouring women's self-governance of their biological destinies.⁹ This was marked by the legalization of the contraceptive pill in 1967 and abortion in 1975. Although these existed, and still exist, alongside a powerful ideology of femininity that saw women first and foremost as potential mothers, the pill was an important turning point in the history of gender relations because women had, for the first time, some control of their own fertility. As Nadine Lefaucher notes, children's dependency on mothers was reduced by the development of industrialized baby foods and sterilized animal milk, meaning that fathers could potentially partake in feeding their new-borns.¹⁰ In theory, then, mothering in the twentieth century became a choice, both for women who could have children but did not want them and, thanks to the development of assisted reproductive technologies, for women who wanted children but could not conceive naturally.

The Stonewall riots in the US in 1969 sparked the rise of the modern gay liberation movement in the West. In France, both the *Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire* and the *Gouines Rouges* were formed in 1971. In 1981, homosexuality was declassified as an illness. The following year, the age of consent for homosexual relationships was made equal to that of heterosexual relationships, and in 1985 legislation was passed to prevent discrimination against homosexuals on the job market and in their access to goods and services. While early defenders of gay rights, such as Havelock Ellis in *Sexual*

⁹ Thébaud, *Histoire des femmes*, p. 512.

¹⁰ Nadine Lefaucher, 'Maternité, famille, état', in *Histoire des femmes*, ed. by Thébaud, pp. 555–80 (pp. 566–67).

Inversion (1897), had successfully rescued homosexuality from its equation with criminality and sin, they did so only to rebrand it as a biological abnormality and pathology. In the nineteenth century, sexologists including Ellis defined homosexuality as the condition of having the soul of the opposing gender. The stigmatisation of homosexuality was, however, largely directed at gay men. Since female sexuality was thought to be inseparable from reproductive desire, and therefore from heterosexuality, lesbians suffered what Christopher Robinson calls ‘oppression by silence’.¹¹ This actually permitted women, especially bourgeois women, some licence to engage in same-sex affectivity, albeit within the confines of heterosexual marriage.¹² Although tension between these “romantic friendships” and women’s family responsibilities persisted, these relationships were accepted because they were seen as separate from heterosexual, reproductive relations. This shows that, like the definitions of male and female, public and private, the hetero–homo binary was more permeable than is commonly believed. Lesbians, then, exploited their invisibility to experience same-sex affectivity alongside heterosexual marriage and motherhood. Paradoxically, this laid the foundations of twentieth-century lesbian movements that, not content with living lesbian double lives, took issue with the silencing of their sexuality.

The political and social debates on gay and lesbian parenting emerged, then, on the back of changes to the organization of gender, sexuality, and the family just described and, as Clarisse Fabre and Éric Fassin demonstrate, alongside debates on several issues of gender and sexuality, notably *parité*, pornography, and prostitution.¹³ In France, the politicization of gay and lesbian parenting began very recently with the debate on the PaCS in 1999, even though the law ultimately made no provision for couples with children and explicitly excluded them from the right to adopt children. As Fabre and Fassin write, ‘on découvre qu’on ne peut faire l’économie d’une interrogation sur la filiation lorsqu’on débat du mariage homosexuel. Pour la première fois, on parle d’un même souffle d’homosexualité et de famille’.¹⁴ The PaCS thus nonetheless marked a formal recognition of homosexual relationships, sparked the debate on gay and lesbian families, and therefore provided a vital springboard for subsequent pro-same-sex-

¹¹ Christopher Robinson, *Scandal in the Ink: Male and Female Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century French Literature* (London: Cassell, 1995), p. 16.

¹² Judith Walkowitz, ‘Sexualités dangereuses’, trans. by Geneviève Faure, in *Histoire des femmes*, ed. by Fraïsse and Perrot, pp. 439–78 (pp. 470–78).

¹³ Clarisse Fabre and Éric Fassin, *Liberté, égalité, sexualités: Actualité politique des questions sexuelles* (Paris: Belfond, 2003), p. 7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

parenting legislation. As Fassin further argues, the PaCS debate had the merit of challenging the supposedly natural definition of the family as a heterosexual institution or as one founded on sexual difference.¹⁵

Political attitudes towards the PaCS transcended party allegiances. While it was predictable that the far right would unanimously denounce the PaCS, what is perhaps more surprising is the number of centre-right politicians who supported the PaCS and the number of socialists who opposed it. As Camille Robcis convincingly shows, French deputies organized their arguments around the notion of republicanism, in other words on the compatibility of the PaCS with republican values.¹⁶ On the one hand, the PaCS epitomized universalism since, it being open to heterosexual and homosexual couples, it treated them as exactly alike. On the other hand, opponents argued that it ‘represented another American-inspired attempt to cater to the demands of specific groups (homosexuals) and a move towards “*communautarisme*”’.¹⁷ Opponents of the PaCS thus coopted the notions of republicanism, universalism, and anti-*communautarisme* to link the PaCS to discourses of the nation—in other words, to portray the PaCS as anti-French. As well as the arguments about republican values, the PaCS debate was marked by, and arguably transformed into, discussions of same-sex parenting. As Fassin, writing in 2000, says:

The real issue, beyond the *PaCS* (even though the bill currently discussed in Parliament makes no reference to the topic whatsoever), is in fact access to adoption as well as reproductive technologies – both of which currently legally exclude same-sex couples in France. The real problem is that, while not objecting to gays and lesbians as individuals, nor even as couples, many refuse the perspective of gay and lesbian families.¹⁸

Conservatives therefore feared that same-sex unions would automatically lead to the legal enshrinement of gay and lesbian families. Rather than assert the supposed superiority of the heterosexual family on religious grounds, which lacked political merit in secular France, French deputies opposed to gay and lesbian parenting turned to experts in anthropology and psychoanalysis to define the concepts of the couple and family. As

¹⁵ Éric Fassin, ‘Usage de la science et science des usages: À propos des familles homoparentales’, *L’Homme*, 154/155 (2000), 391–407 (p. 391).

¹⁶ Camille Robcis, ‘How the Symbolic Became French: Kinship and Republicanism in the PACS Debates’, *Discourse*, 26 (2004), 110–35 (p. 112).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

¹⁸ Éric Fassin, ‘The Politics of PACS in a Transatlantic Mirror: Same-Sex Unions and Sexual Difference in France Today’, *Sites: The Journal of Twentieth-Century/Contemporary French Studies revue d’études françaises*, 4 (2000), 55–64 (p. 59).

Robcis writes, the PaCS debate was devoid of empirical data on same-sex parenting, which were replaced by ‘a higher, or at least more abstract, level of intellectual reflection’.¹⁹ Fassin is harshly critical of this use of intellectualism. While intellectuals can, he claims, legitimately intervene in politics to inform debates, interventions that found political decisions “scientifically” are an abuse of intellectual power.²⁰ Fassin seeks to limit intellectual power, arguing that it is not the business of intellectuals to provide universal definitions of aspects of the social world, in this case the family.²¹

It was not until 2013 that France legalized same-sex marriage and adoption—dubbed “*mariage pour tous*” in keeping with French universalist principles. By 2013, the divisions within left- and right-wing parties at the time of the PaCS debate seemed to have healed, and political arguments about same-sex marriage generally fell across traditional party lines.²² This was perhaps a result of François Hollande’s pledge to legalize same-sex marriage in the 2012 Socialist Party manifesto, which encouraged French deputies to argue one way or the other out of party loyalty. What Fassin refers to as the ‘anthropological argument’ that marked the PaCS debate gave way to biological arguments during that on same-sex marriage: opponents of the bill frequently expressed the view that filiation is and should be based on biology.²³ Indeed, on the website of the right-wing anti-same-sex marriage movement, the *Manif pour tous*, we are reminded that ‘[t]ous nés d’un homme et d’une femme’, that same-sex marriage ‘ouvre la voie à une nouvelle filiation “sociale”, sans rapport avec la réalité humaine’, and that children ‘seront privés d’accès à une partie de leurs origines’.²⁴ As was the case during the PaCS debate, what was at stake in the debate on same-sex marriage and adoption, then, was not the recognition of gay and lesbian relationships but the acceptability of gay and lesbian families. Fassin further argues that the republican commitment to secularism that characterized the PaCS debate gave way to the ‘restoration of Catholic France’ as the marriage debate increasingly became informed by the Church.²⁵

The shift in focus from marriage to parenting during the *mariage pour tous* campaign is not, contrary to political opinion, a natural step. In some countries, including the United

¹⁹ Robcis, ‘How the Symbolic Became French’, p. 116.

²⁰ Fassin, ‘Usage de la science’, p. 393.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 403.

²² Éric Fassin, ‘Same-Sex Marriage, Nation, and Race: French Political Logics and Rhetorics’, *Contemporary French Civilization*, 39 (2014), 281–301 (p. 283).

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 285.

²⁴ <<http://www.lamanifpourtous.fr/qui-somme-nous/notre-message/>> [accessed 30 May 2017].

²⁵ Fassin, ‘Same-Sex Marriage’, p. 285.

Kingdom and the United States, homosexual couples' access to adoption and reproductive technologies was legalized before their access to marriage. This suggests that, in the UK and US, the issue was marriage itself. In France, however, the underlying issue, as was the case in the 1990s, was not marriage but parenting. Interestingly, France is the only country in the world in which same-sex couples can access marriage and adoption but are barred from using reproductive technologies, meaning that, somewhat confusingly, it allows same-sex couples to become parents via one means but not via another. Fassin persuasively argues that France's defence of biological filiation is linked to ideas about the nation.²⁶ In France, discourses of immigration are frequently marked by references to "origins"—that is, to biology—through, for example, terms like "français de souche". Non-biological kinship, then, disrupts not only norms of the family but also ideas about "Frenchness". In other words, detractors of same-sex parenting argued that the marriage law with which it was conflated was decidedly un-French.

The adoption of same-sex marriage in 2013 hardly spelled the end of the debate. The prolonging of the debate on same-sex marriage is uniquely French and testifies to the tenacity of gender and sexual norms in France. In Britain, by contrast, opponents of same-sex marriage have largely ceased to voice, at least publicly, their views. Even highly Catholic countries like Ireland, where same-sex marriage was legalized by a sizeable majority via a referendum, have seen no attempts to repeal the law. In addition to the ongoing pressure on the French government to open reproductive technologies to lesbian and single women, the *mariage pour tous* law resurfaced as a point of debate during the 2017 presidential election campaign. In the televised Republican party primaries, finalists Alain Juppé and François Fillon clashed over the Taubira Law, with Fillon pledging to amend it by revoking same-sex couples' right to *adoption plénière*—or full adoption, which is irrevocable and inscribes the child within the filiation of the adopting parents—while protecting their right to *adoption simple*—which maintains the child's filiation with the biological parents. Fillon's proposal, then, was a reiteration of the biologism that was prevalent at the time of the marriage debate. While Fillon accepted, reluctantly, the notion of same-sex marriage, he pledged to amend the law such that "l'enfant est toujours le fruit de l'union d'un homme et d'une femme. Les couples homosexuels peuvent toujours adopter. Mais l'adoption est une adoption simple qui n'efface pas la filiation naturelle".²⁷

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 287–88.

²⁷ Agnès Leclair, 'Le mariage pour tous, sujet de divergences entre François Fillon et Alain Juppé', *Le Figaro*, 23 November 2016 <<http://www.lefigaro.fr/elections/presidentielles/primaires->

Although Fillon did not win the election, nor even make it through to the second round, the tension between him and Juppé during the Republican primaries over the marriage law illustrates the centrality of debates on parenting and the family in contemporary France. Indeed, it encouraged other candidates to voice their position on same-sex marriage and parenting. Marine Le Pen, perhaps unsurprisingly, declared her opposition to marriage and pledged to replace same-sex marriage with an “improved PaCS” and to maintain the ban on lesbian and single women’s access to reproductive technologies.²⁸ Emmanuel Macron, on the other hand, promised to lift this ban and declared on his website that same-sex parenting was “un enrichissement de ce qu’est la famille en France”.²⁹

The growing visibility of gay and lesbian parenting has coincided with the emergence of lesbian mothering as a literary theme. While texts portraying lesbian mothers remain small in number, the fact that most were published after 2000 suggests that they are on the rise. This thesis engages with this nascent branch of French literature, focusing on ten texts published between 1970 and 2013. It thus encompasses the period from the birth of the modern gay and lesbian movement until the adoption of same-sex marriage in France. It shows how the texts both reflect changes to the family and contribute to political and theoretical debates on gay and lesbian parenting and, more broadly, to the redefining of mothering and family in twentieth- and twenty-first-century France.

What This Thesis Does

In his introduction to *Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (1997), Stuart Hall discusses the link between meaning and representation. Traditionally, meaning was regarded as separate from representation. Meaning was thought to be determined by the material or natural properties of an object or concept, which exist regardless of how the object or concept is represented. In Hall’s view, however, representation ‘enter[s] into the very constitution of things’.³⁰ For Hall, meaning is produced by, rather than simply found in, representation. Following Hall, this thesis assumes that cultural artefacts do more than

droite/2016/11/23/35004-20161123ARTFIG00352-le-mariage-pour-tous-sujet-de-frictions-entre-francois-fillon-et-alain-juppe.php> [accessed 31 May 2017].

²⁸ Florian Bardou, ‘Serait-il possible d’abroger le mariage pour tous comme le souhaite Marine Le Pen?’, *Libération*, 27 April 2017 <http://www.liberation.fr/elections-presidentielle-legislatives-2017/2017/04/27/serait-il-possible-d-abroger-le-mariage-pour-tous-comme-le-souhaite-marine-le-pen_1565572> [accessed 31 May 2017].

²⁹ <<https://en-marche.fr/emmanuel-macron/le-programme/familles-et-societe>> [accessed 31 May 2017].

³⁰ Stuart Hall, ‘Introduction’, in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. by Stuart Hall (London: Sage/The Open University, 1997), pp. 1–11 (p. 5).

just reflect ideological and social change: they actively participate in it. This thesis, then, analyses literary representations of lesbian mothering and reveals how they reflect and contribute to political and theoretical debates on gay and lesbian parenting and to the meaning of mothering and family in contemporary France.

The thesis considers autobiographical and fictional, highbrow and mass-market texts and, in doing so, opposes the distinction between “high” and “mass” culture. As Hall explains, definitions of culture tend to distinguish between ‘the sum of the great ideas, as represented in the classic works of literature, painting, music and philosophy – the “high culture” of an age’; and ‘the widely distributed forms of popular music, publishing, art, design and literature, or the activities of leisure-time and entertainment, which make up the everyday lives of “ordinary people” – what is called the “mass culture” or the “popular culture” of an age’.³¹ This distinction carries a ‘powerfully evaluative charge’, whereby “high” is deemed to be superior and “mass” inferior.³² Against this, this thesis values all cultural productions equally and posits that both highbrow and mass-market literature can contribute to ideological and political debate and change. It thus partially resists Roland Barthes’s distinction between the *texte de plaisir*—‘celui qui vient de la culture, ne rompt pas avec elle, est lié à une pratique *confortable* de la lecture’; and the *texte de jouissance*—‘celui qui déconforte [...], 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’.³³ While it is undeniable that some texts ‘déconfortent’ more than others, and that this can be reflected or enhanced by their form, this thesis postulates that easy-reading texts have the potential to be just as politically transgressive as ones that are linguistically challenging. Moreover, the terms employed to distinguish between “high” and “mass” culture are far from self-evident: to recall Hall’s quotation, what are “classic” works of art, what constitutes “philosophy”, what is “popular”, and who are “ordinary people”? In practice, the categories “high” and “mass” are not dichotomous and fixed but overlapping and unstable. The same is true of autobiography and fiction. There is, of course, a widely accepted link between personal experience and literary composition. The French literary turn towards autofiction from the 1970s has further problematized the distinction between autobiography and fiction. As Chapter Five shows, focusing on a range of literary genres also offers opportunities

³¹ Ibid., p. 2.

³² Ibid., p. 2.

³³ Roland Barthes, *Le Plaisir du texte* (Paris: Seuil, 1973), pp. 25–26.

for analysing the relationship between the form of the texts and their treatment of lesbianism and lesbian mothering. This focus is, then, an additional strength of this thesis.

As well as a range of literary forms, the corpus comprises works by established and less well-known writers. Since this thesis is primarily concerned with the representation of lesbian mothering—that is, with what literature has to say about lesbian mothering and how it says it—texts have not been included on account of the writers’ gender, sexuality, parental status, or literary reputation. It is significant, however, that all the texts happen to be female-authored: despite the ideological and practical deconstruction of gender roles discussed earlier, parenting and the family would, at least for now, still seem to be “women’s business”. That all the texts are written by women is, moreover, in keeping with the gendering of literary practices, the private sphere being the setting and theme of women’s writing more frequently than it is of male-authored literature. This could account for the almost total inexistence of literary texts treating gay fathering and explain this study’s exclusive focus on lesbian mothering. The texts were, then, selected for thematic reasons and, in particular, with a view to providing an equal number of representations of planned and unplanned lesbian mothering. Moreover, while an author’s gender, sexuality, and parental status can undoubtedly impact on his or her treatment of these themes, this thesis follows postmodernism’s distrust of author-centred criticism.³⁴ In his famous essay ‘La Mort de l’Auteur’ (1968), Barthes advocates the birth of the reader at the expense of the death of the Author: ‘La naissance du lecteur doit se payer de la mort de l’Auteur’.³⁵ For Barthes, reading can begin only when the author’s intentions are no longer what guide the interpretation of the text. Problematically, author-centred criticism postulates that texts have only one meaning, the author’s, and overlooks the divergent meanings that texts have according to the conditions in which they are read. It also, as Steph Lawler notes, ‘assumes that the reader could *know* what the author intends, and, indeed, it would do away with any need for analysis since the narrative would simply “speak for itself”’.³⁶ By decentering the author as the object of criticism, postmodern literary theory transfers the power to create meaning to the reader. This reader-centred approach to literary criticism owes much to Ferdinand de Saussure’s theory of language

³⁴ For a discussion of the shift from author- to reader-centred criticism, see Roger Webster, *Studying Literary Theory: An Introduction* (London: Arnold, 1990), pp. 11–27.

³⁵ Roland Barthes, ‘La Mort de l’Auteur’ (1968), in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Éric Marty, 5 vols (Paris: Seuil, 1993–2002), II (1994), pp. 491–95 (p. 495).

³⁶ Steph Lawler, ‘Stories and the Social World’, in *Research Methods for Cultural Studies*, ed. by Michael Pickering (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), pp. 32–49 (p. 46).

as a system of signs consisting of a signifier, the ‘acoustic image’, and a signified, the concept. According to Saussure, the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary.³⁷ Meaning, then, is not referential—that is to say, signs have no inherent quality that defines them. Rather, it is we, the speakers of a language, who construct meaning to the extent that it appears fixed and natural. By applying Saussure’s theory of language to the text, Barthes concludes that texts have multiple meanings. Thus, the text is not the product of its author’s meaning but of the meaning created by the reader.

This thesis takes a thematic approach to studying literary representations of lesbian mothering. It is divided into five chapters. Chapter One places this thesis within its critical and theoretical context. Whereas the first half of this introduction illustrated why a study of representations of lesbian mothering is politically and socially timely, Chapter One demonstrates the critical and theoretical opening for such a study. It shows that gay and lesbian parenting, although an established field of social scientific research, is only a nascent interest in cultural studies disciplines. Moreover, it demonstrates that although mothering is a recurrent object of French literary criticism, the vast majority of studies focus on mothers who identify as heterosexual.

Chapters Two, Three, and Four are structured around the gradual broadening of the experiences of mothering found in the texts. In Chapter Two, then, the focus is on texts depicting mothers who have children in a heterosexual partnership before or while assuming a lesbian identity. In one sense, these women more or less adhere to the normative definition of mothering: they are biogenetically connected to their children and are the only people who identify as mothers to their children. Focusing on five of the ten works studied in this thesis, this chapter interprets the texts in the light of Adrienne Rich’s distinction between motherhood as experience and institution. Specifically, it examines how they challenge the norms of this institution, particularly the patriarchal image of mothering as a single-minded identity and the assumption that maternal love is absolute and unconditional.

Chapter Three examines portrayals of planned lesbian families in the other five texts included in this study. A planned lesbian family is one founded by a lesbian couple who intend to parent together from the beginning and who both identify as mothers to their children. In this chapter, then, a biologicistic definition of mothering is insufficient to capture the experiences of the families portrayed in these texts. This chapter therefore

³⁷ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale*, 3rd edn (Paris: Payot, 1949 [1916]), p. 100.

draws on the seminal work of Judith Butler to argue that the texts portray mothering as a performative function. This chapter also reveals how the texts intervene, often explicitly, in the debates on gay and lesbian kinship in twenty-first-century France.

Whereas Chapters Two and Three centre on the implications of lesbian mothering for the mother-characters themselves, Chapter Four examines how this has repercussions beyond them. It begins by discussing the impact of the characters' status as lesbian mothers on their own parents, the grandparents of their children. Like mothering, grandparenting is a caregiving role, so it is part of the definition of family that this thesis seeks to explore. Inspired by the repercussions of lesbian mothering beyond the mother, the chapter then turns to the impact of the texts on French society. Whereas Chapter Three demonstrates how the texts intervene in the wider political debates on gay and lesbian kinship, Chapter Four shows how far-reaching and instructive this intervention is.

Chapter Five serves to bring together the ten texts included in this study through a discussion of genre and its relationship to the representation of gender, sexuality, and parenting in the texts. It examines how far these texts fit into established generic categories and how their subversive narratives are influenced, even enhanced, by their form and positions them within the contemporary literary landscape. Ultimately, this chapter shows how the texts engage with and reflect debates on and evolutions in literary aesthetics, form, and genre, just as they contribute to the political and social debates on gay and lesbian parenting.

Any study of lesbian mothering exists alongside a wealth of feminist, psychoanalytic, and queer theoretical work on gender, sexuality, and kinship, and it is to these fields that this thesis must now turn.

1

Theorizing Lesbian Mothering

There is a large body of research in gender studies and French literary criticism that forms the critical background and theoretical framework of this thesis. This chapter introduces the most relevant contributions to these fields and positions this thesis within this intellectual context. In doing so, it reveals the lack of studies addressing representations of lesbian mothering in French literature. By filling this gap, this thesis treads new ground. This chapter begins by presenting psychoanalytic and feminist theories of mothering. Since the early twentieth century, psychoanalysis and feminism have been equally influential in shaping understandings of mothering, yet their ideas on the subject have often been at odds: in Freudian thinking, mothering is the natural consequence of female psychological development; feminists have fought to expose this view as an instrument of patriarchy, to uncouple notions of femininity from mothering, and, ultimately, to make motherhood a choice. To account for the partial rapprochement between psychoanalysis and feminism since the 1970s, the first section of this chapter focuses on early psychoanalytic theories of mothering and leaves feminist psychoanalytic perspectives until the second section. The third section of this chapter looks at the essentialist–constructionist divide in gender studies and, more specifically, its role in debates on gay and lesbian parenting. The final two sections move on to contributions to French literary criticism, focusing specifically on studies of lesbianism, then of mothering. Collectively, they demonstrate that while lesbianism and mothering are recurrent objects of literary criticism, they have mostly been treated separately. This thesis, on the other hand, focuses on texts that bring these two themes together.

Early Psychoanalysis and Mothering

In the psychoanalytic thinking of Freud and his disciples, mothers and fathers have unique roles in ensuring their children’s healthy psychological and social development. Freudian psychoanalysis would, then, seem to oppose gay and lesbian parenting. Indeed, Freud saw

homosexuality itself as an abnormal form of psychological development. While Freudian theory has since been developed and opposed, it is the importance that Freud attached to the mother–father–child triangulation that fuels many of the arguments used to oppose gay and lesbian parenting in France today. Taking Freud’s work as a crucial starting point, this section offers a critical overview of the most influential early psychoanalytic theories of mothering.

Freud’s well-known theory of the Oedipus complex postulates that sexuality begins not during puberty but in early childhood. In his ‘Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality’ (1905), Freud describes infantile sexuality as ‘polymorphously perverse’—that is to say, formless, multidirectional, non-procreative, and uninhibited by the ‘mental dams’ of shame, disgust, and morality that curb sexual excess.³⁸ Polymorphous perversity is repressed and channelled into the socialized (heterosexual and procreative) form of adult sexuality—a process that Freud calls ‘infantile amnesia’—by way of the Oedipus complex.³⁹ During the Oedipal phase, the mother—the child’s primary caregiver and love object—is rejected in favour of the father, who thus enforces the separation between mother and child and enables the child to later form its own identity. For Freud, the Oedipus complex is driven by biology; while it may be a result of socialization, it is, fundamentally, ‘organically determined and fixed by heredity’.⁴⁰ During the Oedipal phase, the male infant desires to possess the mother and perceives the father as a rival. He then abandons his desire for the mother for fear that he will be castrated by the father, thus accepting the father’s authority. The female infant, upon seeing her lack of a penis, blames and rejects the mother and desires to possess a penis, and the power that it would give her, of her own—a desire that Freud refers to as ‘penis envy’. The little girl therefore turns to the father, before resolving to become a mother, preferably to a son, so that she might possess a penis “of her own”. In Freud’s thinking, then, maternal desire represents the dissolution of the girl’s Oedipus complex. For Freud, the mother functions merely as object of or obstacle to the infant’s desire, while the father occupies the position of authority. As Stephen Frosh states in his introduction to Freud’s work, the father acts as the ‘symbol of patriarchal authority and hence of all social authority under patriarchy’; it is he who ‘stands in the position of the originator of culture and of sexual difference, of

³⁸ Sigmund Freud, ‘Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality’ (1905), in *Freud on Women: A Reader*, ed. by Elisabeth Young-Bruehl (London: Hogarth, 1990), pp. 89–145 (p. 119).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

what is male and female, allowable and forbidden'.⁴¹

Understandably, feminists have objected to Freud's phallocentrism and misogynistic references to penis envy. Before second-wave feminism, though, Freud's work underwent considerable extension and revision by psychoanalysts during his own lifetime. Melanie Klein, for instance, acknowledges her considerable intellectual debt to Freud, but her theory of the Oedipus complex diverges from the original in a number of ways. In her early essay 'Early Stages of the Oedipus Conflict' (1928), Klein argues that the Oedipal tendencies are triggered earlier than Freud believed, as early as the period of weaning and training in cleanliness.⁴² As a result, Klein attaches considerable importance to the infant's identification and changing relationship with the mother as the Oedipal tendencies emerge. Whereas Freud considers the girl's realization of her lack of a penis to be what compels her to turn away from the mother, Klein states that this is fundamentally caused by the deprivation of the mother's breast; the lack of a penis just reinforces the rejection of the mother.⁴³ Klein's Oedipal model also differs from Freud's in the emphasis that she places on the violence that the infant directs at the mother during weaning. For Klein, the infant 'desires to destroy the libidinal object by biting, devouring and cutting it, which leads to anxiety, since awakening of the Oedipus tendencies is followed by introjection of the object, which then becomes one from which punishment is to be expected'.⁴⁴ Klein's Oedipal model, then, reveals the considerable ambivalence in the relationship between mothers and infants and presents the mother, not as a passive object or obstacle as Freud does, but as an active agent of child development.

The object relations school of psychoanalytic thought, with which Klein herself has sometimes been associated, further emphasizes the role of the pre-Oedipal relationship with the mother in child development.⁴⁵ Whereas Freud places instincts at the heart of mental life, object relations underlines the role of relationships in development. Consequently, it has, as will be discussed later with reference to the work of Nancy Chodorow, proved to be popular among feminists seeking to eschew Freudian biologicistic explanations for women's mothering. Moreover, object relations theorists devote considerable attention to the role of the mother in child development. Donald Winnott's

⁴¹ Stephen Frosh, *The Politics of Psychoanalysis: An Introduction to Freudian and Post-Freudian Theory*, 2nd edn (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999 [1987]), p. 50.

⁴² Melanie Klein, 'Early Stages of the Oedipus Conflict' (1928), in *Love, Guilt and Reparation' and Other Works, 1921–1945* (London: Vintage, 1998 [1975]), pp. 186–98 (p. 186).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

⁴⁵ For a discussion of Klein's relationship with object relations theory, see Frosh, pp. 4–5.

notion of the ‘good enough mother’ typifies this approach. For Winnicott, a good enough mother, who is not necessarily the infant’s biological mother, is ‘one who makes active adaptation to the infant’s needs’ by gradually enabling the infant to separate itself from her and to form its own identity.⁴⁶ Interestingly, the emphasis placed on the role of the father by Freud is markedly absent from Winnicott’s object relations theory.

It is the theories of early psychoanalysis, and the work of Freud in particular, that modern-day detractors of gay and lesbian parenting evoke when they insist on the centrality of sexually differentiated parents to children’s healthy development. Furthermore, Freud’s Oedipal model is the starting point for many feminist theories of mothering, to which the next section turns.

Feminism and Mothering

Feminism’s relationship with mothering is an ambivalent one. Celebrated by some feminists as a specificity of women’s identity and metaphor for their creativity, mothering is considered by others to be instrumental in maintaining female subordination. Others still have tried to bridge the gap between these two camps by rejecting patriarchal motherhood while maintaining that maternal experience is, at least potentially, a site of female empowerment. Beginning with Simone de Beauvoir’s *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1949), which laid the foundations of feminism’s critique of mothering, this section charts the evolution of and critically reviews the most influential feminist theories of mothering.

Le Deuxième Sexe challenges the widely held belief that womanhood is innate and intrinsically tied to mothering. Beauvoir strives to ensure that becoming a mother is a choice rather than a cultural and social obligation. To this end, Beauvoir’s chapter on mothering in *Le Deuxième Sexe* begins with a call to legalize abortion and oral contraception, and goes on to repudiate the essentialist assumption that women have a maternal instinct—that is, both a desire to have children and a natural capacity to love and nurture them.⁴⁷ In Beauvoir’s view, a woman’s capacity to love her children depends on the circumstances in which she becomes a mother and, most crucially, on whether motherhood is a choice. Beauvoir’s ambivalence towards mothering is, in addition, a recurrent theme of her autobiographical works, notably *Une mort très douce* (1964), in

⁴⁶ D. W. Winnicott, ‘Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena’ (1951), in *Collected Papers: Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis* (London: Tavistock, 1958), pp. 229–42 (p. 237).

⁴⁷ Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe: L’Expérience vécue*, Folio Essais, 38 (Paris: Gallimard, 1976 [1949]), p. 364.

which mothers are portrayed as tender but also as manipulative, overbearing, and self-effacing.⁴⁸

Second-wave feminists in France and the English-speaking world reiterated Beauvoir's critique of the equation of womanhood with maternity. Betty Friedan, for instance, regards mothering as a cornerstone of what she calls 'the feminine mystique'—that is, the image and role assigned to women by postwar American society—and a source of female discontentment.⁴⁹ In *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970), Shulamith Firestone advocates an overhaul of childcare and reproductive relations. For Firestone, women's responsibility for the bearing and rearing of children is the fundamental inequality between the sexes. Female emancipation therefore demands the replacement of natural procreation by artificial reproduction and the contribution of the whole of society to the rearing of children.⁵⁰ Undeniably, these texts played a crucial role in awakening feminist consciousness at the time of their publication, yet their negative attitudes towards mothering are to some degree outdated. The association between women and maternity is, at least in the West, less strict than it used to be: birth rates are falling, the majority of women have access to methods of birth control, and many women today successfully combine mothering with a career. This has, however, resulted in what is popularly dubbed the "double burden": responsibility for paid and the majority of unpaid labour. As recently as 2015, it was found that mothers assumed an unequal proportion of childcare and household responsibilities on top of the demands of paid employment.⁵¹ Gender inequality within the home imposes a heavy mental burden on women recently referred to in France as "la charge mentale"—that is, as one newspaper puts it, 'le syndrome des femmes épuisées "d'avoir à penser à tout"'.⁵² The fact that women do more housework encourages the belief that women must also think to do it and that men, when they do help, do so only in a supporting role. In a recently published online cartoon called 'Fallait demander', comic artist "Emma" attacks the expectation that women should have to ask their husbands for help.⁵³ Women's advancement in the paid workforce has not, then,

⁴⁸ For a comprehensive discussion of Beauvoir's treatment of mothering, see Yolanda Astarita Patterson, *Simone de Beauvoir and the Demystification of Motherhood* (Ann Arbor, MI: U.M.I. Research, 1989).

⁴⁹ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (London: Norton, 2001 [1963]), p. 15.

⁵⁰ Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex* (London: Cape, 1971 [1970]), pp. 8–12.

⁵¹ Clare Lyonette and Rosemary Crompton, 'Sharing the Load? Partners' Relative Earnings and the Division of Domestic Labour', *Work, Employment and Society*, 29 (2015), 23–40.

⁵² Emilie Tôn, 'La "charge mentale", le syndrome des femmes épuisées "d'avoir à penser à tout"', *L'Express*, 10 May 2017 <http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/societe/la-charge-mentale-le-syndrome-des-femmes-epuisees-d-avoir-a-penser-a-tout_1906874.html> [accessed 20 June 2017].

⁵³ "Emma", 'Fallait demander', 9 May 2017 <<https://emmaclit.com/2017/05/09/repartition-des-taches-hommes-femmes/>> [accessed 20 June 2017].

coincided with men's increased participation in domestic work.

The publication of Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born* in 1976 marked an important shift in feminist thinking about motherhood. Unlike previous feminist analyses of mothering, Rich explicitly states that motherhood is not oppressive to women 'except as defined and restricted under patriarchy'.⁵⁴ As will be discussed further in Chapter Two, Rich distinguishes between the experience of mothering—or the potential relationship between mothers and children and between women and maternity—and the patriarchal institution of motherhood—that is, the norms that police this experience, including the prescription of mothering as women's sole or primary function. This distinction allowed Rich both to extend feminism's critique of patriarchy and to hypothesize that mothering can, if chosen and lived freely, empower women. It thus helped to create a space within feminist theory for women who genuinely desire to have children while defending other women's wish to remain childless.

Like Rich, Nancy Chodorow in *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978) suggests that only patriarchal motherhood is oppressive to women and ultimately calls for men's equal participation in childcare.⁵⁵ Chodorow's work continues to be an important reference point for its treatment of mothering from the perspective of psychoanalysis, whose relationship with feminism has, as was noted earlier, long been antagonistic. Principally, Chodorow seeks to explain why mothering is a female rather than male role. Rejecting biological essentialist and social constructionist explanations, Chodorow argues that women's mothering is reproduced by 'social structurally induced psychological processes'.⁵⁶ In Chodorow's view, the fact that an infant's first relationship is with a woman fosters life-long expectations in children.⁵⁷ That women mother and men do not is thus internalized psychically and subsequently reproduced. Despite this, throughout *The Reproduction of Mothering* Chodorow, true to the feminist cause, remains insistent on the potential and need for change, claiming that anyone, male or female, has the relational basis for parenting.

In Britain, one of the leading second-wave feminist theorists of mothering and women's domesticity is sociologist Ann Oakley. In *Housewife* (1974), Oakley conceives

⁵⁴ Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, 2nd edn (London: Norton, 1986 [1976]), p. 14.

⁵⁵ Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 215.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

of and deconstructs a ‘myth of motherhood’ bearing close resemblance to Rich’s more well-known theorization of motherhood as an institution. According to Oakley, the myth of motherhood consists of three common assumptions: first, children need mothers; second, mothers need their children; and third, becoming a mother is a woman’s greatest achievement and mode of self-fulfilment.⁵⁸ For Oakley, the myth of motherhood is, as the institution of motherhood is for Rich, a principal source of women’s oppression, since it confines them to the private sphere and forestalls their financial independence and access to the power of public life.⁵⁹ Yet, Oakley, like Rich, implies the potential for ideological and social change, for beyond the myth of motherhood mothering is not inherently an obstacle to women’s liberation. Rather, it is the normative organization of mothering that is to women’s detriment. Much of Oakley’s subsequent work further unpicks discourses and norms of femininity, domesticity, and mothering. In *The Sociology of Housework* (1974), Oakley investigates women’s attitudes towards domestic labour and finds that social isolation and the juggling of housewifery and childrearing lead to women’s dissatisfaction with both their domestic and their maternal roles.⁶⁰ In *Becoming a Mother* (1979), Oakley draws on interviews with first-time mothers to criticize the increasingly medicalized maternity care. In Oakley’s view, the medicalization of maternity care is often unnecessary, even dangerous, and therefore demonstrates a lack of concern for mothers.⁶¹ Like Rich and Chodorow, then, Oakley does not see mothering as de facto oppressive to women. Her critique, rather, is levelled at the circumstances and discourses that impact negatively on maternal experience.

French feminists have contributed to the debate among English-speaking theorists on the reconcilability of mothering with women’s emancipation. In *Parole de femme* (1974), Annie Leclerc, who wants women to have a voice of their own, celebrates mothering as a uniquely female experience. Christine Delphy, on the other hand, follows in Beauvoir’s footsteps by rejecting mothering. Delphy denounces Leclerc as essentialist because she posits men and women as natural entities—that is, as categories deriving from biology—and even condemns Leclerc’s work as pseudoscientific antifeminism.⁶² As a materialist feminist, Delphy believes female oppression to be a product of ideological and social

⁵⁸ Ann Oakley, *Housewife* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976 [1974]), p. 186.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

⁶⁰ Ann Oakley, *The Sociology of Housework* (London: Martin Robertson, 1974).

⁶¹ Ann Oakley, *From Here to Maternity: Becoming a Mother* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986 [1979]), pp. 15–20.

⁶² Christine Delphy, ‘Proto-féminisme et anti-féminisme’, *Les Temps modernes*, 30 (1975), 1469–1500 (p. 1496).

structures.

Alongside Leclerc and Delphy, a group of French feminists spearheaded by Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva took up the task of rewriting Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis from a feminist perspective and, in doing so, extended insights into the link between mothering and female psychic development. As will be discussed further below, Cixous and Irigaray aim above all to theorize feminine subjectivity outside patriarchy. In Cixous's work, references to mothering are predominantly metaphorical. In 'Le Rire de la Méduse' (1975), in which she calls on women to inscribe feminine subjectivity in writing, Cixous states that women write in "white ink"—a figurative reference to breast milk.⁶³ Furthermore, Cixous widens the conventional meaning of mothering by using the word "mère" to refer to a woman who instils in another woman love for her own body.⁶⁴ Finally, Cixous underlines the delights of pregnancy, thus rejecting the patriarchal taboo on the gestating body, but resists prescribing mothering as a prerequisite of femininity.⁶⁵ Like Leclerc, then, Cixous celebrates mothering as a site of feminine subjectivity and source of women's literary inspiration.

Irigaray's interest in mothering lies in the mother-child and, in particular, the mother-daughter relationship. Irigaray argues that under patriarchy this relationship is founded on matricide—that is, the psychic and symbolic murder of the mother. Irigaray describes matricide as a twofold suppression: first, the infant must reject the mother as its primary love object in favour of the father. Irigaray's lyrical mother-daughter dialogue in *Et l'une ne bouge pas sans l'autre* (1979) presents the daughter's struggle to extricate herself from her ties to the mother.⁶⁶ Second, Irigaray argues in *Le Corps-à-corps avec la mère* (1981) that Western civilization demands that mothers be suppressed. Challenging Freud's claim that the primitive horde was founded on the murder of the father, Irigaray contends that this murder was in fact preceded by that of the mother.⁶⁷ It is not obvious whom or what Irigaray blames for the mother's murder, yet her analysis of the Greek play the *Oresteia*, in which Orestes kills his mother Clytemnestra, implies that the son is merely an agent of a patriarchal order that demands matricide and that pardons Orestes by curing him of the madness that this crime entails. Since Irigaray is clear that matricide today is more or less as it was in ancient Greece, responsibility for the mother's murder continues to lie with

⁶³ Hélène Cixous, 'Le Rire de la Méduse', *L'Arc*, 61 (1975), 39–54 (p. 44).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁶⁶ Luce Irigaray, *Et l'une ne bouge pas sans l'autre* (Paris: Minuit, 1979).

⁶⁷ Luce Irigaray, *Le Corps-à-corps avec la mère* (Montreal: La Pleine Lune, 1981), p. 19.

Western patriarchal civilization.

Kristeva charts the rise and recent decline of the cult of the Virgin Mary as a model of mothering in Christian societies. In 'Stabat Mater' (1977), Kristeva shows how mothering has long been portrayed as the only legitimate form of female subjectivity.⁶⁸ According to this cult, mothers, like the Virgin Mary, should be asexual and devoted to their children.

In addition to the psychoanalytically driven theories of mothering offered by Irigaray, Cixous, and Kristeva, French feminist historians Élisabeth Badinter, Yvonne Knibiehler, and Catherine Fouquet have sought to reveal the changing nature of mother-love. Echoing Beauvoir, Badinter in *L'Amour en plus* (1980) rejects the existence of maternal instinct, arguing that mother-love is culturally and historically variable.⁶⁹ According to Badinter, until the end of the eighteenth century mothers felt largely indifferent towards their children due in part to the high rate of infant mortality.⁷⁰ Ann Dally makes an identical argument in *Inventing Motherhood* (1982).⁷¹ It is, Badinter and Dally claim, a natural human reaction not to become attached to what one is likely to lose. The de-Christianization of attitudes towards death and the afterlife and the difficulty in defining and quantifying love make it hard to argue that mothers today love their children more than did pre-modern mothers. It is more pertinent, then, to emphasize Badinter's and Daly's contention that mother-love has changed in line with patterns of childcare. As they point out, wealthier mothers, who had the opportunity to raise their children because their husbands did not require them to work, commonly handed over the task of nurturing their children to wetnurses and nannies. As Badinter shows, only after 1760 did mother-love acquire sufficient moral and social value to push aristocratic women to raise their own children.⁷² This is not to say that mothers in the past loved their children less than mothers today. Rather, it shows that modes of expression of mother-love have changed. Whereas in the past mothers were often distant figures, in the modern West mothering is often considered to be a hands-on role to the extent that distant mothers are now susceptible to criticism and scorn.

Knibiehler and Fouquet's *L'Histoire des mères du moyen-âge à nos jours* (1980) is explicitly feminist in that it attempts to write the history of mothering from the perspective

⁶⁸ Julia Kristeva, 'Stabat Mater' (1977), in *Histoires d'amour* (Paris: Denoël, 1983), pp. 225–47 (p. 225).

⁶⁹ Élisabeth Badinter, *L'Amour en plus: Histoire de l'amour maternel, XVII^e–XX^e siècle* (Paris: Flammarion, 1980), pp. 7–11.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 75–83.

⁷¹ Ann Dally, *Inventing Motherhood: The Consequences of an Ideal* (London: Burnett, 1982), p. 44.

⁷² Badinter, pp. 137–39.

of mothers themselves. The authors argue that mothers have been sidelined by historians, who have tended to focus on the male-dominated spheres of politics and the state.⁷³ Like Kristeva, Knibiehler and Fouquet emphasize the centrality of the Virgin Mary to medieval discourses of motherhood. In the Middle Ages, womanhood was constructed in terms of two dichotomous images: the Virgin Mary, who embodied innocence, obedience, and devotion to the maternal role; and Eve—the temptress, but mother to us all.⁷⁴

Mothering has resurfaced as an object of feminist criticism in the first decades of the twenty-first century thanks in no small part to Canadian scholar Andrea O'Reilly. In 1998, O'Reilly established the Association for Research on Mothering, which became the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement in 2010, and its associative biannual journal. In 2006, she founded Demeter Press, the first feminist publisher dedicated to research on motherhood. The very establishment of these organizations suggests the continued relevance of mothering as a focus of scholarly attention. Indeed, O'Reilly coined the term “Motherhood Studies” to establish motherhood as a discrete academic discipline. O'Reilly's numerous edited collections centre on the theories and practices of empowered and/or feminist mothering, and owe much to Rich's distinction between women's experience of mothering and the institution of motherhood.⁷⁵ O'Reilly posits that, despite this distinction, Rich paved the way for but did not create a theory of feminist mothering. A feminist mother, in O'Reilly's words, ‘is a woman whose mothering, in theory and practice, is shaped and influenced by feminism’.⁷⁶ While empowered mothering and feminist mothering overlap insofar as they both challenge patriarchal discourses of motherhood, the latter is explicitly informed by feminism's critique of patriarchy. Following Rich, O'Reilly argues that mothers can affect social change through antisexist childrearing and can feel empowered as mothers only if the institution of motherhood is deconstructed.⁷⁷

Since the publication of *Le Deuxième Sexe*, feminist attitudes towards mothering have become increasingly favourable. Although Beauvoir, in a 1976 interview with Alice

⁷³ Yvonne Knibiehler and Catherine Fouquet, *L'Histoire des mères du moyen-âge à nos jours* (Paris: Montalba, 1980), pp. 4–6.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁷⁵ Andrea O'Reilly (ed.), *Feminist Mothering* (Albany: SUNY, 2008); Andrea O'Reilly (ed.), *From Motherhood to Mothering: The Legacy of Adrienne Rich's 'Of Woman Born'* (Ithaca: SUNY, 2004); Andrea O'Reilly (ed.), *Mother Outlaws: Theories and Practices of Empowered Mothering* (Toronto: Women's Press, 2004); Andrea O'Reilly (ed.), *Twenty-First-Century Motherhood: Experience, Identity, Policy, Agency* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

⁷⁶ Andrea O'Reilly, ‘Introduction’, in *Feminist Mothering*, ed. by O'Reilly, pp. 1–22 (p. 7).

⁷⁷ Andrea O'Reilly, ‘Mothering against Motherhood and the Possibility of Empowered Mothering for Mothers and their Children’, in *From Motherhood to Mothering*, ed. by O'Reilly, pp. 159–74 (p. 160).

Schwarzer, still likened the decision to marry and have children to slavery, mothering has come to be regarded, particularly by O'Reilly, as not merely acceptable to feminism but, potentially, as an explicitly feminist enterprise.⁷⁸ The decline of the nuclear family since the 1970s has prompted researchers to consider mothering and child development in non-traditional family groupings, including gay and lesbian families, which is the focus of the next section.

Essentialism, Constructionism, and Lesbian Mothering

Gay and lesbian parenting has been an object of social scientific research since the 1970s. Within this now established field, there has emerged a debate on the extent to which gay and lesbian families differ from heterosexual families. Initially, research compared the development of gay- and lesbian-parented children with that of children with heterosexual parents, and found no evidence that children's wellbeing was adversely affected by their parents' sexuality. At the time, this conclusion played a vital role in preventing gay and lesbian parents from losing custody of their children. Since 2000, however, scholars have begun to argue that insisting on the similarities between heterosexual- and homosexual-parented children reinforces heteronormativity by positing heterosexual parents as the standard against which all parents ought to be judged. This debate in the social sciences builds on the enduring dispute among feminist and queer critical theorists over the reconcilability of difference with gender and sexual equality—a debate that frequently overlaps with that on essentialism and constructionism. Briefly, in discussions of gender essentialism is the belief that men and women are naturally occurring entities determined by biogenetic properties; sexual difference, then, is natural. Against this, constructionists believe that gender is a learned concept; experiences of difference are, according to this view, merely the effects of social conditioning and dominant discourses. This section critically introduces feminist and queer interventions in this debate before considering how this plays out in social scientific studies of gay and lesbian parenting.

As early as the nineteenth century, feminists were split between those who stressed the similarities between women and men and those who defended a female essence. In France, this divide re-emerged in the 1970s and 1980s in the form of a disagreement between prominent feminists Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Monique Wittig. For Cixous and Irigaray, female emancipation lies in the cultural and social inscription rather

⁷⁸ Alice Schwarzer and Simone de Beauvoir, 'Le Deuxième Sexe: Trente ans après' (1976), in *Simone de Beauvoir aujourd'hui: Six entretiens* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1984), pp. 71–85 (p. 77).

than suppression of women's difference. In Wittig's view, valorizing difference only reiterates patriarchal representations of women. Cixous, Irigaray, and Wittig are united, however, in their rejection of Freudian and Lacanian theories of femininity. As was explained earlier, in Freud's patriarchal thinking women's sexuality is defined by their lack of a penis and desire to possess it. When little girls see the male organ and compare it with their own, they are 'overcome by envy for the penis—an envy culminating in the wish [...] to be boys themselves'.⁷⁹ For Freud, penis envy produces in women a sense of inferiority; a greater quantity of jealousy than in men; resentment towards the mother, whom they blame for their lack of a penis; and aversion to masturbation.⁸⁰ Freud also believed that women's sexuality was marked by a shift from infantile clitoral activity, which Freud regarded as masculine, to adult "feminine" vaginal passivity, as well as a change in love object: mother to father.⁸¹ Lacan, who saw his work as a return to Freud, stressed the role of language in sexual development. Whereas Freud considered sexual drives to be a biological given, Lacan viewed them as a function of the infant's entry into the linguistic system. For Lacan, the phallus is not an organ: it is a signifier.⁸²

It is easy to see why many feminists reject models of sexuality that position women as inferior solely on the basis of their biology and in a seemingly arbitrary way: neither Freud nor Lacan ever paused to consider the possibility of "vagina envy". Cixous calls for the creation and inscription in writing of an *écriture féminine*—that is, an alternative symbolic order, organized around the feminine, which celebrates the specificities of the female body and sexuality and thus destabilizes the linguistic dominance of the phallus.⁸³ In 'Le Rire de la Méduse', which functions dually as a manifesto for and example of *écriture féminine*, this translates into an overflowing, seemingly illogical syntax that resonates with Cixous's vision of female sexuality as an overflow, flood, or series of waves or outbursts that cannot be defined in a monolithic way. The form and narrative of Cixous's writing is deliberately circular, thus avoiding resemblance to the linearity of patriarchal language, as well as the male sex organ and orgasm.

Like Cixous, Irigaray desires to theorize feminine sexuality and subjectivity outside patriarchy. In *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (1977), Irigaray, drawing on Freud, postulates

⁷⁹ Freud, 'Three Essays', p. 122.

⁸⁰ Sigmund Freud, 'Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes', in *Freud on Women*, ed. by Young-Bruehl, pp. 304–14 (pp. 310–12).

⁸¹ Sigmund Freud, 'Female Sexuality' (1931), in *Freud on Women*, ed. by Young-Bruehl, pp. 321–41 (p. 325).

⁸² Jacques Lacan, 'La Signification du phallus' (1958), in *Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), pp. 685–95 (p. 690).

⁸³ Cixous, p. 39.

that female sexuality has always been conceptualized as a lack or inferior version of male sexuality—in other words, as ‘not one’. For Irigaray, Freud’s claim that women’s sexual maturation necessitates a shift from “masculine” clitoral activity to “feminine” vaginal passivity is conveniently compatible with male penetration.⁸⁴ Taking issue with Freud’s organization of sexuality around a single male organ, Irigaray valorizes the multiplicity and ‘autoeroticism’ of the female sex organ. She compares the vulva, which is composed of two inseparable parts that touch and pleasure each other constantly, with the singularity of the penis, and argues, first, that woman is not one but two and, then, that ‘[l]a femme a des sexes un peu partout’, thus underlining the multiplicity of female sexuality.⁸⁵ In her short but uncharacteristically lucid essay, ‘Petite annonce: Égales ou différentes?’, Irigaray asks what it is that women want to be equal to.⁸⁶ Although Irigaray supports gender equality in political and social terms—that is, she believes unequivocally that women and men should have equal opportunities—she opposes the suppression of sexual difference and the assimilation of the feminine to a physical and symbolic male norm. In Irigaray’s view, feminism must embrace sexual difference and push for the recognition of ‘sexuate rights’.⁸⁷ A wholesale rejection of “equal rights for all”, sexuate rights account for female inequality by granting different rights to men and women.

Because they seem to posit sexual difference as a given and derived from biology, Cixous and Irigaray have frequently been accused of essentialism. For instance, Wittig denounces Cixous’s metaphorical allusions to the female body as mere reiterations of patriarchal myths about women.⁸⁸ Ann Jones contends that *écriture féminine* not only preserves the male–female binary but actively participates in it.⁸⁹ Irigaray has faced particularly severe charges of essentialism. For example, Toril Moi states in *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985) that ‘Irigaray falls into the very essentialist trap of defining woman that she set out to avoid’.⁹⁰ Indeed, Irigaray’s utopian vision of the female body—‘son sexe [...] fait de deux lèvres qui s’embrassent continûment’⁹¹—seems to reduce

⁸⁴ Luce Irigaray, *Ce sexe qui n’en est pas un* (Paris: Minuit, 1977), p. 23.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁸⁶ Luce Irigaray, ‘Petite annonce: Égales ou différentes?’ (1990), in *Je, tu, nous: Pour une culture de la différence* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), pp. 9–15 (p. 12).

⁸⁷ Luce Irigaray, ‘Pourquoi définir des droits sexués?’ (1988), in *Je, tu, nous*, pp. 101–15 (pp. 104–07).

⁸⁸ Monique Wittig, ‘The Point of View: Universal or Particular?’ (1980), in *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp. 59–67 (p. 59).

⁸⁹ Ann Rosalind Jones, ‘Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of “L’Ecriture Feminine”’, *Feminist Studies*, 7 (1981), 247–63 (p. 255).

⁹⁰ Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2002 [1985]), p. 142.

⁹¹ Irigaray, *Ce sexe*, p. 24.

womanhood to a physiological reality and, ignoring the persuasive materialist argument that culture is central to women's oppression, suggests that women's empowerment can come through the body. Moreover, Irigaray's theory of sexuate rights presumes that there are two and only two sexes. In 'Égales ou différentes?', Irigaray writes: 'L'espèce humaine est divisée en *deux genres* qui en assurent la production et reproduction'.⁹² Irigaray fails, then, to acknowledge the artificiality and exclusionary power of the gender binary. It is far from clear how sexuate rights would incorporate queer and, in particular, intersex, non-binary, and transgender people.

More sympathetic responses to Irigaray propose a more nuanced view of essentialism. Naomi Schor, for instance, problematizes the terms of the essentialist–constructionist divide within feminist theory, arguing that the feminist understanding of essentialism fails to recognize the multitude of positions that essentialism can encompass.⁹³ Essentialism is thus for Schor as female sexuality is for Irigaray: not one. Diana Fuss contends that constructionist accounts of gender depend partly on essentialism, for while constructionism postulates that essence is historically constructed, it often deploys essentializing notions of history.⁹⁴

In contrast to Cixous and Irigaray, Wittig believes that sexual difference is the obstacle to women's oppression and must be abolished. In 'The Category of Sex' (1976/1982), Wittig argues that men and women are categories that establish heterosexuality as a political regime and that impose on women responsibility for human reproduction.⁹⁵ Lesbians therefore exist outside the regime of heterosexuality, leading Wittig to her fierce declaration at the end of her most famous essay, 'The Straight Mind' (1980), that '[l]esbians are not women'.⁹⁶ Despite her rejection of *écriture féminine*, Wittig's project has much in common with Cixous's. Like Cixous, Wittig considers language to be a fundamental source of women's oppression.⁹⁷ Wittig's fiction, most notably *Les Guérillères* (1969) and *Le Corps lesbien* (1973), aims to deconstruct phallogocentrism by creating a non-phallogocentric language. Although she condemns Cixous for upholding the male–female binary, Wittig's fictional texts appear to theorize an alternative essentialism

⁹² Irigaray, 'Égales ou différentes?', pp. 12–13.

⁹³ Naomi Schor, 'This Essentialism Which Is Not One: Coming to Grips with Irigaray' (1989), in *Engaging with Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought*, ed. by Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor, and Margaret Whitford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 57–78 (p. 60).

⁹⁴ Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature & Difference* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 3.

⁹⁵ Monique Wittig, 'The Category of Sex' (1976/1982), in *The Straight Mind*, pp. 1–8 (pp. 5–6).

⁹⁶ Monique Wittig, 'The Straight Mind' (1980), in *The Straight Mind*, pp. 21–32 (p. 32).

⁹⁷ See Monique Wittig, 'The Mark of Gender' (1985), in *The Straight Mind*, pp. 76–89.

by endorsing an opposition between heterosexuality and lesbianism. Wittig's fictional and theoretical works thus present a paradox that she fails to resolve.

The essentialist–constructionist debate is also a problematic of gay and lesbian studies and queer theory. In *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (1980), John Boswell defines “gay people” as those ‘who are conscious of erotic inclination toward their own gender as a distinguishing characteristic’.⁹⁸ For Boswell, then, heterosexual and homosexual, although terms that date from the late nineteenth century, are categories that are nonetheless understood crossculturally and transhistorically. In response to charges of essentialism, Boswell subsequently revised his definition of “gay people”: ‘I would now define “gay persons” more simply as those whose erotic interest is predominantly directed toward their own gender’.⁹⁹ Homoerotic interest is indeed a universal phenomenon. However, Boswell's later definition shifts the focus of the debate from sexuality and sexual identity—which refers to how people define and explain their erotic preferences—to one about desire. A discussion of the constructionist position on sexuality will elucidate this distinction. Michel Foucault's seminal *Histoire de la sexualité* (1976–84) underpins this position. Foucault believed that sexuality is a construct dating from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In *La Volonté de savoir* (1976), the first of the *Histoire*'s three volumes, Foucault challenges what he calls ‘the repressive hypothesis’—the assumption that this period was one of sexual repression.¹⁰⁰ Foucault argues that it was, on the contrary, marked by a proliferation of discourses of sex and sexuality, particularly in the medical profession, which led to the invention of modern sexual identity categories. Following Foucault, David Halperin contends that before the end of the nineteenth century there was no homosexuality, only what nineteenth-century sexologists called “sexual inversion”.¹⁰¹ Sexual inversion was a pathology that encompassed a range of gender-deviant behaviour, of which homosexuality was only an example. Homosexuality, on the other hand, refers exclusively to sexual object choice. Until the medicalization of homosexuality, then, same-sex desire was not distinguished from other forms of gender non-conformity. Importantly, neither Foucault nor Halperin

⁹⁸ John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 44.

⁹⁹ John Boswell, ‘Revolutions, Universals, and Sexual Categories’, in *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, ed. by Martin B. Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey (London: Meridian, 1990), pp. 17–36 (p. 35).

¹⁰⁰ Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité: La Volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976).

¹⁰¹ David M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 15.

argues that homosexuality, as it is now commonly understood, did not exist prior to the nineteenth century. What they do claim, however, is that sexuality is an invention of modernity that works to categorize and classify human experience. Sexuality, as Halperin writes, ‘generates sexual identity: it endows each of us with an individual sexual nature, with a personal essence defined (at least in part) in specifically sexual terms’.¹⁰² In other words, the invention of homosexuality and, ultimately, of heterosexuality establishes people’s sexual acts and preferences as a marker of their identity in a way that did not predate the late nineteenth century.

Judith Butler’s landmark work, *Gender Trouble* (1990), brings together feminist and gay and lesbian positions on the essentialist–constructionist debate. A constructionist *par excellence*, Butler challenges the neat separation within feminist theory of biological sex from culturally constituted gender. For Butler, sex does not exist prediscursively—that is to say, the body can only be understood through discourses of gender. As Butler states, ‘perhaps this construct called “sex” is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender’.¹⁰³ Butler therefore defines gender as the regime that sexes human beings into the categories of male and female: ‘Gender ought not to be conceived merely as the cultural inscription of meaning on a pre-given sex (a juridical conception); gender must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established’.¹⁰⁴ Butler’s stance resonates strongly with, and draws heavily on, Foucault’s position on sexuality. Just as for Foucault nineteenth-century discourses of sexuality worked to categorize human sexual experience, for Butler discourses of gender ascribe meaning to sex. Butler further argues that gender is constituted performatively: there is no predefined or predetermined identity “behind” acts of gender; rather, this identity is constantly being produced by the repetitive “doing” of gender.¹⁰⁵ Because it is continually being reiterated, identity is always open to redefinition. Butler thus challenges Beauvoir’s emphasis on becoming, for to “become” a gender means to “arrive at” a finite entity that, for Butler, is unattainable. Butler further challenges essentialist conceptions of gender by underlining the differences between women—for example, in terms of class, race, and sexuality—rather than a supposedly inherent difference between women and men. The target of her criticism, here, is undoubtedly

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁰³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge Classics, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2007 [1990]), p. 9.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

sexual difference feminists such as Irigaray. *Gender Trouble* begins by questioning the pertinence of a feminism that claims to represent women. Since, in Butler's thinking, identities are constantly unstable, the category "woman" as a subject of political representation cannot be comprehensive and inevitably creates exclusions. In this respect, Butler echoes the criticism levelled at second-wave feminism by black feminists and lesbian feminists for its bias toward white, heterosexual women. For Butler, identity politics thus threatens to become an instrument of the very power relations that it seeks to dismantle.

It is in the midst of this debate between essentialists and constructionists that the first studies of gay and lesbian parenting were carried out. These studies, which appeared in the late 1970s, were prompted by the growing visibility of homosexual parents and the challenge that same-sex parenting issued to traditional theories of psychosocial development, which, as was discussed earlier, emphasize the distinctive role of mothers and fathers in the healthy development of children. These studies were, moreover, a response to prejudice against homosexual parents in the resolution of custodial disputes and in the creation of adoption policies. As such, initial studies of gay and lesbian parenting investigated the validity of three unproven fears that were frequently cited to oppose gay and lesbian parents in the courts: first, children raised by same-sex parents will display signs of abnormal sexual development—that is, they will themselves identify as homosexual in later life; second, same-sex-parented children are more apt to develop mental health problems than those brought up in heterosexual families; finally, children of lesbians and gay men struggle to build relationships with peers.¹⁰⁶ All three fears proved to be unfounded: the psychological, sexual, and social development of same-sex-parented children was found to compare with that of children living in heterosexual families. Initial findings support what has since become known as the "no differences" model of gay and lesbian parenting—that is, one that presents no significant developmental differences between mixed- and same-sex-parented children.

Although studies have largely questioned the assumption that gay and lesbian parents produce gay and lesbian children, Paul Cameron's findings are a notable, if controversial, exception. In Cameron's study, more than half of daughters thought that their lesbian mother wanted them to become homosexual, and Cameron argues that this pressure, coupled with same-sex-parented children's immersion in "gay culture", could impact on

¹⁰⁶ For a comprehensive review of these studies, see Charlotte J. Patterson, 'Children of Lesbian and Gay Parents', *Child Development*, 63 (1992), 1025–42.

children's adult sexual identity.¹⁰⁷ For Cameron, investigations of the relationship between parental and children's sexuality is both methodologically flawed and politically biased. He argues that since studies have predominantly focused on young children, the impact of parental homosexuality on adult children—that is, on children who are postpubescent and sexually active—has yet to be ascertained.¹⁰⁸ Cameron further contends that those who deny a correlation between parental and children's sexual identity favour same-sex parenting and support proposals to extend adoption rights to same-sex couples.¹⁰⁹ Cameron has been widely condemned for his blatantly homophobic position on same-sex parenting, evidenced by his provocative reference to contagion theory—the belief that homosexuality is a learned pathology. While his own findings appear to support the hypothesis that gay and lesbian parents “produce” gay and lesbian children, Walter Schumm, in response to Cameron's work, maintains that the intergenerational transfer of sexual orientation is only problematic if one has a problem with same-sex desire and affectivity in the first place.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, Judith Stacey and Timothy Biblarz point out the difficulty of defining sexuality.¹¹¹ Studies investigating the impact of parental sexuality on that of their children measure sexuality as a hetero–homosexual dichotomy, rather than as a continuum, and fail to account for the possible mutability and undefinability of sexual preference.

While early studies of gay and lesbian parenting played a crucial role in preventing homosexual parents from losing custody of their children and, more recently, in encouraging legislative changes that extend parenting rights to same-sex couples, recent social scientific work on gay and lesbian parenting has problematized the “no differences” model. Stacey and Biblarz, for example, argue that by accepting heterosexual families as the standard by which gay and lesbian parents ought to be judged this model reinforces heteronormativity and assumes that differences amount to deficits.¹¹² The preface to Gillian Hanscombe and Jackie Forster's *Rocking the Cradle* (1981), one of the earliest books about lesbian mothers, exemplifies the defensiveness that is the object of Stacey

¹⁰⁷ Paul Cameron, ‘Children of Homosexuals and Transsexuals More Apt to Be Homosexual’, *Journal of Biosocial Science*, 38 (2006), 413–18 (p. 416).

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 414.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 415–16.

¹¹⁰ Walter Schumm, ‘Children of Homosexuals More Apt to Be Homosexuals? A Reply to Morrison and to Cameron Based on an Examination of Multiple Sources of Data’, *Journal of Biosocial Science*, 42 (2010), 721–42 (p. 732).

¹¹¹ Judith Stacey and Timothy Biblarz, ‘(How) Does the Sexual Orientation of Children Matter?’, *American Sociological Review*, 66 (2001), 159–83 (p. 171).

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 162.

and Biblarz's critique. The book opens with a description of the 'usual idea of a lesbian' as 'someone who isn't quite nice', who 'is possibly mad, or possibly dangerous, or possibly freakish and pitiable', and who is depicted, in books and films, as masculine-looking, flat-chested, overweight, and so on.¹¹³ Clearly, this is not the authors' position on lesbianism, yet the book's next paragraph, although not as lesbophobic as the stereotype just described, seeks to assimilate lesbian mothers to a heterosexual norm: 'It will seem strange to many,' write Hanscombe and Forster, 'to hear that hundreds of lesbians are not only not half-men, but that they are perfectly normal mothers'.¹¹⁴ They go on:

[T]here are already thousands of [lesbian mothers], all over the world, bringing up their children just like other mothers do. We want to introduce you to some of these mothers, their friends and their children, so that you can see for yourselves how normal and ordinary they are.¹¹⁵

The authors' insistence on the normality of lesbian mothers is slightly at odds with their subsequent reservations about the normative status of the nuclear family; indeed, their argument in the above passage seems to underscore lesbian mothers' conformity to the norm. One way in which to come to terms with this tension is to differentiate between the structural norm—which refers to the configuration of the family in terms of the parents' gender and sexual identity—and the emotional norm—that is, the feelings that parents experience in relation to their children. While lesbian mothers clearly depart from the normative nuclear configuration, heterosexual and lesbian mothers might well share similar emotional experiences vis-à-vis their children. It is in this sense, according to Hanscombe and Forster, that lesbian mothers are just like other mothers.

Since the 2000s, research has begun to embrace the possibility that gay and lesbian families provide children with a number of advantages: first, same-sex-parented children display greater tolerance of diversity relative to those in heterosexual families.¹¹⁶ Second, homosexual parents, especially lesbians, are more likely than heterosexual couples to engage in egalitarian divisions of paid and unpaid labour.¹¹⁷ Henny Bos's comprehensive

¹¹³ Gillian Hanscombe and Jackie Forster, *Rocking the Cradle: Lesbian Mothers: A Challenge in Family Living* (London: Owen, 1981), p. 9.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹¹⁶ Megan Fulcher, Erin L. Sutfin, and Charlotte J. Patterson, 'Individual Differences in Gender Development: Associations with Parental Sexual Orientation, Attitudes, and Division of Labor', *Sex Roles*, 58 (2008), 330–41; Erin L. Sutfin and others, 'How Lesbian and Heterosexual Parents Convey Attitudes about Gender to their Children: The Role of Gendered Environments', *Sex Roles*, 58 (2008), 501–13.

¹¹⁷ Jordan B. Downing and Abbie E. Goldberg, 'Lesbian Mothers' Constructions of the Division of Paid and Unpaid Labor', *Feminism and Psychology*, 21 (2011), 100–20; Lawrence A. Kurdek, 'The Allocation

comparative study of 100 planned lesbian and 100 heterosexual families reveals several differences between these families.¹¹⁸ Compared with heterosexual families, lesbian mothers exhibit greater desire to have a child and tend to reflect more on their motives for starting a family. Whether children conform to social norms is less important to lesbian mothers than to heterosexual families. Relative to heterosexual fathers, lesbian comothers report greater emotional involvement with their children, display more respect for their children's autonomy, and are less likely to assert their power over their children. In addition, lesbian comothers feel obliged to justify the quality of their parenting more often than do heterosexual fathers. For Bos, these findings do not show either type of family to be superior in terms of child development—which was found to be similar regardless of family type—but emphasize the effects of discrimination against non-traditional families.¹¹⁹ Experiences of stigmatization increase levels of parental stress in lesbian families. Lesbian mothers who had greater experience with discrimination also reported more behavioural problems with their children, suggesting that the threat to children's wellbeing stems not from having lesbian parents but from cultural and social norms of kinship, which may impact negatively on gay and lesbian parents and their children.

Following Stacey and Biblarz, scholars have begun to assert and reclaim the specificity of gay and lesbian families on ideological as well as empirical grounds. Sasha Lerner and Ada Sinacore, for example, contend that comparative studies of heterosexual and lesbian parenting preserve a hetero-homosexual dichotomy that equates homosexuality with abnormality and posits that lesbian families are tolerable only insofar as they resemble heterosexual families.¹²⁰ Shelly Park warns that the desire to legitimize non-normative modes of kinship often engenders their assimilation to the norm, thus nullifying their subversive potential.¹²¹ Maureen Sullivan argues that, although gay and lesbian families are but one example of the changes to sexuality and family life dating from at least the latter half of the twentieth century, the results of these changes should ultimately be

of Household Labor by Partners in Gay and Lesbian Couples', *Journal of Family Issues*, 28 (2007), 132–48; Charlotte J. Patterson, Erin L. Sutfin, and Megan Fulcher, 'Division of Labor among Lesbian and Heterosexual Parenting Couples: Correlates of Specialized versus Shared Patterns', *Journal of Adult Development*, 11 (2004), 179–89.

¹¹⁸ Henny M. W. Bos, *Parenting in Planned Lesbian Families* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2004).

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

¹²⁰ Sasha Lerner and Ada Sinacore, 'Lesbian Mother–Heterosexual Daughter Relationships: Toward a Postmodern Feminist Analysis', *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, 8 (2012), 446–64 (p. 457).

¹²¹ Shelly M. Park, *Mothering Queerly, Queering Motherhood: Resisting Monomaterialism in Adoptive, Lesbian, Blended, and Polygamous Families* (Albany: SUNY, 2013), p. 8.

understood as novel configurations of kinship that depart radically from the traditional model.¹²² For Sullivan, the effects of gay and lesbian parenting on gender relations are potentially ground-breaking. If, as many feminists have argued, the heterosexual family is the site for the reproduction of patriarchy, this cycle may be broken by homosexual family formations.¹²³ Although Sullivan's argument is persuasive, it is important not to conflate or idealize the subversive potential of gay and lesbian families. Same-gender parents do not automatically have non-normative attitudes towards gender, just as mixed-gender parents do not necessarily hold gender-conservative views. The gender-transgressive potential of parenting lies in how children are raised rather than in the gender of the parents.

French social scientists share the reservations of their North American colleagues about the “no differences” model. Martine Gross, perhaps the most prolific researcher on same-sex parenting in France, maintains that although the term “homoparentalité”—a neologism coined by the *Association des Parents et Futurs Parents Gays et Lesbiens* to refer to any family in which at least one adult who identifies as homosexual is the parent of at least one child—marks the same-sex parent context as divergent from the “ordinary”, heterosexual norm by underlining the homosexuality of parents, denomination ultimately ensures the visibility of same-sex parenting.¹²⁴ In *La Famille en désordre* (2002), Élisabeth Roudinesco argues:

[I]l faudra bien admettre aussi que les parents homosexuels sont différents des autres parents. C'est pourquoi notre société doit accepter qu'ils existent tels qu'ils sont [...]. Et ce n'est pas en se contraignant à être “normaux” que les homosexuels parviendront à prouver leur aptitude à élever leurs enfants.¹²⁵

Roudinesco's stance on LGBT parenting views aspirations to “normality” as futile and difference as a means of achieving equality between mixed- and same-sex modes of kinship. In *Les Mères lesbiennes* (2010), the first French-language book devoted entirely to lesbian mothering, Virginie Descoutures takes a similar view:

La mise en scène de la vie familiale [lesbienne] peut se dessiner en contre-jour de celle qui est socialement “attendue” et donc, même si elle se fait toujours référence à la norme, les contours révélés n'ont pas pour objectif premier de normaliser la vie d'une famille constituée de mères lesbiennes, mais

¹²² Maureen Sullivan, *The Family of Woman: Lesbian Mothers, their Children, and the Undoing of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), p. 17.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 11–12.

¹²⁴ Martine Gross, *Qu'est-ce que l'homoparentalité?* (Paris: Payot & Rivages, 2012), pp. 7–8.

¹²⁵ Élisabeth Roudinesco, *La Famille en désordre* (Paris: Fayard, 2002), p. 238.

visent plutôt à rendre a-normale [...] la vie d'une famille "normale", c'est-à-dire hétéroparentale.¹²⁶

Instead of asking how far LGBT families resemble those headed by a heterosexual couple, Descoutures inverts the terms of the difference–equality debate by uncoupling the nexus between normality and heterosexual parenting. Descoutures further argues that ‘c’est à partir du moment où le modèle “universel” est redéfini comme une construction sociale issue de rapports de domination déjà existants que la question de l’égalité des droits et des traitements peut être examinée’.¹²⁷ For Descoutures, then, equality for lesbian mothers will only be achieved when the authority of the ideologically dominant, heterosexual family is questioned. Despite her own position, Descoutures’s interviews with lesbian families show that mothers tend to assert their similarity with heterosexual mothers.

In France, scholars could be said to display a greater concern than their colleagues in the US with documenting the many structures of LGBT families and with theorizing the extent to which they depart from the normative nuclear triangulation. In *Qu’est-ce que l’homoparentalité?* (2012), Gross distinguishes principally between two-parent and multiparent LGBT families.¹²⁸ In *Des parents comme les autres* (2002), anthropologist Anne Cadoret identifies four types of LGBT family: those created when one parent enters a homosexual relationship following the breakdown of a heterosexual partnership; coparenting arrangements—that is, when a same-sex couple seeks the help of an opposite-sex person or couple to conceive and raise a child together; those created via adoption; and those created via recourse to assisted reproductive technology.¹²⁹ Éric Garnier’s *L’Homoparentalité en France* (2012) follows Cadoret’s model but differentiates between families created via surrogacy and those created via artificial insemination as well as between coparenting arrangements and stepparent families, thus distinguishing between six forms of gay and lesbian family and, in this way, eschewing essentialism.¹³⁰ Whereas Gross therefore classifies gay and lesbian families in numerical terms, Cadoret and Garnier group them according to the circumstances of their formation.

Some studies of gay and lesbian parenting have endeavoured to go beyond a view of homosexual parents as either assimilative or radical. In her comparative study of Irish and

¹²⁶ Virginie Descoutures, *Les Mères lesbiennes* (Paris: PUF, 2010), pp. 122–23.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

¹²⁸ Gross, *Qu’est-ce que l’homoparentalité?*, pp. 91–92.

¹²⁹ Anne Cadoret, *Des parents comme les autres: Homosexualité et parenté* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2002), pp. 14–15.

¹³⁰ Éric Garnier, *L’Homoparentalité en France: La Bataille des nouvelles familles* (Vincennes: Thierry Marchaisse, 2012), pp. 16–22.

Swedish lesbian mothers, for instance, Róisín Ryan-Flood suggests that it might be more productive to see them as ‘inhabiting norms differently’.¹³¹ Stephen Hicks rejects the assimilation–transgression dilemma, arguing that it reiterates either/or-type arguments, reinforces the normative status of heterosexuality, and confines gay and lesbian families to essentialist positions.¹³² Instead, Hicks advocates an approach that investigates how and why gay and lesbian parents utilize claims to both conformity and rebellion in their everyday lives.¹³³ This is not to reject outright the ways in which these families reinvent discourses of the family, parenting, and sexuality, but Hicks maintains that experiences of difference are only ever the result of dominant discourses and never a product of essential characteristics.¹³⁴ The arguments of Ryan-Flood and Hicks constitute the beginnings of a theoretical shift from essentialism *versus* constructionism to essentialism *and* constructionism. Indeed, they seem to respond to the suggestion discussed earlier by Schor that essentialism be regarded as a multitude of positions.

As well as studies of gay and lesbian parenting, a handful of scholars have begun trying to “queer” mothering. Of this kind, two titles in particular stand out: Shelly Park’s monograph, *Mothering Queerly, Queering Motherhood* (2013), and Margaret Gibson’s edited collection, *Queering Motherhood* (2014). Park’s study brings together lesbian families with adoptive, blended, and polygamous families on the grounds that, despite the specificities of each family type, they have something in common: the presence of two or more mothers. To queer motherhood, according to Park, is to legitimize and make visible the polymaternal family—that is to say, a family that comprises two or more women who both, irrespective of their biological status in relation to their child, identify as his or her mother based on their shared contribution to his or her upbringing.¹³⁵ This demands that mothering be thought of in social as well as biological terms, just as queer theorists regard gender and sexuality as social constructs. Park further argues that, to some degree, to queer motherhood is to understand lesbian mothering as a prototype for other configurations of mothering.¹³⁶ It is, moreover, essential to look beyond the mother–child relationship and towards an analysis of the relationship between mothers. Drawing on

¹³¹ Róisín Ryan-Flood, *Lesbian Motherhood: Gender, Families and Sexual Citizenship* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 3.

¹³² Stephen Hicks, *Lesbian, Gay, and Queer Parenting: Families, Intimacies, Genealogies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 8.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹³⁵ Park, p. 3.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

Eve Sedgwick's point that intermale bonding is traditionally posited as a rivalry over a woman, thus reconfiguring queer desire as heterosexual desire, Park argues that interfemale bonding is frequently made intelligible by structuring it around a child, thus reframing it as reproductive desire.¹³⁷ In polymaternal families, Park writes, female bonding over children is thought of as rivalry. For instance, it is not inconceivable, given the cultural and legal importance of the biological in matters of parenting, that lesbian comothers should exhibit some anxiety or jealousy vis-à-vis their partner's relationship with their child, as Chapter Three demonstrates.

Gibson, whose introduction begins with the disclaimer that queer eschews definition, suggests that to queer motherhood is, broadly speaking, to pull it outside the expectations of reproduction, sexuality, culture, kinship, race, and embodiment.¹³⁸ Queer motherhood can therefore begin where any of these expectations are challenged. As Park's focus on a multitude of family types also implies, Gibson thus contends that, while much can be gleaned from hearing about the experiences of queer parents, the project of queering motherhood is not limited to studying mothers who identify as queer and especially not within existing heteronormative frameworks.¹³⁹ Moreover, Gibson asks a highly interesting question: 'Can we "queer motherhood" by shaking off methodological and theoretical formulae in our own beliefs and practices of what constitutes academic writing on motherhood, or scholarship more generally?'.¹⁴⁰ This thesis does not seek to offer an answer to this question or to challenge "scholarly" norms but, rather, to examine how French literary representations of lesbian mothering contribute to political and theoretical debates on gay and lesbian parenting. That said, Gibson's question is one about the pertinence of binarized distinction between "narrative" and "theory"—a distinction that, as the discussion of genre in Chapter Five will show, is also blurred by my literary corpus.

Many French-authored studies of gay and lesbian parents are also concerned with unpicking the negative discourses associated with them, perhaps due to the ongoing debates surrounding gay and lesbian parenting in France. Gross's *Parent ou homo: Faut-il choisir?* (2013), for instance, identifies the most prevalent arguments and stereotypes voiced to oppose gay and lesbian parenting.¹⁴¹ Descoutures conducts interviews with

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹³⁸ Margaret F. Gibson, 'Introduction: Queering Motherhood in Narrative, Theory, and the Everyday', in *Queering Motherhood: Narrative and Theoretical Perspectives*, ed. by Margaret F. Gibson (Bradford, ON: Demeter, 2014), pp. 1–23 (p. 1).

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 5–6.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁴¹ Martine Gross, *Parent ou homo: Faut-il choisir? Idées reçues sur l'homoparentalité* (Paris: Le Cavalier

forty-eight biological (24) and nonbiological (24) lesbian mothers to construct a picture of the experience of forming and being a lesbian family. In addition, Descoutures employs the interviews to interrogate the heteronormative framework in which her interviewees' experience take place and the discourses that inform this experience.

In addition to the increasing volume of academic work on the subject, an interesting genre of writing that merges autobiography with social commentary has contributed to the debate surrounding the sociolegal status of gay and lesbian parents, mostly in the United States. These texts seem to follow the tradition begun by Adrienne Rich of using personal experience to generate theory and stem, it seems, from the writers' need to voice their experiences, be they positive, negative, or "ordinary". For instance, Nancy Abrams's poignant *The Other Mother* (1999), written during her four-and-a-half-year separation from her daughter, of whom she lost custody following her split with her partner, the child's biological mother, is an attack on the prejudice against homosexual parents in the legal system.¹⁴² Becky Thompson tells of her experience as a white lesbian mother raising an African-American boy, whom she adopted suddenly when he was nine, thus exploring how racial, sexual, and class-based discriminations interact to inform the experience of mothering.¹⁴³ Dawn Prince-Hughes also explores prejudice from a multitude of dimensions in her autobiographical account of becoming a nonbiological lesbian mother with autism.¹⁴⁴ Amie Miller's *She Looks Just Like You* (2010) is a lighthearted retelling of nonbiological lesbian mothering, which features a humorous description of artificial insemination, but also an honest admission of the difficulties of being a mother and of the strain that parenting puts on relationships.¹⁴⁵ In each of these texts, the authors claim that they wish to share a story that they have not been able to find in preexisting autobiographies of mothering. Collectively, then, they serve to make lesbian mothering visible as an alternative to the grand narrative of heterosexual mothering. Just as they challenge the organization of parenting around the gender binary, their juxtaposition of personal experience with "objective" scholarship poses interesting questions about the binary between literature and theory. This thesis considers two French-authored texts of

Bleu, 2013).

¹⁴² Nancy Abrams, *The Other Mother: A Lesbian's Fight for her Daughter* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999).

¹⁴³ Becky W. Thompson, *Mothering without a Compass: White Mother's Love, Black Son's Courage* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

¹⁴⁴ Dawn Prince-Hughes, *Expecting Teryk: An Exceptional Path to Parenthood* (Athens: Swallow Press/Ohio University Press, 2005).

¹⁴⁵ Amie Klempnauer Miller, *She Looks Just Like You: A Memoir of (Nonbiological Lesbian) Motherhood* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2010).

this kind—Brigitte Célier’s *Maman, Mamour, ses deux mamans: Grandir dans une famille homoparentale* (2008) and Myriam Blanc’s *elles eurent beaucoup d’enfants... Et se marièrent: Histoire d’une famille homoparentale* (2012)—and, in Chapter Five, interrogates the parallel between their transgressive narrative and their blurring of the lines between traditional genres.

Essentialism versus constructionism is perhaps the most important and certainly the most recurrent debate among scholars of gay and lesbian parenting. It is also, as will be shown in Chapter Three, a dominant theme of literary representations of lesbian mothering. The theories presented here will, then, be central to the theoretical framework of Chapter Three, and attempts will be made to place the literary corpus within this theoretical context. Moving on from critical theory, the final two sections of this chapter turn to studies of lesbianism and mothering in French literature in order to position this thesis within its literary critical context.

Lesbianism, Literature, and Literary Criticism

French lesbian writing has traditionally received less critical attention than gay male texts. George Stambolian and Elaine Marks’s pioneering volume of essays on homosexuality in French literature exemplifies this imbalance by dedicating just two chapters to lesbian writing exclusively. In one of these chapters, Marks presents a chronological overview of lesbian-themed French literature and identifies what she calls the ‘Sappho model’—that is, the literal or symbolic presence of Sappho in literature about women loving women.¹⁴⁶ In particular, the school has been the recurring setting of lesbian-themed fiction since the eighteenth century, despite the lack of proof that Sappho founded a school on Lesbos. The now established field of lesbian literary criticism has revealed the gradual shift from depictions of self-destructive figures in the nineteenth century to contemporary representations of lesbians assuming their sexuality. This thesis adds to this field by focusing on late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century lesbian-themed texts whose characters are, overall, at ease with their sexuality. This section traces the development of and critically reviews the main contributions to this field and positions this thesis within this critical context.

A number of studies of lesbians in French literature focus on the works of nineteenth-

¹⁴⁶ Elaine Marks, ‘Lesbian Intertextuality’, in *Homosexualities and French Literature: Cultural Contexts/Critical Texts*, ed. by George Stambolian and Elaine Marks (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), pp. 353–77 (p. 356).

century writers. These studies expose the patriarchal norms underpinning representations of lesbianism in this period. For instance, Tama Engelking's analysis of Renée Vivien's poetry argues that it ultimately reinforces patriarchal images of femininity by portraying a string of destructive women.¹⁴⁷ Similarly, Dominique Fisher shows in her discussion of Rachilde that the writer's depiction of lesbianism is disempowering and misogynistic. In *Monsieur Vénus* (1884), the lesbian is relegated to the status of a prostitute, and in *Les Hors-nature* (1897) Marguerite Florane must conform to the heteronormative order by renouncing her desire for women and declaring love for a man.¹⁴⁸ In Catulle Mendès's *Méphistophéla* (1890), the novel's heroine becomes a drug addict and develops an incestuous attraction to her own daughter.¹⁴⁹ *Fin-de-siècle* representations of lesbians are, then, at best pessimistic—associating lesbianism with negative symbols such as illness and vice, or masking it behind “romantic friendships”—and at worst homophobic and misogynistic.

Studies of lesbianism in twentieth-century literature illustrate the steady emergence of empowered lesbian characters in this period. The most extensive of these studies are Jennifer Waelti-Walters's *Damned Women: Lesbians in French Novels, 1796–1996* (2000) and Lucille Cairns's *Lesbian Desire in Post-1968 French Literature* (2002). Before their publication, lesbian writing had, as Cairns argues, received little critical attention.¹⁵⁰ Both studies therefore seek to uncover lesbian writing from its shroud of invisibility and prove the long-established presence of lesbians in French novels, which, as Waelti-Walters shows, dates from as early as 1796 when Diderot published *La Religieuse*.¹⁵¹ To this end, Waelti-Walters and Cairns cover an impressively large corpus of primary texts, thus providing, as Cairns puts it, ‘useful, quasi-encyclopaedic reference tool[s]’ for the study of lesbian writing.¹⁵² Perhaps the most significant change to the lesbian literary landscape in the twentieth century was the shift from male- to female-authored lesbian writing, which, according to Waelti-Walters, goes back to the

¹⁴⁷ Tama Lea Engelking, ‘Renée Vivien and The Ladies of the Lake’, *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 30 (2002), 363–80 (p. 375).

¹⁴⁸ Dominique D. Fisher, ‘A propos du “Rachildisme” ou Rachilde et les lesbiennes’, *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 31 (2003), 297–310 (p. 297).

¹⁴⁹ See Gretchen Schultz, ‘*La Rage du plaisir et la rage de la douleur*: Lesbian Pleasure and Suffering in Fin-de-Siècle French Literature and Sexology’, in *Pleasure and Pain in Nineteenth-Century French Literature and Culture*, ed. by David Evans and Kate Griffiths (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), pp. 175–86.

¹⁵⁰ Lucille Cairns, *Lesbian Desire in Post-1968 French Literature* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 2002), p. 1.

¹⁵¹ Jennifer Waelti-Walters, *Damned Women: Lesbians in French Novels, 1796–1996* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), p. 3.

¹⁵² Cairns, *Lesbian Desire*, p. 10.

publication of Jeanne Galzy's *L'Initiatrice aux mains vides* in 1929.¹⁵³ With the emergence of female-authored lesbian writing came that of increasingly sympathetic portrayals of lesbians. Although still troubled, especially in early twentieth-century texts, they are no longer demonized. Lesbianism even enters the works of the most celebrated twentieth-century women writers, such as Simone de Beauvoir's *L'Invitée* (1943), Violette Leduc's *Thérèse et Isabelle* (1966), and Monique Wittig's *Les Guérillères* (1969) and *Le Corps lesbien* (1973). Wittig's lesbian fiction in particular, perhaps because she identified as a lesbian and was a hugely influential lesbian radical theorist, has attracted a wealth of criticism. Namascar Shaktini's analyses of *Le Corps lesbien* centre on Wittig's critique of phallogocentrism—that is, the structuring of language and meaning around the phallus—and her attempt to reorganize language around the lesbian body.¹⁵⁴ Similarly, James Davis's analysis of *Les Guérillères* investigates Wittig's violent reinvention of male-centred myths and language.¹⁵⁵ Wittig's fiction is, then, a precursor to her theoretical works, in which language is presented as an important site of female oppression and heterosexual dominance. This thesis builds on existing studies of lesbian writing, for while its primary focus is on the characters' experiences of mothering it will also examine inter-female desire and love. Since Waelti-Walters's and Cairns's studies have cut-off points of 1996 and 1998 respectively, this thesis is, additionally, the first sustained analysis of (mostly) twenty-first-century lesbian writing. The texts studied in this thesis are part of the literary panorama just outlined. Indeed, the centrality of mothering in these texts may even indicate an emerging trend within lesbian writing more broadly—a trend that both reflects and contributes to the dismantling of the association of lesbianism with childlessness and the opposition between homosexuality and family.

Critically, as far as this thesis is concerned, Waelti-Walters and Cairns offer analyses of Jocelyne François and Hélène de Monferrand, whose works feature in the discussions in Chapters Two and Five. Although both note the presence of a lesbian mother in these texts, in line with the wider remit of their studies it is on the texts' encodings of lesbian desire and love that they predominantly focus. Waelti-Walters and Cairns identify the centrality of love in François's novels: the former underscores the characters' acceptance of their homosexuality and mutual feelings; the latter emphasizes the heteronormative

¹⁵³ Waelti-Walters, p. 97.

¹⁵⁴ Namascar Shaktini, 'Displacing the Phallic Subject: Wittig's Lesbian Writing', *Signs*, 8 (1982), 29–44; Namascar Shaktini, 'Monique Wittig's New Language', *Pacific Coast Philology*, 24 (1989), 83–93.

¹⁵⁵ James D. Davis, Jr., *Beautiful War: Uncommon Violence, Praxis, and Aesthetics in the Novels of Monique Wittig* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010).

forces impinging on lesbian love to which Waelti-Walters makes only passing references.¹⁵⁶ In this way, Cairns gives a more rigorous analysis of the heteronormative context in which François's work is set and with which it engages. As for Monferrand, Waelti-Walters and Cairns oppose the writer's apparent elitism and social conservatism.¹⁵⁷ For Cairns, Monferrand's social conservatism directly opposes her sexual liberalism—a contradiction that, in Cairns's view, Monferrand does nothing to resolve.¹⁵⁸

As will be discussed in the following section, a small amount of critical attention has been devoted to two of the other texts studied in this thesis: Éliane Girard's *Mais qui va garder le chat?* and Myriam Blanc's *Elles eurent beaucoup d'enfants*. Significantly, though, this thesis brings a number of authors and texts into the critical limelight for the first time. It therefore sheds light on the ways in which lesbian writing is evolving in the twenty-first century and, in particular, how mothering is being integrated as a theme of lesbian writing. Like much twentieth-century lesbian-themed literature, the texts covered here present lesbianism as largely unproblematic. The issue present in these texts, rather, is the reconcilability of mothering with lesbianism.

Mothering, Literature, and Literary Criticism

Mothering is a recurrent subject of French women's writing and literary criticism, yet the vast majority of both creative and critical texts consider mothers who identify, or can be assumed to identify, as heterosexual. By focusing on rare but nonetheless emerging texts that portray lesbian mothers, this thesis is markedly different from existing studies of French literary representations of mothering. That said, it is also an extension of them in that these studies examine how women's writing exposes, questions, or rebukes normative discourses of mothering. This section maps the evolution of and critically reviews the most influential of these studies and places this thesis within this critical context.

Numerous studies of mothering in French literature focus on the works of well-known twentieth-century women writers, such as Simone de Beauvoir, Marie Cardinal, Chantal

¹⁵⁶ Waelti-Walters, p. 190; Cairns, *Lesbian Desire*, p. 212.

¹⁵⁷ Waelti-Walters, pp. 205–06.

¹⁵⁸ Lucille Cairns, 'Dissidence sexuelle, conservatisme social? La Mise en écriture du lesbianisme chez Hélène de Monferrand', in *Nouvelles écrivaines: Nouvelles voix?*, ed. by Natalie Morello and Catherine Rodgers (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), pp. 215–32.

Chawaf, Annie Ernaux, Jeanne Hyvrard, and Violette Leduc.¹⁵⁹ These studies shed light on how writers challenge patriarchal discourses of maternity, particularly the prescription of mothering as women's sole or primary function. For instance, Alison Fell claims in *Liberty, Equality, Maternity in Beauvoir, Leduc and Ernaux* (2003) that the authors resist 'dominant patriarchal interpretations of motherhood as women's "natural" and patriotic duty or destiny'.¹⁶⁰ As Fell further argues, mothers in the works of Beauvoir, Leduc, and Ernaux, and in twentieth-century women's writing in general, feature as ambiguous, ambivalent characters who subvert the patriarchal image of mothering as an idealized, selfless role.¹⁶¹

The most recent studies of mothering in French literature have turned to the works of "new women writers" publishing in the 1990s and early 2000s, such as Christine Angot, Paule Constant, Marie Darrieussecq, Virginie Despentes, Véronique Olmi, and Laurence Tardieu.¹⁶² These studies reveal how this generation of writers is, in increasingly controversial ways, continuing to disrupt normative discourses of mothering. The most comprehensive of these studies are Gill Rye's *Narratives of Mothering* (2009) and Natalie Edwards's *Voicing Voluntary Childlessness* (2016). In response to Marianne Hirsch's observation that mothers have traditionally been relegated to being the object of the narratives of others,¹⁶³ Rye posits that mothers have begun to emerge as speaking subjects in recent women's writing, both as authors and as narrators.¹⁶⁴ The texts considered in this thesis reflect this phenomenon: in most cases, the mother is the protagonist and, in some, a first-person narrator. Rye's book is also important because, as well as returning to established authors like Chantal Chawaf and Marie Ndiaye, it brings to critical attention some less well-known and previously unstudied writers, such as Leïla Marouane and Geneviève Brisac. The thematic structure, which includes chapters on ambivalence and

¹⁵⁹ See, for example, Lucille Cairns, *Marie Cardinal: Motherhood and Creativity* (Glasgow: University of Glasgow Press, 1992); Alison S. Fell, *Liberty, Equality, Maternity in Beauvoir, Leduc and Ernaux* (Oxford: Legenda, 2003); Diana Holmes, *French Women's Writing, 1848–1994* (London: Athlone, 1996); Alex Hughes, *Violette Leduc: Mothers, Lovers, and Language* (London: W.S. Maney/MHRA, 1994); Monique Saïgal, *L'Écriture: Lien de fille à mère chez Jeanne Hyvrard, Chantal Chawaf, et Annie Ernaux* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000).

¹⁶⁰ Fell, p. 187.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁶² The term "new women writers" is taken from Gill Rye and Michael Worton. See Gill Rye and Michael Worton (eds), *Women's Writing in Contemporary France: New Writers, New Literatures in the 1990s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).

¹⁶³ Marianne Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 8.

¹⁶⁴ Gill Rye, *Narratives of Mothering: Women's Writing in Contemporary France* (Newark, Del.: University of Delaware Press, 2009), p. 15.

child death, reveals the diverse circumstances and contexts in which mothering is being represented by contemporary women writers. Rye thus shows how writers, contrary to dominant expectations about mothering, present this as a potentially traumatic experience. Although narrower than Rye's in terms of corpus size, Edwards's study engages with an important and often overlooked part of discussions about mothering: the decision not to mother. Like Rye, Edwards prioritizes woman-as-subject texts, focusing on four works of first-person self-narrative published after 2000. Voluntary childlessness is, in one sense, the most outright rejection of patriarchal images of femininity and mothering. As Edwards argues, 'the authors whose work forms the basis for the analyses in this book carve out new narrative forms to encapsulate new forms of female identity and, taken together, perform a radical rethinking of the connection between femininity and maternity'.¹⁶⁵ Edwards demonstrates how childlessness, rather than being a punishment or source of shame, is represented as a positive, thoroughly considered choice.

In a number of smaller studies, Rye and Edwards focus on particular ways in which late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century women writers rebuke received ideas about mothering. For example, Rye's analysis of childbirth in Christine Angot's *Interview* (1995), Virginie Despentes's short story, 'A terme' (1995), and Camille Laurens's *Philippe* (1995) argues that these texts contest the symbolic power of women's reproductive function by situating childbirth in the contexts of incest, infanticide, and infant mortality, thus inscribing the birthing body as a site of trauma.¹⁶⁶ Furthermore, studies point out the problematization by women writers of dichotomous and subjective notions of "good" and "bad mothering". For instance, Rye's discussion of mother-daughter relations in Paule Constant's fiction argues that the writer's portrayal of this relationship, although negative, works not to blame mothers for "bad mothering" but to encode a process of mourning—that is, in Kleinian theory, the reworking of originary loss or separation from the mother.¹⁶⁷ Similarly, Edwards's examination of infanticide in Olmi's *Bord de mer* (2001) and Tardieu's *Le Jugement de Léa* (2004) argues that the authors go beyond the mad/bad framework in which infanticidal mothers are portrayed,

¹⁶⁵ Natalie Edwards, *Voicing Voluntary Childlessness: Narratives of Non-Mothering in French* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2016), p. 16.

¹⁶⁶ Gill Rye, 'Registering Trauma: The Body in Childbirth in Contemporary French Women's Writing', *Nottingham French Studies*, 45 (2006), 92–104 (p. 104).

¹⁶⁷ Gill Rye, 'Lost and Found: Mother-Daughter Relations in Paule Constant's Fiction', in *Women's Writing in Contemporary France*, ed. by Rye and Worton, pp. 65–76 (p. 71).

especially in the legal system and the media, as monstrous, sadistic villains by presenting a disconcerting testimony of mental illness and maternal despair.¹⁶⁸ By focusing on lesbian mothers, who, as was discussed previously, are stereotyped as neglectful and inappropriate role models, this thesis also enters the debate on subjective notions of “good” and “bad mothering”. Moreover, it engages with the wider deconstruction of binaries relating to mothering through a critical examination of texts foregrounding women tasked with negotiating the maternal role with a sexuality that has traditionally been regarded as preclusive to mothering. Lesbian mothers deconstruct the nexus between lesbianism and sterility and, by extension, the equation of maternity with heterosexuality. Although this thesis examines representations of mothering from a previously unconsidered angle, it is, then, inscribed in a critical context concerned with challenges to dominant beliefs about mothering.

At the same time as studies of the “new women writers” emerged, another strand of criticism, pioneered by Rye, began to address mothering in non-traditional family contexts. Although short, these studies show how changing family patterns are emerging as a theme of French literary texts and, critically, how they contribute to political and social debates on the family. Rye has published two chapters on surrogate mothering—an illegal activity in France but one that is nonetheless practised informally or organized through overseas associations.¹⁶⁹ For Rye, the few texts depicting surrogacy are suggestive of a growing trend.¹⁷⁰ Rye interprets these texts as interventions in the current reshuffling of family paradigms in twenty-first-century France, arguing that they ‘suggest wider possibilities for the experience of parenting than the narrower understandings determined by French *filiation*’.¹⁷¹ Most significantly, as far as this thesis is concerned, Rye devotes a chapter of *Narratives of Mothering* to lesbian parenting. With reference to Éliane Girard’s *Mais qui va garder le chat?* (2005) and Myriam Blanc’s *Et elles eurent beaucoup d’enfants... Histoire d’une famille homoparentale* (2005)—texts that will be addressed Chapters Three, Four, and Five—Rye examines how far these texts portray

¹⁶⁸ Natalie Edwards, ‘Babykillers: Véronique Olmi and Laurence Tardieu on Motherhood’, in *Women’s Writing in Twenty-First-Century France: Life as Literature*, ed. by Amaleena Damlé and Gill Rye (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), pp. 98–110 (p. 103).

¹⁶⁹ Gill Rye, ‘Marginal Identities and New Kinship Paradigms: Surrogate Motherhood in Contemporary Women’s Writing in France’, in *Experiment and Experience: Women’s Writing in France, 2000–2010*, ed. by Gill Rye and Amaleena Damlé (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013), pp. 109–24; Gill Rye, ‘New Representations and Politics of Procreation: Surrogate Motherhood, Artificial Insemination and Human Cloning in Contemporary Women’s Writing in France’, in *Women, Genre and Circumstance: Essays in Memory of Elizabeth Fallaize*, ed. by Margaret Atack and others (Oxford: Legenda, 2012), pp. 109–21.

¹⁷⁰ Rye, ‘Marginal Identities’, p. 113.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

lesbian families as a new family form. This thesis builds on Rye's work by offering a sustained critical examination of literary representations of lesbian mothering. In doing so, it brings several previously overlooked lesbian- and maternal-themed texts into the critical limelight. One limitation of Rye's discussion of lesbian mothering, due only to the brief nature of chapter-length studies, is its exclusive focus on texts treating planned lesbian families—that is to say, a family in which a lesbian couple intend to parent together from the beginning. While this focus is, of course, exciting and pertinent in light of the debates on gay and lesbian kinship in France, it fails to account for the many women—indeed, the overwhelming majority of lesbian mothers—who have children via a heterosexual union before coming out as lesbian. This thesis focuses on planned and unplanned lesbian families and, as was noted earlier, on previously unanalysed texts, thus providing a more complete picture of how lesbian mothering is represented in French literature. Further, this dual focus makes it possible to compare the experiences of formerly heterosexual lesbian mothers (Chapter Two) with those of mothers who are “always already” lesbian (Chapter Three).

Although literature-based criticism of lesbian mothering is thus few and far between, a handful of studies address French films depicting lesbian mothers, focusing in particular on Josiane Balasko's *Gazon maudit* (1995).¹⁷² Balasko's comedy is one of only two French lesbian films—the other being Abdellatif Kechiche's *La Vie d'Adèle* (2013)—to have enjoyed mainstream success. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that it has attracted critical attention and, it would seem, generated a polarity of interpretations. Some argue that butch lesbian Marijo's maternal desire implies that women's fulfilment can be found only in mothering and that the image of a maternal lesbian serves to placate a heterosexual public.¹⁷³ Lucille Cairns further contends that, despite the challenged issued by Marijo's child with Laurent, the film ultimately restores the authority of the father and heterosexual family.¹⁷⁴ In response to Cairns, Cristina Johnston convincingly affirms that ‘it is unclear how the “heterosexual family” can be seen as having been restored to “its ‘natural’ order”

¹⁷² For a short discussion of lesbian mothering in Hollywood cinema, see Claire Jenkins, *Home Movies: The American Family in Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), pp. 128–31.

¹⁷³ Alain Brassart, ‘Une visibilité discrète: Les Lesbiennes dans le cinéma français des années 1990 à nos jours’, in *Cinematic Queerness: Gay and Lesbian Hypervisibility in Contemporary Francophone Feature Films*, ed. by Florian Grandena and Cristina Johnston (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011), pp. 43–62 (p. 50); Martine Gross, ‘Visibilités homoparentales’, in *New Queer Images: Representations of Homosexualities in Contemporary Francophone Visual Cultures*, ed. by Florian Grandena and Cristina Johnston (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011), pp. 117–38 (p. 125).

¹⁷⁴ Lucille Cairns, ‘*Gazon maudit*: French National and Sexual Identities’, *French Cultural Studies*, 9 (1998), 225–37 (p. 236).

[...] when that order suddenly includes a father and two maternal figures involved in a complex series of attractions and relationships'.¹⁷⁵ The disagreement between Cairns and Johnston over *Gazon maudit*'s transgressive potential raises the question of what it means to question the dominance of the heterosexual family and of how cultural artefacts might do this.

Although many studies of French literature address the ways in which women's writing subverts patriarchal ideals of mothering, literary representations of lesbian mothering have yet to receive in-depth critical attention. Rye's pioneering work on portrayals of mothering in non-traditional family contexts is, however, a crucial point of reference for this thesis. In particular, it is her claim that literature offers wider definitions of parenting than those endorsed and institutionalized by French law that is the starting point for the analysis in this thesis.

Conclusion

This thesis is the first study to identify and provide an in-depth critical examination of the small but growing number of French texts treating lesbian mothering. This chapter has offered an overview of the major theoretical and literary critical perspectives underpinning this study. Although gay and lesbian parenting is an established research field in the social sciences, cultural studies disciplines are only beginning to examine how the debates among psychoanalysts, feminists, and queer theorists on gay and lesbian parenting are being presented and interrogated in artefacts of cultural production. This thesis takes as its premise that such artefacts, of which literature is an example, have the power not only to passively reflect social phenomena but to actively contribute to debates on them. As Shirley-Ann Jordan aptly puts it in a chapter on the family in contemporary women's writing:

[F]iction is a primary site for "figuring out" the family: for interrogating its structures and ideologies at given historical junctures; for exploring family relationships and the place of the individual within them; and for developing productive figures or tropes which re-imagine family in distinctive ways.¹⁷⁶

How, then, do the texts covered in this thesis reimagine the family? How do they not only reflect but also contribute to political and theoretical debates on gay and lesbian parenting

¹⁷⁵ Cristina Johnston, *French Minority Cinema* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), p. 112.

¹⁷⁶ Shirley-Ann Jordan, 'Figuring Out the Family: Family as Everyday Practice in Contemporary French Women's Writing', in *Affaires de familles: The Family in Contemporary French Culture and Theory*, ed. by Marie-Claire Barnet and Edward Welch (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), pp. 39–58 (p. 39).

in contemporary France? It is to these questions that this thesis hopes to offer answers.

2

Lesbianism and the Institution of Motherhood

In *Of Woman Born*, Adrienne Rich distinguishes between two definitions of motherhood: the real-life, heterogeneous experiences of pregnancy, childbirth, and childcare; and the patriarchal institution, which ensures that these experiences, and all women, remain under male control.¹⁷⁷ This institution posits three fundamental assumptions that construct the patriarchal image of the ideal mother: first, procreation is women's sole or primary function; second, mothers love their children absolutely; and third, the art of childrearing comes naturally to, and is therefore easy for, women. Because mothers rarely meet these expectations, many experience anxiety and guilt, as Rich's own testimony demonstrates:

I was haunted by the stereotype of the mother whose love is “unconditional”; and by the visual and literary images of motherhood as a single-minded identity. If I knew parts of myself existed that would never cohere to those images, weren't those parts then abnormal, monstrous?¹⁷⁸

According to patriarchal norms, then, the ideal mother is devoted exclusively to her children and loves them unconditionally. Rich further argues that the institution of motherhood aims to preserve male-dominated society by regulating the female body, sexuality, and reproductive power. The institution therefore regards family types that operate outside direct male jurisdiction, such as lesbian and single-mother families, as non-normative and unacceptable. Mothering, in Rich's words, ‘is “sacred” only so long as its offspring are “legitimate”—that is, as long as the child bears the name of a father who legally controls the mother’.¹⁷⁹ As such, the institution of motherhood delegitimizes women who mother without men, thus polarizing mothers into dichotomous moral categories. If good mothers, according to the institution of motherhood, appear subservient to male authority, lesbian mothers are deviant by default because they refute the norms of heterosexuality and patriarchal lineage. In practice, the ever-growing

¹⁷⁷ Rich, *Of Woman Born*, p. 13.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

number and acceptance of single and cohabiting mothers indicate that the norms of the institution of motherhood are being deconstructed. In 2012, almost 20% of French children belonged to families led by a single mother,¹⁸⁰ and well over 50% of babies delivered that year were born to unmarried parents.¹⁸¹ Yet the continuing prejudice against lesbian mothers is an acute reminder of the tenacity of patriarchal kinship. The *Manif pour tous*, for instance, opposes gay and lesbian parenting in the name of the best interests of the child, claiming that the mother–father–child triangulation is necessary for healthy child development. What appears to unite modern-day detractors of lesbian mothering with those who condemned abortion, contraception, and unmarried mothers in the 1960s and 1970s is an opposition to forms of mothering unmediated by men; female-led mothering, in the form of single- and lesbian-parent families, reverses the patriarchal image of women as passive and reduces fathering, implicitly yet inevitably, to a biological act. When placed within this context, the ongoing hostility to lesbian mothering can be interpreted as a resurfacing of institutional motherhood, of the will to regulate female reproductive power and safeguard male-dominated society.

Rich's insights into the institution of motherhood underpin the discussion in this chapter. Inspired by her claim that mothering under patriarchy is conceived as a single-minded identity—that is, one that negates the facets of the female self that are separable from mothering—I analyse representations of lesbian mothers unable to reconcile their sexuality with the maternal role, focusing on Jocelyne François's *Les Bonheurs* (1970) and Paula Dumont's *La Vie dure: Éducation sentimentale d'une lesbienne* (2010). I then build on this undertaking with reference to the mother–daughter relationship in Axelle Mallet's *Le Choix de la reine* (2009). Finally, I deploy Rich's observation that mother-love is assumed to be unconditional to interpret the ambivalent relationship between the protagonist and her children in Hélène de Monferrand's *Les Amies d'Héloïse* (1990) and *Les Enfants d'Héloïse* (1997), before contrasting this experience of mothering with that portrayed in François's *Les Bonheurs*. The chief argument that I make in this chapter is that these novels deconstruct the norms of motherhood as defined by Rich by exposing the contradictions between the experience and institution of motherhood. The works by François, Dumont, and Mallet problematize the patriarchal image of mothering as a single-minded identity. Monferrand's novels undermine the assumption that women love

¹⁸⁰ <http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/tableau.asp?reg_id=0&ref_id=amfd3> [accessed 27 October 2016].

¹⁸¹ <http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/tableau.asp?reg_id=0&ref_id=NATnon02231> [accessed 27 October 2016].

their children absolutely by depicting the arbitrary and flawed nature of mother-love. This chapter is structured with a view to emphasizing the ways in which the novels dismantle the dichotomy between lesbianism and mothering. Whereas the works of François, Dumont, and Mallet at first present lesbianism and mothering as irreconcilable opposites by depicting mothers who must seemingly choose between the lesbian and maternal dimensions of their lives, the reconciliation of these dimensions in Monferrand's novels is, while not without its problems, never depicted in either/or terms.

Mothering as a Single-Minded Identity

Rich's claim that mothering under patriarchy is conceived as a single-minded identity—that is, one that negates the facets of the female self that are separable from mothering—is well established in feminist theory. Simone de Beauvoir, for instance, makes a comparable observation about pregnancy in her pioneering *Le Deuxième Sexe*:

[E]lle la [la grossesse] ressent à la fois comme un enrichissement et comme une mutilation; le fœtus est une partie de son corps, et c'est un parasite qui l'exploite; elle le possède et elle est possédée par lui; il résume tout l'avenir et, en le portant, elle se sent vaste comme le monde; mais cette richesse même l'annihile, elle a l'impression de ne plus être rien. Une existence neuve va se manifester et justifier sa propre existence, elle en est fière; mais elle se sent aussi jouet de forces obscures, elle est ballottée, violentée.¹⁸²

Beauvoir argues that women's feelings about pregnancy are ambivalent. On the one hand, pregnancy enables women to achieve the state that is most meaningful to them according to patriarchal society: motherhood. On the other hand, according to Beauvoir women who become mothers find that their identity becomes inseparable from the maternal role; just as unborn babies cannot survive without the maternal body, mothers depend on their children to retain a sense of self. While abortion, contraception, and access to public life have dramatically altered women's relationship with mothering, the notion of motherhood as a single-minded identity remains real for some women; particularly underprivileged women, including teenagers, who see motherhood as their sole means of social fulfilment and economic security; as well as those who give up their financial independence to be mothers. This is also true for some mothers who transgress the norms of gender, sexuality, and the family that, as we have seen, are central to the institution of motherhood.

¹⁸² Beauvoir, p. 345.

At first, François's *Les Bonheurs* and Dumont's *La Vie dure* present lesbianism and mothering as irreconcilable opposites by depicting mothers who must choose between the lesbian and maternal dimensions of their lives. Ultimately, however, they dismantle this binary as the mothers overcome cultural and social assumptions to embrace the diverse facets of their identities. Both *Les Bonheurs* and *La Vie dure* are autobiographical novels. At first glance, François's optimistic-sounding title conflicts with much of the plot. The story begins when a devastated Anne ends her relationship with an equally distraught Sarah and agrees to marry Michel, with whom she has two children. Sarah, meanwhile, begins a long-term affair with a married man, Jean, before she and Anne are eventually reunited. The "bonheurs", then, are the possibility of perpetual love and the author's unshakable belief that lesbianism will triumph over homophobia and patriarchy. Dumont's title underlines more explicitly than François's the difficulty of assuming a lesbian relationship in a homophobic and patriarchal context. In *La Vie dure*, Pascale is abandoned by her lover, Catherine, who decides to marry a man and start a family. Twenty years later, Catherine, now a mother of two, contacts Pascale, and they enjoy an intermittent reunion before Catherine leaves Pascale for another woman. *Les Bonheurs* is set in the 1950s; *La Vie dure* in the 1980s, although it occasionally flashes back to the 1960s. Both texts are therefore set before same-sex couples were granted institutional recognition in France, and the fact that Anne and Catherine forfeit their lesbian lovers to have children further testifies to the difficulty of assuming a lesbian identity in this cultural and social context. Like most lesbian mothers in this period, then, Anne and Catherine become mothers in the context of a heterosexual marriage.

Les Bonheurs and *La Vie dure* demonstrate an acute awareness of and hostility towards the norms of the institution of motherhood that compel their mother-characters to sacrifice their lesbian relationships. Anne and Catherine subscribe, for instance, to the view that mothering is women's destiny. While caring for her infant daughter, Anne reflects on the night when she accepted Michel's proposal: 'C'est donc pour toi, sans le savoir, que j'ai dit oui cette nuit-là, moi-même aveugle sur ma vie, aveugle et pauvre comme jamais!'¹⁸³ Anne's use of *tu* to address her daughter indicates the close bond between them. This bond challenges claims about the supposed inferiority of lesbian mothers that were rife at the time of the text's publication. As was discussed in Chapter One, many lesbian mothers in the 1970s lost custody of their children on the basis of their sexuality. Similarly, Pascale

¹⁸³ Jocelyne François, *Les Bonheurs* ([n.p.]: Lacombe, 1982 [1970]), p. 70; subsequent references to this book appear within the text in the form (B pp).

believes that Catherine ‘était tellement marquée par le grand schéma dominant de la jeune femme qui doit à toute force se marier et avoir des enfants’;¹⁸⁴ and that ‘sans doute son désir de maternité était-il lié étroitement au besoin de respectabilité’ (VD 16). This suggests that, for Anne and Catherine, the purpose of marriage was to become a mother. As such, they endorse the normative equation of womanhood with mothering and, moreover, the assumption that this is viable only when women are in heterosexual relationships. In practice, then, they uphold the supposed dichotomy between lesbianism and mothering. What the mothers do in practice does not, however, necessarily reflect what they believe. Given the limited options available to lesbians wanting to mother prior to the availability of reproductive technologies in the 1970s, the mothers’ decision to have children with a man is arguably one made in the absence of alternatives. In France, lesbian couples still cannot access fertility treatment legally. While there is, as will become clear, evidence that Catherine does in fact subscribe to the normative opposition between lesbianism and mothering, the same cannot be said of Anne, who makes no suggestion that she is better or worse than a heterosexual mother as a result of her sexuality. Further, Anne is persuaded to renounce Sarah by her priest, who indirectly threatens them with damnation. As such, her decision to conform outwardly to heterosexuality could be interpreted as an act of religious expediency rather than a subscription to the supposed dichotomy between lesbianism and mothering.

The choice that Anne and Catherine are forced and force themselves into making upholds the patriarchal image of mothering as a single-minded identity. Both mothers lament the unequal division of paid and unpaid labour that forestalls women’s identities and lives after they have children. *Les Bonheurs*, in particular, follows Rich’s critique of the gendered definitions of parenting under patriarchy: ‘To “father” a child suggests above all to beget, to provide the sperm which fertilizes the ovum. To “mother” a child implies a continuing presence, lasting at least nine months, more often for years’.¹⁸⁵ Indeed, Anne notes that whereas she no longer does what she did prior to becoming a mother, Michel, who was not even present at the birth of either of his children, resumes working and pursuing leisure activities after becoming a father, while ensuring that his children are cared for by a woman. Thus, Anne’s identity, in a manner that epitomizes the point made by Beauvoir, is locked to that of her children. Later, having resolved to leave

¹⁸⁴ Paula Dumont, *La Vie dure: Éducation sentimentale d’une lesbienne* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2010), p. 9; subsequent references to this book appear within the text in the form (VD pp).

¹⁸⁵ Rich, *Of Woman Born*, p. 12.

Michel and rekindle her relationship with Sarah, Anne remains hesitant out of fear of losing custody of the children. This is both a blatant attack on a judicial system that, as was the case at the time of the text's publication, fails to protect and stigmatizes lesbian mothers and a testament to the power of institutions not only to shape cultural and social attitudes but to dictate the ways in which people live their lives. Indeed, encouraged by her brother, Anne briefly retreats from her plan to leave Michel, casting Sarah aside again, before seeing it through.

In *La Vie dure*, Catherine reifies the image of mothering as a single-minded identity, both in practice and, it seems, in thought by enforcing a strict division between her lesbian affair and her life as a mother. Significantly, her children feature only as a subject of conversation in the novel, and Pascale, to her frustration, never meets them: “Je ne connais pas ses gamins, je ne connais rien de sa vie, seulement ce qu'elle m'en a dit, ou écrit!” (VD 134). Catherine, Pascale believes, ‘était persuadée qu'il fallait qu'elle élève ses enfants dans la stabilité et elle n'envisageait pas un seul instant de leur révéler, en pleine adolescence, son homosexualité’ (VD 28). As well as the difficulties of mothering a child through adolescence, which will be discussed later with reference to *Le Choix de la reine*, this underscores Catherine's association of stability and “normality” with heterosexuality and, by extension, with male-regulated configurations of mothering. It is telling too that Pascale's role as the novel's narrator, as well as Catherine's virtual disappearance from the plot once she and Pascale separate, implicitly compounds the silencing of lesbian mothers. This is in tune with the cultural and social context of the plot, when the very existence of lesbian mothers was overlooked or suppressed, even though feminism, even lesbian feminism, and gay liberation were, by the 1980s, well under way. Catherine's lack of voice might, then, be interpreted as a reflection of lesbian mothers' invisibility within these movements. Her lack of voice also makes it difficult to know what she herself thinks about the reconcilability of lesbianism and mothering, since her experience is communicated only through Pascale.

The choice of Pascale as narrator and protagonist can, however, be interpreted more optimistically. By giving prominence to the lover of the lesbian mother-character and potential stepmother to her children, the text appears to endorse the feminist view that caregiving is as fundamental to mothering as biology. This anticipates the argument that I will make about the texts studied in Chapter Three, which are premised on this view. Rich, for example, notes that ‘[m]ost women have been mothers in the sense of tenders and carers for the young, whether as sisters, aunts, nurses, teachers, foster-mothers, step-

mothers'.¹⁸⁶ Like Rich, the text nods towards the redefinition of mothering as a caregiving function rather than a purely biological process. While Pascale states plainly that she has never been emotionally able to have children “of her own”—“Ça ne m’est pas possible” (VD 219)—she remains open to performing the social role of mothers. As a teacher, for instance, Pascale believes that her relationship with her pupils bears resemblance to that between a mother and child. Moreover, Pascale is willing to become a stepmother to Catherine’s children, on the basis that ‘les enfants de la femme qu’on aime sont un peu les vôtres’, and is, as noted earlier, vexed by her exclusion from this part of Catherine’s life (VD 94). *La Vie dure* portrays characters that anticipate the emergence of gay and lesbian families as a cultural and social phenomenon when Pascale suggests to Catherine that they raise a family together with help from a gay male friend: “Tu pourrais avoir des enfants, avec un ami homosexuel par exemple, et nous les élèverions ensemble” (VD 16). *Les Bonheurs* exemplifies a similarly progressivist view of the politics of kinship when Anne asks Sarah: “Aimerais-tu mes enfants si tu vivais avec eux tous les jours?” (B 122).

Although the texts thus envisage structures of kinship that challenge the configuration of mothering under patriarchy that is essential to the institution of motherhood, for the characters to bring these structures to fruition is out of the question. In this respect, then, these are not transgressive texts but ones that expose and explore the norms of the family at the time. In *Les Bonheurs*, forming a lesbian-stepparent family remains the merest of suggestions until Anne and Sarah are reunited at the end of the novel. In *La Vie dure*, Pascale ponders the possibility at greater length than do Anne and Sarah, but she too does not consider it a serious one. Her proposition, cited earlier, that she and Catherine start a family together might even be understood not literally but as an impromptu attempt to rescue the relationship. *La Vie dure* criticizes the preclusion of lesbian families, for it is not Pascale’s suitability as a potential stepmother that she and Catherine question but the feasibility of assuming this role in a society wherein the norms of mothering are policed by the institution of motherhood. As such, Catherine ‘n’a pas pris la peine de discuter d’une telle éventualité’ (VD 16). Her silence on the matter of lesbian families communicates their silencing and unworkability in the cultural and social context of the plot. As Pascale states: ‘Catherine m’avait demandé un jour si j’aurais aimé avoir un enfant avec elle et je n’avais pu m’empêcher d’ouvrir de grands yeux devant une idée

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

aussi extravagante' (VD 174–75). Having previously suggested undertaking such a venture, Pascale voices a more conservative opinion of lesbian families. Indeed, she accepts that the family life for which she hopes would be impossible while Catherine's homosexuality remains undisclosed, and she fears that, even if Catherine came out, the children would only ever regard her as a rival for their mother's affection. Pascale has thus internalized the normative assumption that children have one and only one mother, the woman from whom they are born. Again, this view represents that held by society in the 1980s, when planned gay and lesbian parenting—that is, when a homosexual couple decide to become parents together—was a largely unacknowledged possibility.

In both texts, then, the mother-character is driven to choose between mothering and her sexuality by heteronormative society and the resulting lack of alternative means of access to motherhood. As Lucille Cairns demonstrates, in *Les Bonheurs* two discourses club together to prohibit lesbian love and to preserve men's control of the female body and sexuality: religion, embodied in Anne's priest, Ulrich, who first convinces her to abandon Sarah; and phallocentrism, represented by her husband, Michel.¹⁸⁷ As such, *Les Bonheurs* nods towards lesbian feminism's conception of heterosexuality as a political regime that seeks to regulate women.¹⁸⁸ As was mentioned earlier, Ulrich compels Anne to conform to heterosexuality through the threat of damnation and the demonization and pathologization of same-sex desire: "Ne m'obligez pas à vous dire: de l'enfer parce que je n'aime pas brandir ce mot et nul ne sait ce qu'il recouvre mais je pense que vous la sauverez de la perte de Dieu" (B 86–87). Michel, like Ulrich, reinforces the normative status of heterosexuality by naturalizing institutional relationships, like heterosexual marriage, over non-contractual love: "Ce n'était pas une parole entre vous. C'était un vice, une passion mauvaise, une horreur. Un mariage est une parole donnée selon la loi et selon la nature" (B 137). Michel's blindness to the culturally constructed nature of institutions works to undermine his position on homosexuality and, by extension, the dominant view in society at the time. Moreover, he accepts the phallocentric assumptions that female desire is necessarily heterosexual and that sexual pleasure requires the intervention of a penis: "[L]e clitoris, ça n'existe pas" (B 152). For Michel, then, lesbian relationships are de facto platonic, as evidenced by his reference to Anne and Sarah's relationship as 'amitié' rather than 'amour'.

¹⁸⁷ Cairns, *Lesbian Desire*, p. 212.

¹⁸⁸ See, for example, Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 5 (1980), 631–60; Wittig, 'The Straight Mind', pp. 21–32.

In *La Vie dure*, Catherine reports that her husband's reaction to her coming out bears comparison with that of Michel, since he too expresses the homophobic discourse of illness and inversion. Like Michel, he permits Catherine to continue living with him so that she can raise the children, thus reifying the nexus between women and mothering. Pascale's pragmatic, "it-could-be-worse" attitude towards Catherine's situation says little for the way in which lesbian mothers were treated in the cultural and social contexts of the plot. More generally, however, *La Vie dure* critiques the invisibility and marginalization of lesbianism in the late twentieth century. Pascale recalls the fear of and stigma attached to being a lesbian, or an 'homme manqué' (VD 13), and the challenge of coming to terms with her homosexuality in a cultural and social context in which lesbianism went unnoticed: '[D]irais-je jamais [à Catherine] combien j'avais pu, adolescente, me sentir infirme, monstrueuse, vouée à jamais à la solitude quand je m'éprenais d'une fille de mon âge?' (VD 42). In particular, the image of the monster emphasizes Pascale's sense of abnormality and exclusion and recalls the many male-authored novels of the nineteenth century that use the theme of the lesbian as monster.¹⁸⁹

These authors engage with or, in François's case, anticipate the argument of feminist and queer thinkers of the 1990s that human desire and sexuality are constructed in the interests of reproduction—that is, according to the gender to which we are attracted.¹⁹⁰ As such, *Les Bonheurs* and *La Vie dure* go beyond a simple description of the heteronormativity and homophobia that obstruct lesbian desire and love to a thorough deconstruction of the norms of gender and sexuality. Most radically, the texts reframe desire and sexuality in terms of affectivity rather than gender. As Anne informs Michel in *Les Bonheurs*: "Ce n'est pas la femme que j'aime en Sarah, c'est Sarah et c'est moi Anne qui suis aimée" (B 191). Comparably, Pascale wonders while contemplating her relationship with Catherine:

Quand comprendrait-elle que le mot "homosexuelle" que je revendique pourtant par ailleurs [...] s'appliquait mal à mon cas personnel puisque j'étais cent fois plus affamée d'amour que de caresses, les secondes me bouleversant seulement si je les sentais émaner du premier? (VD 139)

As these extracts suggest, the novels share or, in the case of *Les Bonheurs*, foreshadow Judith Butler's distrust of sexual identity categories, first developed in her landmark *Gender Trouble*. As was noted in Chapter One, Butler believes that sexual identity

¹⁸⁹ For a discussion of the portrayal of the lesbian as a monster, see Waelti-Walters, *Damned Women*.

¹⁹⁰ See, for example, Judith Butler, 'Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?', *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 13 (2002), 14–44 (p. 14).

categories—heterosexual, lesbian, and so forth—fail to adequately account for the nuances of human sexuality since they structure desire first and foremost around a binary conception of gender. Although Pascale actively identifies as a lesbian—indeed, her ex-partner, Martine, refers to them both as ‘les goudous à cent pour cent’ (VD 123)—she, like Butler, underscores the limitations of such a label. Despite hers and Martine’s subscription to the possibility of being completely “one way or the other”, *La Vie dure* depicts a multitude of gender identities. Whereas Catherine, according to Pascale, is ‘féminine au sens traditionnel’—that is, she desires children and looks “like a woman”—Martine and Pascale are depicted as butch lesbians (VD 16). The novel might therefore be charged with relying on the heteronormative butch–femme dyad of lesbian couples, yet it deploys this stereotype only to subvert it. Catherine’s claim that she is “the man”—“J’ai toujours su que c’était moi le mec, dans notre couple” (VD 58)—contradicts the presumed nexus between femininity, femme, and mothering.

While *La Vie dure* challenges the dominant portrayal of butch and femme identities, *Les Bonheurs* abandons entirely the assimilation of lesbian relationships to heterosexual standards, as the following dialogue between Anne and Michel shows:

“Mais dis, Anne, entre vous deux, comment se répartissent les rôles? Tu es l’homme ou tu es la femme?”

“Pourquoi? Tu as eu l’impression d’être pédéraste en vivant avec moi?”

“Je t’en prie...”

“Non! Eh bien, Jean non plus ne s’est pas senti pédéraste avec Sarah. Tout le monde est homme et femme à la fois. Pourquoi imaginer une complémentarité entre Sarah et moi imitant celle entre un homme et une femme? Jouer un rôle, tu vois dans la vie concrète ce que cela comporterait d’intenable et de ridicule?”

“Mais enfin, Anne, dans l’amour? Ne sois pas hypocrite, n’essaie pas de me dire que vous n’imitiez pas un couple normal!” (B 188)

Instead of asserting that lesbian couples are no different from heterosexual ones, *Les Bonheurs* works to legitimize same-sex relationships in their own right by challenging the very idea that they need to resemble heterosexual unions. Anne’s vision of sexual politics is more radical than Michel’s misguided belief that she and Sarah are attempting to mirror the heterosexual model. Whereas Michel cannot envisage sexual relationships without the male role or outside the gender binary, Anne rejects the gendered dynamics of heterosexual relationships as the standard against which all relationships ought to be measured. By asking Michel if marriage to her made him feel like a homosexual, Anne neatly and cuttingly queers his antagonistic narrow-mindedness. Her conception of gender equality is comparable:

[L]es hommes et les femmes ne pouvaient pas se rejoindre. Ils engendraient, ils coexistaient. Peut-être se rejoignaient-ils plus tard, beaucoup plus tard, quand les femmes, enfin sorties de leur condition de servantes, auraient eu tout le temps qu'il faut pour être véritablement ce qu'elles sont: les égales différenciées des hommes, sans féminisme et sans forfanterie, sans qu'il soit nécessaire d'en parler. (B 84)

Although *Les Bonheurs* exposes the limitations of sexual identity categories, which appears to support Butler's resistance to identity-based politics, it subscribes to a feminism that defends the existence of sexual difference. As such, the novel engages with the oldest, and perhaps the most important, point of contention between feminists: as was discussed in Chapter One, equality feminists, such as Beauvoir and Butler, regard sexual difference as the main obstacle to female emancipation and accordingly advocate its suppression; difference feminists, such as Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous, contend that female emancipation lies within difference. It would be a stretch to argue that *Les Bonheurs* reconciles difference and equality feminisms—indeed, this is one of just a handful of references to the feminist movement in the text—but it does at least bring these two diametrically opposed theoretical camps into dialogue, thereby challenging what has become an ever-more polarized debate in the decades since the publication of the novel. Although *La Vie dure* also brings the traditional definition of lesbianism into question, it devotes considerably more attention to identity politics. After separating from Catherine, Pascale enters the burgeoning lesbian feminist groups and lesbian culture of the 1980s, thus offering a critique of the invisibility of lesbianism, its marginalization from the male-dominated gay rights movement, and the paucity of lesbian cultural and social spaces.

While *Les Bonheurs* defends the notion of sexual difference, it eschews biological essentialism. Anne questions the essentialist formation of gender and sexuality when she tells Ulrich: “‘Il n’y a pas de prototype de comportement humain, les morales diffèrent, les usages, les coutumes’” (B 86). Similarly, *La Vie dure* posits a constructionist view of gender roles and, moreover, rejects gender as a cornerstone of human identity: ‘[C]’est la répartition des rôles assignés strictement à chaque sexe qui me gêne. Ni femme féminine, ni homme manqué, je suis un être humain’ (VD 174). Pascale makes the queer-sounding claim that it is better to talk of people rather than of men and women, thereby going beyond what queer theorists see as a reductive male–female binary. Like Anne, Pascale repudiates the pathologization of same-sex desire: ‘[J]e me sentais parfaitement normale et je n’avais nulle envie de voir changer ma personnalité en quoi que ce soit’ (VD 11). Through Pascale’s assertion of her own normality, *La Vie dure* appears to ally itself with

the equality camp within gender studies. By downplaying the difference between hetero- and homosexual desire, Pascale renders the latter more acceptable both to herself and to her conservative milieu.

By portraying mothers who at first suppress their sexuality, *Les Bonheurs* and *La Vie dure* exhibit the ways in which mothering under patriarchy is conceived as a single-minded identity. Following Rich, however, they ultimately challenge this conception by eventually allowing the mothers to assume their sexuality. In addition, the texts allude to the possibility of a lesbian-headed family. Although they cannot be said to embrace alternative family forms, their nods towards the formation of lesbian families are notable given that both texts are set well before gay and lesbian parenting emerged as a political and social issue in France. In these texts, heteronormative and homophobic discourses compel the mothers to initially suppress their sexuality. The following section expands on the treatment of mothering as a single-minded identity with reference to the mother–daughter relationship in Mallet’s *Le Choix de la reine*.

The Mother–Daughter Relationship

The mother–daughter relationship, as Marianne Hirsch demonstrates in her influential *The Mother/Daughter Plot* (1989), has traditionally been silenced by or submerged in the conventional plot structure of Western literature. Citing the myth of Oedipus as the ‘classic and paradigmatic story of individual development in Western civilization’, Hirsch shows how this plot structure obfuscates the mother–daughter relationship by portraying women only as instruments of or obstacles to the formation of male subjectivity.¹⁹¹ In the myth of Oedipus, the plot centres on the protagonist’s quest—killing his father to claim the throne—while the female characters, Jocasta and the Sphinx, either aid or hinder him in the fulfilment of his destiny. The voices of mothers and daughters, as Hirsch’s book illustrates, gradually emerged in nineteenth- and twentieth-century narratives, both in fiction and in feminist and psychoanalytic theory. Today, the mother–daughter relationship is a recurrent theme of French women’s writing. Recent scholarship makes the point that this body of literature is, with growing frequency, privileging the perspective of mothers.¹⁹² The novel considered in this section, Mallet’s *Le Choix de la reine*, follows this trend but is unique in that it portrays a relationship between a lesbian mother and heterosexual daughter. This novel is one of only two texts

¹⁹¹ Hirsch, p. 1.

¹⁹² Rye, *Narratives of Mothering*, p. 15.

in this study's corpus—the other being Monferrand's *Les Enfants d'Héloïse*—that gives more than an outside role to the child of a lesbian mother. It thus testifies to the diverse ways in which the mother–daughter relationship is being envisaged in contemporary French women's writing.

In this section, I expand on my discussion of mothering as a single-minded identity by supplementing Rich's insights into the institution of motherhood with contributions from feminist psychoanalysis, drawing on the descriptions of the mother–daughter relationship in the works of Nancy Chodorow and Luce Irigaray. Chodorow postulates that the mother–daughter relationship is and will remain conflictual so long as gender is a crucial marker of identity and women are primarily responsible for childcare.¹⁹³ This, Chodorow argues, is because girls, unlike boys, continue to identify with their mother postoeidipally due to their shared anatomy. Since daughters therefore resolve the Oedipus complex only partially—which, Chodorow stresses, does not make the female Oedipal configuration inferior to its male counterpart¹⁹⁴—they fluctuate constantly between the desire to identify with and the need to separate from the mother. The female Oedipal world is thus triadic, which engenders conflict: a relational triangle forms between the daughter; the mother, her primary love-object whom she can never totally relinquish; and the father, her secondary love-object. As Chodorow notes, the dynamics between mothers and daughters that characterize the preoedipal and Oedipal phases resurface when girls reach puberty: 'Just as the object-relations during the prepubertal period repeat elements of the preoedipal period, the object-relations of puberty and adolescence resemble those of the oedipal situation'.¹⁹⁵ The onset of puberty, which demands the replacement of incestuous desires by extrafamilial attachments, thus initiates a second period of mother–daughter conflict. I deploy Chodorow's model of the mother–daughter relationship to illuminate the conflict between the lesbian mother and heterosexual teenage daughter in Mallet's *Le Choix de la reine*. More precisely, I propose to explore how their divergent sexualities impact on their relationship and the implications of having a lesbian mother for Marion's sense of self. In the previous section, I argued that the mother-characters felt pressured into choosing between their sexuality and desire to mother by heteronormative and homophobic discourses, personified most evidently by Anne's husband and priest in *Les Bonheurs*. In Mallet's novel, however, it is the daughter who acts as the mouthpiece of

¹⁹³ Chodorow, pp. 135–36.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 130–31.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

heteronormative discourse and defender of the norms of institutional motherhood.

Le Choix de la reine begins moments after fifteen-year-old Marion, unaware of her mother's sexuality, walks in on her mother, Elena, in bed with her schoolteacher, Louise. Angry and shocked, Marion demands to move in with her maternal grandmother, Marinette. Mother and daughter are subsequently reconciled, but Marion schemes to end Elena and Louise's relationship by contacting her mother's lost lesbian love, Raphaëlle. Elena must then choose—the choice to which the novel's title refers—between Louise and Raphaëlle. She chooses Raphaëlle, who moves in with Elena and Marion, and together they form a lesbian-stepparent family. Unlike Anne and Catherine, who have lesbian relationships while at high school, Elena apparently feels no desire for other women until after her daughter's birth. Elena also becomes a mother in the early 1990s, much later than François's and Dumont's characters. Nonetheless, the reconciliation of lesbianism and mothering is far from easy in this novel—a testament to the entrenchment of the equation of parenting with heterosexuality.

In *Le Choix de la reine*, Marion upholds the norms of institutional motherhood by denouncing her mother's homosexuality and affair with Louise, Marion's schoolteacher. Although Marion's immediate reaction stems in part from shock and the humiliation of finding her mother and her teacher in bed together, her equation of opposite-sex attraction with normality—“Je suis normale, moi! J'aime les garçons, comme grand-mère!”¹⁹⁶—and the homophobic vocabulary with which she insults Elena—“une barge de ton espèce” (CDLR 26)—affirm the normative status of heterosexuality. Marion's intolerance compels Elena to choose between her daughter and her lover—that is, between mothering and her sexuality. In a gesture symptomatic of Rich's description of mothering as a single-minded identity, Elena opts to repress her lesbianism, informing Louise that she can love no woman save her daughter: “Tu n'as pas encore compris que Marion est l'unique amour de ma vie, ma seule priorité!” (CDLR 10). By dedicating herself to her child at the expense of her own desire, Elena reaffirms the presumed irreconcilability of lesbianism and mothering and perhaps reinforces the incompatibility of mothering with sexual desire in general. Indeed, as was mentioned in Chapter One, the most enduring example of mothering in the West is that of the Virgin Mary, a figure both maternal and asexual. By temporarily renouncing her affair, Elena exhibits the selflessness, and self-lessness, demanded of women by the institution of motherhood and

¹⁹⁶ Axelle Mallet, *Le Choix de la reine* (Paris: KTM, 2009), p. 27; subsequent references to this book appear within the text in the form (CDLR pp).

epitomized by the Virgin Mary. Nevertheless, in conversation with her own mother, Marinette, she scolds herself for thinking only of herself and of her own desires:

“Je n’arrête pas de culpabiliser.”

“Bah! C’est exactement ce que tu m’as dit le jour de ton divorce.”

“Là, c’est différent. Il n’est pas question de choix avec Marion. C’est mon enfant, mon amour de toujours. Je dois la protéger. Elle n’a pas à souffrir de la stupidité de sa mère.”

“Je te trouve très sévère avec toi, Elena. Être amoureuse n’a rien de stupide.”

“Je ne suis pas amoureuse, maman, c’est justement ça qui me rend furieuse! Je n’ai pensé qu’à moi, à mon plaisir.” (CDLR 13)

And yet, Elena’s self-admonishment for acting selfishly itself belies such an aspersion, since selfishness arguably connotes a certain blindness to one’s lack of consideration for others. While it should be remembered that her guilt, like Marion’s outburst, is an in-the-heat-of-the-moment response to the sudden mother–daughter crisis, Elena unquestioningly endorses the norms of the institution of motherhood. For instance, she accepts the taken-for-grantedness of mother-love, its unchangeability, and its superiority over love for another, here her ex-husband. In addition, she has internalized the dominant view of mothering as a heterosexual prerogative or, more broadly, as a role precluding sexual relationships with anyone other than the child’s father. According to Louise, Elena’s shame at being a lesbian in part fuels Marion’s reaction: ““Elena... ça fait des années que tu n’assumes pas ta vie, tes sentiments et ta sexualité. Comment veux-tu que ta fille t’accepte telle que tu es, si tu continues de te taire?”” (CDLR 10). The fact that Marion’s reaction is certainly worsened by Elena’s self-censorship suggests how important it is that parents are open with their children about their sexuality.

Moreover, Elena’s belief that her pursuit of affairs could cause Marion to suffer reinforces the widespread view that changes to the family structure during childhood are detrimental to children, and points to the harsh judgements often made about parents who, irrespective of their orientation, enter a relationship with someone other than the mother or father of their children. Indeed, Marinette seems to look beyond gender and sees Elena and Louise’s affair as harmless love, thus trivializing the difference between hetero- and homosexual relationships. Contrary to François, who, as noted earlier, posits difference as a potential source of empowerment, Mallet seems to want to normalize lesbianism and lesbian mother–heterosexual daughter relationships. Indeed, when Marinette declares “[d]e quelque bord qu’elle soit, une femme reste une femme”, she emphasizes what lesbian and heterosexual women have in common—that is, their gender—rather than

what distinguishes them (CDLR 15). In contrast with Marion's sexual conservatism, Marinette takes a modern, "it's-no-big-deal" view of homosexuality—"N'exagère pas, Marion! De nos jours, l'homosexualité n'est plus..." (CDLR 29)—and she therefore represents the all-important theme of acceptance of a homosexual child. Since Marinette is aware of her daughter's lesbianism from the beginning, the novel does not tackle, and thus deproblematizes, Elena's coming out to her mother. Interestingly, then, the grandmother is more accepting of homosexuality than are her daughter and granddaughter—a point that will be discussed further in Chapter Four.

A second force behind the novel's mother–daughter conflict is the absence of Marion's father. Like Anne's husband in *Les Bonheurs*, he represents the patriarchal need to police women's mothering. Using Marion as leverage and presenting Elena with an ultimatum, to choose between him and Raphaëlle, the father initially coerces her into rejecting Raphaëlle, thus compelling Elena to repress an important facet of her identity. Until Elena explains to Marion that her father abandoned them when he discovered that Elena had resumed her affair with Raphaëlle, Marion considers Elena to be responsible for the breakup. Marion's identification with her father further resonates with psychoanalytic theories of the mother–daughter relationship. Chodorow argues that because mothers are usually an infant's primary carer and the sole object through which they first experience the world, daughters see their father as a symbol of freedom from dependence on the mother and, therefore, seek to identify with him.¹⁹⁷ Comparably, Marion seeks to identify with her estranged father because she is disillusioned with her mother. Marion's wish that her father be present and her aversion to Elena's lesbianism are an attempt to sever the mother–daughter bond. Indeed, she tells Elena in the novel's opening scene: "Tu n'es plus ma mère" (CDLR 9). She reinforces this rejection by moving in with her grandmother. If, however, Marion's aversion to Elena's lesbianism is an expression not of homophobia per se but of her distress because it is her mother's sexuality that is in question, this implies a closeness between Elena and Marion. Chodorow's description of the daughter's relationship to the mother during the pubertal and prepubertal phases offers an explanation for Marion's ambivalence towards Elena: "[The daughter tries] to merge herself with anyone other than the mother, all the while expressing her feelings of dependency on and primary identification with this mother."¹⁹⁸ By actively disidentifying from Elena and bonding with Marinette, Marion's identity is founded on what Elena is

¹⁹⁷ Chodorow, p. 121.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

not. In this way, Marion necessarily defers to the authority of the mother. Marion's identification with Marinette resonates with Chodorow's belief that adolescent girls may idolize another woman or family member to effect their individuation from the mother.

While Marion quickly comes to terms with her mother's homosexuality, her acceptance of Louise takes much longer, much to Elena's concern: 'Consciente du rejet naturel que Marion alimentait, non plus à l'égard de son homosexualité, mais envers sa compagne, Elena s'inquiétait' (CDLR 86). In this respect, the novel divorces the mother–daughter conflict from Elena's sexuality, since children are often hostile to a parent's new partner, irrespective of gender. Again, then, Mallet seems to downplay differences between heterosexual and lesbian mothers. The novel presents the mother's lover as the daughter's rival for the mother's devotion and love. When Marion is persuading Marinette to let her move in, Marion resentfully states: “[E]lle a d'autres idées en tête en ce moment que de se préoccuper de moi. Alors, c'est oui ou c'est non?” (CDLR 25). Thus, although Marion insists on enforcing a separation between her and Elena, her resentment towards Elena implies a subconscious and, at this precise moment, denied wish to be close to the mother, following Chodorow's model of the mother–daughter relationship.

Irigaray's mother–daughter dialogue in *Et l'une ne bouge pas sans l'autre* further exemplifies the daughter's fluctuation between coveting the mother's affection and forging an identity distinct from that of the mother:

Et si tu me ramènes encore et encore à l'assimilation aveugle de toi—mais qui, toi?—, si tu détournes de moi ton visage, ne te donnant à moi que sous forme déjà inanimée, et m'abandonnant aux hommes compétents pour me défaire de ma/ta paralysie, je me tourne vers mon père. Je te quitte pour qui semble plus vivant que toi.¹⁹⁹

The parenthetical question—'[M]ais qui, toi?'—suggests an estrangement between mother and daughter that is supported by the words: 'Adieu, ma mère. Je ne deviendrai jamais à ton image'.²⁰⁰ Similarly, Marion's commitment to heterosexuality ensures that she does not become her mother's likeness. Indeed, her disidentification from Elena is borne of a fear that she too will become a lesbian—a theory of genetically acquired homosexuality that the novel ultimately refutes:

“Marion, ce n'est pas parce que je suis homosexuelle que tu l'es! Regarde ta grand-mère! Elle ne l'est pas.”

¹⁹⁹ Irigaray, *Et l'une ne bouge pas sans l'autre*, pp. 11–12.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

“Ça saute une génération?”

“Non, ma chérie, ce n’est pas génétique.”

“C’est quoi?”

“C’est... alchimique...” (CDLR 84)

While the novel thus advocates a constructionist view of sexuality, the word “alchimique” connotes something loosely scientific. *Le Choix de la reine* appears, then, to bridge the constructionist–essentialist divide among feminist and queer thinkers on sexual development. Indeed, Elena goes on to describe sexuality as a cooking recipe, suggesting a multitude of “ingredients” that are neither purely social nor purely biological.

Marion’s self-inflicted separation from Elena, moving in with Marinette and transferring to a new school, is her way of avoiding the stigma attached to having a lesbian mother. Indeed, her fear of and attempt to escape this stigma enable the novel to reconfigure the acts of closeting and eventual coming out that are typically thought of only in relation to homosexuals themselves. Elena’s sexuality, then, affects her daughter’s sense of self, positioning it in a liminal space between normativity and otherness: as a heterosexual, Marion adheres, on the one hand, to the normative assimilation of sex, gender, and sexuality; and yet, being the daughter of a lesbian mother engenders a self-imposed marginalization. While the novel thus acknowledges the difficulties that adolescents may face as members of gay and lesbian families, it does not present them as unresolvable, and it challenges Marion’s assumption—one shared by opponents of same-sex parenting—that gay- and lesbian-parented children, because their families divert from gender norms, have trouble building positive peer relationships. Indeed, Marion’s relationship with Tristan, who, incidentally, encourages Marion and Elena’s reconciliation, implies that, in line with recent research findings, gay- and lesbian-parented children are in fact no more likely than those raised in heterosexual families to experience bullying.²⁰¹

Although the novel’s mother–daughter relationship has a transgressive lesbian facet, it also presents several theoretical limitations; first, the lesbian mother–heterosexual daughter conflict becomes a subplot when Raphaëlle reappears, with the result that the novel reverts to an unoriginal focus on a love triangle between Elena, the protagonist,

²⁰¹ See Henny M. W. Bos and Frank van Balen, ‘Children in Planned Lesbian Families: Stigmatisation, Psychological Adjustment and Protective Factors’, *Culture, Health & Sexuality: An International Journal for Research, Invention and Care*, 10 (2008), 221–36; Jennifer L. Wainright and Charlotte J. Patterson, ‘Peer Relations among Adolescents with Female Same-Sex Parents’, *Developmental Psychology*, 44 (2008), 117–26.

Louise, the protagonist's lover, and Raphaëlle, the protagonist's ex. By positioning the lesbian mother in this context—one that adopts the traits of the modern romance—the novel could be said to rely on clichés in order to make lesbian mothering acceptable. Furthermore, the novel ends at what is arguably its most subversive moment, when Raphaëlle moves in with Elena and Marion, thus forming a lesbian-stepparent family. The novel thus sets up but leaves the lesbian family narrative undeveloped and the relationship between the daughter and her lesbian mother's partner largely unexplored. This could, however, be interpreted more optimistically as a refusal to dictate a fixed model of the lesbian stepparent family. Moreover, the novel empowers lesbian mothers through the resolution of its mother–daughter conflict, and the happy ending suggests that the future for these characters will not be problematic.

Le Choix de la reine partially challenges the dominant portrayal of mother–daughter relationships. By casting Elena as a lesbian, the novel exemplifies the ways in which the mother–daughter relationship is being reconfigured in contemporary French women's writing. That said, the origins of the mother–daughter conflict in this novel, such as the mother's fear of pursuing a relationship with a new partner and the daughter's antipathy towards a potential stepparent, are potentially applicable to all mother–daughter conflicts, regardless of family form. In this way, *Le Choix de la reine* seeks to normalize lesbianism, lesbian mothering, and the alternative mother–daughter relationships that result from non-traditional forms of kinship. However, the novel declines to fully explore the implications of these forms of kinship because it masks the transgressive lesbian mother–heterosexual daughter relationship behind a somewhat clichéd focus on the love triangle between Elena and her two lovers—a point to which I return in Chapter Five. In the final section of this chapter, I move on from Rich's claim that mothering under patriarchy is conceived of as a single-minded identity and focus instead on the second element of her critique of the institution of motherhood: that mother-love is assumed to be flawless and unconditional. The following section engages with this insight by examining the portrayal of maternal ambivalence in Monferrand's *Les Amies d'Héloïse* and *Les Enfants d'Héloïse*.

Maternal Ambivalence*

The reconciliation of lesbianism and mothering in Monferrand's *Les Amies d'Héloïse* and

* An earlier version of this section has already appeared in publication: Robert Payne, 'Lesbianism and Maternal Ambivalence in Hélène de Monferrand's *Les Amies d'Héloïse* (1990) and *Les Enfants d'Héloïse* (1997)', *Revue critique de fiction française contemporaine*, 12 (2016), 120–29.

Les Enfants d'Héloïse is, although problematic, never impossible. Monferrand's novels are, then, subtly different from the texts considered above, in which the mothers must at first suppress their sexuality. This section centres on Héloïse's ambivalent relationship with her children and, in order to elucidate the specificities of this relationship, briefly contrasts her experience of mothering with that portrayed in François's *Les Bonheurs*. I thus develop my analysis of the texts' engagement with the norms of institutional motherhood, focusing on Rich's observation that mother-love is assumed to be absolute and natural. Maternal ambivalence, to paraphrase Rozsika Parker's definition, describes the love- and hate-based emotions and impulses that women experience in relation to their children.²⁰² For mothers, to recognize and admit such feelings can be distressing due to the supposed flawlessness of mother-love. Ambivalence is often equated with bad mothering and, due to the nexus between good mothering and normative womanhood, with deviant femininity. Many feminists, including Parker and Rich, have endeavoured to normalize maternal ambivalence and to challenge the romanticization of mothering prescribed by the patriarchal institution of motherhood. Ambivalence is also a dominant theme of many online women's blogs, such as 'The Unmumsy Mum', 'Hurrah for Gin', and, in France, 'La Mariée en colère' and 'Mon petit nuage'. Ambivalent mothers also take centre stage in many works by twentieth-century French women writers, as a wealth of literary criticism has established.²⁰³ Monferrand's novels are, then, part of this body of both literary and popular forms of women's writing but are quite unique in that they portray ambivalence from the point of view of a lesbian mother. The relative absence of lesbian mothers from French literature means that, inevitably, the vast majority of criticism addresses representations of ambivalence in heterosexual contexts. In this section, I reorient maternal ambivalence as an object of French literary criticism towards narratives of mothering from a lesbian perspective. Ultimately, I argue that Monferrand rejects the patriarchal stereotype of the perfect mother, undermines the normative link between lesbianism and neglectful mothering, and answers feminist calls to normalize maternal ambivalence, thereby deconstructing the norms of institutional motherhood as defined by Rich. I begin by deconstructing the link that Héloïse draws between her sexuality and her self-proclaimed failure as a mother, arguing that the protagonist's relationship with mothering and with her children is symptomatic of feminist

²⁰² Rozsika Parker, *Torn in Two: The Experience of Maternal Ambivalence* (London: Virago, 1995), p. 1.

²⁰³ See, for example, Holmes, *French Women's Writing*, pp. 246–65; Rye, *Narratives of Mothering*, pp. 99–117.

psychoanalytic theories of ambivalence. I then consider Héloïse's ambivalence from the points of view of her three children, before turning briefly to the novels' representation of adolescent lesbianism. Next, I analyse Erika's role as a quasi-stepparent in *Les Enfants d'Héloïse*. Finally, I contrast Héloïse's experience of mothering with that portrayed in *Les Bonheurs*.

Despite Monferrand's mainstream success—*Les Amies d'Héloïse* won the Prix Goncourt for best debut novel—her work has received little academic attention. Moreover, the few analyses of Monferrand have largely neglected her representation of mothering. *Les Amies d'Héloïse* is an epistolary novel set between 1964 and 1980. It describes the lives of a number of heterosexual and lesbian aristocratic women, centring on the love triangle between Héloïse de Marèges, Erika von Tauberg, and Suzanne Lacombe. Twenty-nine-year-old Erika seduces fifteen-year-old Héloïse. Héloïse then falls for Erika's former lover, Suzanne, who is almost fifty. Humiliated and jealous, Erika shoots Héloïse and flees to Germany. Soon after, Suzanne learns that she has a brain tumour and commits suicide. Grief-stricken, Héloïse marries, has three children—a boy and twin girls—and is widowed prior to the birth of her daughters. She and Erika are subsequently reunited after a ten-year separation. Set between 1981 and 1990, *Les Enfants d'Héloïse* begins where *Les Amies d'Héloïse* ends. *Les Enfants d'Héloïse* abandons the epistolary form but retains its prequel's inclination to foreground aristocratic female identities. Héloïse pursues her relationship with Erika while raising her son, Anne, and her daughters, Mélanie and Suzanne. Until Mélanie discovers Suzanne Lacombe's diary, the children are unaware of their mother's sexuality and of her and Erika's relationship. Thus, the reconciliation of lesbianism and mothering is arguably this novel's central theme. By casting Mélanie as a lesbian, Monferrand also returns to the exploration of adolescent lesbianism that she began in *Les Amies d'Héloïse*.

In *Les Amies d'Héloïse*, the eponymous protagonist unambiguously links her self-proclaimed failure as a mother with her sexuality: 'Voilà comment je suis devenue une bonne maîtresse, tout en restant une bien mauvaise mère'.²⁰⁴ The use of the gerund implies that Héloïse, in her own view, was already a bad mother. Described by Erika as distant, she affirms that she regrets having become a mother: "Mais pourquoi ai-je fait ces gosses? Pourquoi?" (ADH 448). At first glance, Héloïse's pejorative reference to her children as "gosses" appears to uphold the normative equation of lesbianism with

²⁰⁴ Hélène de Monferrand, *Les Amies d'Héloïse*, Le Livre de Poche, 7316 (Paris: Fallois, 1990), p. 450; subsequent references to this book appear within the text in the form (ADH pp).

deficient mothering, yet she repeatedly acts to ensure the safety of her children and, in doing so, discredits her confessions of bad mothering. For example, Héloïse seeks the help of one of her lovers, Melitta, to prevent a near miscarriage during her second pregnancy, which underlines her concern for her twin daughters' wellbeing. When, to give a second example, Héloïse leaves her husband, an abusive drug user, she considers but decides against abandoning her infant son, Anne: 'Voilà comment j'ai quitté le domicile conjugal. Et moi qui ai toujours proclamé que je n'aimais ni les enfants, ni les animaux, ni les malades, j'ai laissé le malade (imaginaire) et le chat, mais j'ai quand même pris l'enfant' (ADH 337). Monferrand humorously evokes Molière's *Le Malade imaginaire* to trivialize her heroine's urge to abandon her child. In *Les Enfants d'Héloïse*, the protagonist recalls the night when she left her husband:

Elle avait songé très lucidement à laisser le bébé à son père mais à la réflexion ne s'en était pas accordé le droit. Non parce qu'on l'aurait mal jugée, ça elle s'en fichait complètement, mais parce qu'elle s'était sentie tout à coup responsable de lui. [...] "En somme, c'est cette nuit-là [...] que j'ai commencé à l'aimer. Il était temps! Peut-être que je suis normale, finalement? Une mère d'ancien régime, en somme, comme les décrivent Ariès et Badinter".²⁰⁵

Héloïse's feelings for Anne challenge dominant beliefs about mother-love and exemplify Parker's conception of ambivalence, thus disrupting the norms of institutional motherhood. For Parker, ambivalence is not simply mixed feelings but refers to the coexistence of contradictory emotions and impulses towards the same person. 'The positive and negative components,' Parker writes, 'sit side by side and remain in opposition'.²⁰⁶ Ambivalence, in other words, is not an oscillation between love and hate but describes the state of experiencing these feelings simultaneously; neither love nor hate ever ceases entirely. In this passage, Héloïse's dislike of Anne—the urge to abandon him—sits side by side with her love and her sense of responsibility for him. Her reference to the love that she has for her son contradicts her assertion in *Les Amies d'Héloïse* that she hates children. Furthermore, the protagonist's indifference to the potential criticisms of others normalizes maternal ambivalence, although her tentative declaration of normality betrays some anxiety at not meeting the expectation that women love their children absolutely. It is notable too that the novel engages with influential literature on mothering and childhood—as evidenced by its references to Philippe Ariès and Élisabeth

²⁰⁵ Hélène de Monferrand, *Les Enfants d'Héloïse* (Paris: La Cerisaie, 2002 [1997]), p. 122; subsequent references to this book appear within the text in the form (EDH pp).

²⁰⁶ Parker, p. 6.

Badinter—of which a cornerstone is the historically variable nature of mother-love, as Héloïse notes. In this way, the novel challenges the patriarchal definition of mother-love as absolute and natural. Indeed, Héloïse’s admission that she started to love Anne when she left her husband suggests that mother-love, especially in an unloving marriage, is not necessarily instinctive but established gradually. Instead of labelling Héloïse as a neglectful mother, the novel thus seems to underline the mutability of mother-love. This, as we saw in Chapter One, is a phenomenon well documented by feminists. Ann Dally, for instance, suggests that parents loved their children less when infant mortality rates were high; it is, Dally claims, a natural human reaction not to become attached to what one is likely to lose.²⁰⁷ Rather than assert that mothers today love their children more—a problematic argument, given that love is difficult to define and quantify—it is perhaps more pertinent to emphasize Dally’s ultimate contention that mother-love has changed in accordance with patterns of childcare. For instance, the class of women to which Héloïse belongs, the aristocracy, traditionally handed over the task of nurturing their children to wet nurses and nannies. The evolution of mothering and the variability of maternal experience among different social classes suggest that maternal norms are constructed, rather than inherent, and that maternal experience cannot be reduced to that sanctioned by the institution of motherhood.

While Héloïse reaches a degree of acceptance of her own ambivalence, Erika and Anne de Marèges, Héloïse’s mother, worry about Héloïse’s lack of maternal fibre, leading Anne to give her daughter a copy of Badinter’s *L’Amour en plus*. Given Badinter’s contention that maternal instinct is relative—a contention that works to normalize ambivalence—Anne could be said to endorse Badinter’s view. Yet, in trying to convince her daughter that she is no different from other mothers, she implicitly asks Héloïse to defend her ambivalence, thus betraying her view that it needs to be defended and therefore cannot be acceptable. Encouraging Héloïse to mother actively becomes a sort of game between her, Anne, and Erika, thus satirizing the former’s feelings of ambivalence. When, for instance, Héloïse plans to send her children to their grandmother’s in Vienna for a month, Anne and Erika attempt, but fail, to foil the plan.

The fact that the children address Héloïse using the *vous* form could indicate that their relationship with her lacks the intimacy and trust that would engender the use of *tu*. However, the distribution of *tu* and *vous* in Monferrand’s novels has more to do with

²⁰⁷ Dally, p. 44.

relations of power and respect than with degrees of closeness and is a common practice among the French bourgeoisie and aristocracy. This suggests that the children's use of *vous* is a family tradition that reflects the characters' aristocratic milieu more than it does the closeness between Héloïse and her children. Indeed, Héloïse says *vous* to her own mother, even though the latter's acceptance of her daughter's homosexuality evidences an obvious affection between them. In *Les Amies d'Héloïse*, Monferrand further plays with the *tu* and *vous* forms to establish the power relations between the teenage Héloïse and her older lovers:

[J]e suis bien contente que les précautions prises à l'époque de ma minorité nous aient conduites à ne jamais nous tutoyer. Tu ne peux pas savoir le supplément de sensualité qu'apporte cette pratique. Mes parents le savent bien, je parie. J'aimais aussi l'inégalité du rapport avec Suzanne. C'était le maître et l'élève... autre chose... (ADH 442)

As lovers, the mutual *vouvoisement* between Héloïse and Erika, emphasized by its juxtaposition with Héloïse's use of *tu* to address her best friend, Claire, is characteristic of French aristocratic speech patterns and, moreover, perhaps communicates Héloïse's emotional detachment from Erika and the resulting sexual pleasure. Indeed, Claire effectively confirms that, for Héloïse, this is a sex- rather than a love-based affair when, in response to her friend's self-expressed doubts about her feelings for Erika, she asks: 'S'interroge-t-on sur l'amour, quand on le ressent?' (ADH 79). The skewed *tu-vous* distribution between Héloïse and Suzanne—Suzanne says *tu* to Héloïse, but Héloïse addresses Suzanne in the *vous* form—evidences the sexually gratifying power relations of their affair, as the preceding extract indicates. In addition to trivializing Héloïse's maternal ambivalence, Monferrand thus deproblematizes her young heroine's presumed sexual exploitation by her older lovers. Unexpectedly, it is Héloïse, counselled by Claire, who toys with Erika and skilfully entices Suzanne into bed. In many ways, then, it is Héloïse who, perhaps unexpectedly, occupies the active role in her sexual relationships.

As my discussion thus far indicates, Héloïse's experience of mothering is characteristic of feminist psychoanalytic theories of maternal ambivalence. Indeed, she displays the will to protect her children alongside a wish to be rid of them. While these examples undoubtedly convey Héloïse's need for a sense of self that is separable from maternity, they do not vindicate her confessions of bad mothering. On the contrary, Parker argues that the dialogue between the simultaneous feelings of love and resentment encourages women to reflect on their mothering and to try to know and understand their child. Parker's notional theorization of a non-ambivalent mother elucidates this point:

Perhaps this becomes clearer if we invent a hypothetical mother who does not experience ambivalence but regards her child only with hostile feelings, or conversely only with untroubled love. In neither case will she find it necessary to dwell on her relationship with her child or to focus her feelings on her child's response to herself because she will not know what is missing. It is the troubling co-existence of love and hate that propels a mother into thinking about what goes on between herself and her child.²⁰⁸

Put simply, the coexistence of love and hate can in fact improve women's mothering. According to Parker, then, 'ambivalence itself is emphatically not the problem; the issue is how a mother manages the guilt and anxiety ambivalence provokes'.²⁰⁹ Far from being a neglectful mother, then, Héloïse is reflecting on her feelings of love and resentment vis-à-vis her children, voicing—often unashamedly—her ambivalence, and expressing the disquiet around the supposed irreconcilability of lesbianism and mothering. Further, Parker distinguishes between manageable and unmanageable ambivalence.²¹⁰ In Monferrand's novels, Héloïse deploys humour to manage the negative emotions that she harbours in relation to her children, as evidenced by the ironic comparison cited earlier between the child, the cat, and her hypochondriac of a husband. This enables the novels to subvert their heroine's declarations of bad mothering, infant hating, and her association of these with her sexuality. While they thus explore maternal ambivalence from a lesbian perspective, the novels do not imply that lesbianism causes ambivalence or that lesbian mothers are less able than heterosexual mothers to manage it. Admittedly, *Les Amies d'Héloïse* depicts a stark contrast between its ambivalent heroine and her best friend, a heterosexual mother who desires seven children and to have them at home for as long as possible, which could be said to reify heterosexuality as a prerequisite of mothering. The maternal experiences of the novels' other heterosexual women are, however, less idyllic. Erika's half-sister, Manuela, is trapped in an unhappy marriage and, in *Les Enfants d'Héloïse*, falls pregnant with another man's child. Monferrand thus suggests that mothering is hard to varying degrees but that the difficulties of mothering do not necessarily have any relation to the mother's sexuality. This is equally applicable to other aspects of the novel. For instance, neither the women's gender nor their sexuality has any bearing on their success in the public sphere—Monferrand's women are all well-educated professionals—or on their political views. Indeed, Monferrand challenges the typical association between lesbian and gay activism and the political left by creating characters who, on subjects other than sex, are socially conservative, as exemplified by Héloïse's

²⁰⁸ Parker, p. 7.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

defence of the traditional education system in which lower-achieving pupils sit at the back of the classroom.

The novels' portrayal of mothering, then, bears some resemblance to Rich's theory of a lesbian continuum—that is to say, 'a range [...] of woman-identified experience; not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman'.²¹¹ According to Rich, sexuality cannot be reduced to a binary of heterosexual and homosexual desire, just as mothering, for Monferrand, is not reducible to a simple question of good and bad. By synthesizing Rich's lesbian continuum with the maternal experiences of Héloïse and her friends, it could be argued that Monferrand's work goes beyond the parochiality of binary logic. Monferrand's novels also expose the limits of accepted sexual identity categories. For instance, Héloïse disrupts the conventional definition of lesbianism by engaging in and, crucially, enjoying the sexual side of her brief marriage to François. As Héloïse comments on her marriage: 'Un échec, oui, mais pas au lit. À la fin de leur mariage c'était même la seule chose qui marchait et ils se réconciliaient souvent sur l'oreiller' (EDH 196). She also has a one-off heterosexual encounter following her husband's death. Héloïse's decidedly non-binary sexuality nods towards Hélène Cixous's concept of 'autre bisexualité'—that is, the recognition that everyone is, to some degree, both male and female and that, by extension, everyone's desire extends beyond the hetero–homo binary.²¹² Indeed, it would be tempting to regard Monferrand's heroine as bisexual, if not for the unambiguous statement that '[m]algré tout Héloïse avait fini par conclure qu'elle n'était pas fondamentalement bisexuelle', which suggests that, ultimately, the protagonist identifies as a lesbian (EDH 196). Nonetheless, the novel undoubtedly questions the pertinence of accepted sexual identity categories and endorses Rich's model of a lesbian continuum through a protagonist whose sexuality is undeniably non-binary.

The novels' recognition of the flaws of mother-love nods towards Andrea O'Reilly's theory of feminist mothering.²¹³ Building on Rich's distinction between the experience and institution of motherhood, O'Reilly argues that maternal experience can only empower women if the institution of motherhood is broken. Central to maternal empowerment is the possibility that mothers have a sense of self that is separable from mothering. By reconciling mothering with her desire to have a love life and embracing,

²¹¹ Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality', p. 648.

²¹² Cixous, p. 46.

²¹³ For an overview of O'Reilly's sizeable contribution to feminist work on mothering, see Chapter One.

even mocking, imperfect mother-love, Monferrand's heroine can be said to resist institutional motherhood. *Les Enfants d'Héloïse* utilizes the perspectives of Héloïse's children to further normalize maternal ambivalence and to challenge the assumption that imperfect mother-love is damaging to children. While Suzanne doubts whether Héloïse loves them, the possible absence of mother-love is remarkably deproblematized:

“Maman? Ça dépend. Elle ne s'intéresse pas à nous. Peut-être qu'elle ne nous aime pas? Quand on y réfléchit c'est son droit. Pourquoi les parents seraient-ils obligés d'aimer leurs enfants?”

“Maman nous aime!”

“Qu'est-ce qui te le prouve? À mon avis elle nous aime bien, oui... et de nous trois elle préfère Anne.”
(EDH 246)

Suzanne's acceptance of, even complete indifference to, maternal ambivalence further challenges the normative stereotype that women love their children absolutely. Through her distinction between love, 'aime', and like, 'aime bien', the novel raises the important question of what it means to love one's child and encourages the reader to reflect on the fine line between these two degrees of affection, just as Parker encourages us to consider the proximity of love and hate. Moreover, Suzanne challenges the modern but widespread expectation that women love all their children equally by suggesting that Héloïse loves Anne more than she does her daughters. Indeed, Héloïse confirms her daughter's belief in conversation with Erika: “Moi je ne suis pas une bonne mère. J'ai des préférences, mais elles varient. En ce moment, j'ai un petit faible pour Anne” (EDH 155). As well as her habitual self-denigration as a bad mother, Héloïse again exposes the mutability and flawed nature of mother-love. Anne, for his part, adores Héloïse and is unquestioningly loyal to her. Indeed, when his paternal grandmother, whom he cannot abide, falsely tells him that Héloïse killed his father, he immediately concludes: “[S]i Maman avait tué Papa, elle avait une excellente raison” (EDH 67). Thus, Anne's love for his mother seems to be unconditional, as Héloïse realizes when Anne informs her of his grandmother's accusation: “Qu'avait-elle fait pour mériter un amour aussi inconditionnel? Et qu'auraient pensé les filles dans la même situation?” (EDH 291). Just as the children reveal the variability of mother-love, Héloïse alludes to the different degrees to which children love their parents. *Les Enfants d'Héloïse* thus goes beyond representing the mother's ambivalence to a portrayal of the shared ambivalence that mothers and children experience in relation to each other. Suzanne, for instance, states that she loves her grandmother, Lise—a friend of the family—and Anne more than she does Héloïse. Mélanie, on the other hand, prefers Erika to her mother. As such, the twins recall

Chodorow's claim discussed earlier that girls attempt to identify with female figures other than the mother.

Mélanie's identification with Erika is particularly strong, and she says that Erika might be the person whom she loves most in the world. Indeed, for Mélanie, Erika 'était quelqu'un de mystérieux qui la fascinait totalement, depuis toujours. Plus exactement depuis le soir, à l'âge de quatre ans, où elle l'avait vue pour la première fois, ce dont elle se souvenait très bien' (EDH 54). Clearly, then, Erika made a lasting impression on her lover's daughter. Mélanie attempts to maintain her attachment to Erika by opting to spend one Christmas in Le Cernix because, in previous years, Erika has spent a few days there. As Mélanie enters puberty, her attachment to Erika becomes increasingly sexual. While the novel could thus be said to reinforce a model of genetically acquired homosexuality, Suzanne neatly challenges this view when her sister confides in her:

[J]e peux fournir quantité d'autres explications aussi simples. L'atmosphère, des choses presque invisibles entre Maman et Erika que tu as captées sans t'en apercevoir. Peut-être même es-tu un peu amoureuse d'Erika, je le croirais volontiers, d'autant plus que tu m'as avoué qu'elle te troublait. Bref tu as fait ton Œdipe à l'envers. (EDH 390)

Suzanne postulates sexuality as psychologically and socially conditioned rather than biologically determined. Moreover, her reference to the Oedipal configuration reapplies, perhaps mockingly, Freudian psychoanalysis to non-heterosexual kinship structures. Mélanie, Suzanne claims, has induced mother–daughter separation by finding a new love-object in the form of another woman.

Whereas Mélanie's attachment to Erika therefore becomes progressively sexual, the role that Erika covets and forges with Héloïse's children is a parental one. By building a positive relationship with Héloïse's children, Erika hopes to ensure her partner's long-term commitment to her: 'En admettant qu'Héloïse tombât un jour amoureuse de quelqu'un d'autre, elle hésiterait certainement à détruire l'équilibre familial, même s'il s'agissait en l'espèce d'une famille hors normes' (EDH 17). Although Erika's motive for coveting the parental role is thus not entirely selfless, she nonetheless envisions the possibility of two women parenting together. Similarly, Anne de Marèges encourages Erika to move into the apartment block where Héloïse and her children are living with a view to providing the children with a "normal" family environment. Héloïse ironically wonders, however, whether her mother realizes how far her daughter's family goes against the norm. While *Les Enfants d'Héloïse*, like *Les Bonheurs* and *La Vie dure*, thus acknowledges lesbian-headed families, it ultimately forecloses the possibility of publicly

declaring this family configuration in a cultural and social context in which gay and lesbian parenting is invisible and taboo. Nonetheless, Héloïse and Erika actively subvert family norms, as their conversation about Héloïse's plan to send Mélanie and Suzanne to boarding school illustrates:

“Il est vrai que ça ne me regarde pas.”

“Mais si, ça vous regarde! Vous vous souvenez de ce qu'a dit Lise, il n'y a pas longtemps, à propos des enfants et de nous?”

“Je ne crois pas.”

“Mais si, elle a dit que vous faisiez la mère et moi le père. Que toute notre attitude...”

“Elle plaisantait.”

“Pas tout à fait. Il y a beaucoup de vrai dans cette remarque. Le père que je suis pensait qu'il fallait les séparer à l'école primaire, même si elles en pleuraient, et qu'il est bon de les mettre en pension maintenant, ce qui ne leur déplaît pas. Vous, vous jouez le rôle de la mère classique: vous vous tordez les mains en vous lamentant.” (EDH 154–55)

Although the relationships between Héloïse, Erika, and the children are assimilated to a heteronormative mother–father–child triangulation, it is not insignificant that Monferrand's novel portrays a lesbian family, of sorts, prior to the emergence of same-sex parenting as a cultural, political, and social issue during the French debates on the PaCS in 1999. Indeed, *Les Enfants d'Héloïse* is a reminder that, although gay and lesbian families have gained visibility in the twenty-first century, and especially in the run-up to the legalization of equal marriage in 2013, such families are not as recent a cultural phenomenon as is commonly believed, and the texts studied in this chapter attest to the existence of lesbian mothers long before then. Lesbian mothers have, of course, existed for as long as heterosexual mothers in cases where women, like Héloïse, have children in a heterosexual partnership before or while assuming a lesbian identity. Although *Les Enfants d'Héloïse* thus nods towards a lesbian stepparent family, its characters never truly embrace this mode of kinship. While Erika lives a floor below Héloïse and the children, she never moves in with them and is never entirely incorporated into the family. Most importantly, Erika is never introduced to the children as Héloïse's partner, although the children eventually discover the nature of the relationship between Héloïse and Erika.

In contrast with Monferrand, whose heroine struggles to interact with her children, François strategically portrays the mother–child relationship as problem-free in order to undermine the stereotypical equation of lesbianism with neglectful mothering. Anne relishes the maternal role, and she confesses that the desire to have children incentivized and gives meaning to her marriage to Michel, suggesting that lesbians do not necessarily

lack the desire to mother that is normatively associated with heterosexual women. Additionally, Anne seems to enjoy breastfeeding—‘Je voudrais te donner mon lait et contenter ta bouche chercheuse’ (B 71)—and, unlike Héloïse, who sends Mélanie and Suzanne to boarding school to keep her sexuality and relationship with Erika a secret, is untroubled by the unceasing mother–child bond:

J’aimais la relation constante avec les enfants. J’en faisais une possession dépossédée. La possession, c’était cette confiance totale et réciproque que nous avions entre nous. Mais c’était une possession dépossédée parce que je savais d’évidence qu’ils allaient vers leur amour et non vers moi. (B 90)

The text’s conception of the mother–child bond alludes to that developed by object-relations psychoanalysts. Unlike Freud, who emphasizes the role of biological drives in the psychic development of infants, object-relations theory holds that the formation of the self occurs through social relations. In Chodorow’s account, infants develop chiefly in relation to their mother since it is she who is their primary carer.²¹⁴ They therefore experience themselves as one with her and acquire a sense of self only when, during the Oedipal phase, they learn that they are separate from their mother. Anne’s description of her relationship with her children as a reciprocated possession thus evokes Chodorow’s model of the early mother–child relationship. Moreover, it resonates with her claim that humans attempt to relive the preoedipal relationship as adults. Women, Chodorow argues, are drawn to mothering in order to recreate the bond they shared as infants with their own mother.²¹⁵ Similarly, Anne states: ‘[L]a femme cherche une compensation affective dans des soins exagérés’ (B 35). Anne’s recognition that her children ‘allaient vers leur amour et non vers moi’ further encourages a psychoanalytic reading of the novel’s conception of the mother–child bond, for it echoes the infant’s rejection of the mother and subsequent love for the father that is the result of the Oedipus complex (B 90).

Whereas in Monferrand’s novels the protagonist’s equation of ambivalence with her sexuality is satirized, *Les Bonheurs* declines to even entertain such conjecture. As Anne reflects: ‘Eux n’étaient pas en cause, jamais elle ne regretterait leur présence. Qu’ils soient nés de son désordre et de son errance, peu importait: ils étaient là, ils dépassaient totalement ses propres dimensions, elle les aimait’ (B 166). Unlike Héloïse, Anne is able to isolate her feelings about her children from her sexuality. Significantly, Anne does not appear to experience ambivalence in relation to her children but is angered by the

²¹⁴ Chodorow, pp. 77–78.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

obligation to mother in a heterosexual framework—that is to say, according to the terms of the institution of motherhood. For example, she fosters some resentment at the gendered division of paid and unpaid labour. Furthermore, *Les Bonheurs* voices the reservations about the medicalization of antenatal care and childrearing that appear in feminist tracts of the same period. Ann Oakley, for instance, qualifies the role of medicine in reducing infant mortality rates, claiming that medical practices that aid a minority of mothers are applied needlessly to the majority.²¹⁶ *Les Bonheurs* seems to sympathize with Oakley’s critique of excessively medicalized maternity care when Anne, while in labour with her first child, only reluctantly accepts medical intervention: “‘Je peux supporter. Je dois vraiment prendre ce remède?’” (B 64). For Anne, the pain of childbirth is a rite of passage to mothering: ‘La douleur me tenait et moi, je me tenais dans la douleur et mon cœur était rempli d’une joie hauturière. Pour rien au monde je n’aurais échangé cette nuit contre une autre’ (B 63). Oakley further criticizes the replacement of women’s own experience of and expertise about mothering with an increasingly medicalized discourse of childcare.²¹⁷ This is a criticism that *Les Bonheurs* also voices:

Dans la salle d’attente, des jeunes femmes accompagnées de leur mari ou de leur mère feuilletaient des albums de “Prénatal” ou ces revues qui encourageaient la maternité heureuse et l’allaitement naturel. J’étais seule et fortement émue en contemplant comme une chose neuve ces visages inconnus. (B 52–53)

The contrast between Anne and the women accompanied by their husband or mother heightens the protagonist’s sense of otherness and alludes to the negative impact of medicalized maternity care. The novel’s pessimism about the discourse of institutional motherhood is made plain by Anne’s disregard both for the mother-and-baby magazines and for the recommendations given to her by the midwife:

Elle m’avait examinée soigneusement en déclarant que j’étais enceinte de six semaines environ. Je pouvais dire et penser “mon enfant”. Tout le reste était confondable, des conseils qu’elle me donnait et qui allaient de soi, et des formalités qu’elle me recommandait d’entreprendre. J’avais grand mal à fixer mon attention. (B 53)

The discordance between Anne’s measured excitement at discovering that she is to be a mother and her disengagement from the midwife’s advice expresses both her love for her children and her disquiet at the isolating experience of pregnancy.

The texts by François and Monferrand offer contrasting portrayals of the feelings that

²¹⁶ Oakley, *From Here to Maternity*, pp. 15–18.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

lesbian mothers harbour towards their children. Whereas François strategically depicts the mother–child bond as problem-free in order to challenge negative perceptions of lesbian mothers, Monferrand rejects the patriarchal view of mother-love as absolute and natural, while also challenging the link between lesbianism and neglectful mothering. On the face of it, Héloïse upholds this normative equation. However, reading Héloïse’s relationship with her children through the lens of feminist psychoanalysis reveals that this relationship is marked by ambivalence rather than neglect. By portraying Erika in a quasi-parental role to Héloïse’s children, *Les Enfants d’Héloïse* can, to some extent, be said to anticipate the increasing visibility of gay and lesbian parents in twenty-first century France. Ultimately, however, the fact that Erika never truly assumes this role indicates the continuing ideological commonplace of the heterosexual nuclear family in the cultural and social context of the plot.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, I would like to return to the theoretical concept that I set out at the beginning of this chapter: Adrienne Rich’s institution of motherhood. The representations of mothering in the texts considered above expose and ultimately challenge the norms of this institution in several ways: first, and most obviously, the texts question the taken-for-granted nexus between mothering and heterosexuality by casting the mother-character as a lesbian. The works by François, Dumont, and Mallet portray the heteronormative and phallogocentric discourses that compel lesbian mothers to suppress their sexuality in order to be a “good” or “normal” mother to their children. *Le Choix de la reine* is notable for its portrayal of a lesbian mother–heterosexual daughter relationship—a concern virtually unrepresented in French literature—and for its illumination of the conflict that, according to psychoanalytic theory, typifies the mother–daughter bond. In *Les Amies d’Héloïse* and *Les Enfants d’Héloïse*, the protagonist’s experience of mothering refutes the supposed flawlessness of mother-love. While the novels thus seem to reiterate the normative irreconcilability of lesbianism and mothering, my analysis sought to resist this conclusion by interpreting the novels’ depiction of mothering in light of psychoanalytic theories of maternal ambivalence. Héloïse’s feelings in relation to her children, far from making her a “bad” mother, are characteristic of ambivalence. The novels therefore support feminist work on mothering that endeavours to normalize and trivialize imperfect mother-love against the patriarchal stereotype of the perfect mother.

A final, important commonality of these texts is that they point towards the increasing

visibility of gay and lesbian families in the 2000s by hypothesizing a parental role for the mother's lover. In *Les Bonheurs* and *La Vie dure*, both Sarah and Pascale envisage the creation of a lesbian family. *Le Choix de la reine* ends with Raphaëlle moving in with Elena and Marion, thus forming a lesbian-stepparent family. In *Les Enfants d'Héloïse*, Erika is portrayed as a quasi-stepparent to the heroine's children. Despite this, the transgressive potential of these texts is limited in this respect, since the possibility of a lesbian family is never truly embraced or is embraced only as a *dénouement* of the text. These texts should therefore be seen as evidence of and steps towards the widening of family structures that France has witnessed in the first decades of the twenty-first century and as records of the existence of lesbian parenting prior to its politicization and theorization. Chapter Three engages with this very phenomenon. My focus now turns from depictions of lesbian mothers who have children within the context of a heterosexual relationship towards representations of planned lesbian mothering. Whereas this chapter has focused on mothers who are biogenetically connected to their children, Chapter Three considers family units in which more than one woman identifies as a mother—irrespective of her biological status vis-à-vis her child. The texts considered thus call attention to the increasingly diverse meanings of mothering in contemporary France.

3

The Performativity of Mothering

In *Mothering Queerly, Queering Motherhood*, Shelly Park coins the term “monomaternalism” to refer to the ideological assumption that a child can have only one real mother.²¹⁸ According to Park, this assumption—which carries with it a monopaternalist assumption—stems in part from the equation of mothering with participation in a series of biogenetic acts that include natural conception, gestation, childbirth, and lactation.²¹⁹ It thus functions to naturalize the nuclear family and to obfuscate and stigmatize alternative kinship networks, such as adoptive, blended, lesbian, and polygamous families.²²⁰ This assumption is hardly unique to France. Across the West, heteronormative and monomaternalist discourses embedded in legal and political systems are being reinforced and, at the same time, resisted, indicating that there is an ongoing debate on the meaning of mothering and the family.

Lucy Yeatman’s examination of two cases in the British High Court illustrates that the comother’s relationship with her child is frequently considered to be inferior to that between the child and the biological—the so-called real—mother.²²¹ These cases testify to the heteronormative and monomaternalist discourses entrenched in Western legal systems. In the first case, two sperm donors obtained parental responsibility for their children, thereby acquiring rights equal to those of the children’s mother and comother. The judge decreed that the men had been deprived of the status of legal parent, even though they had never lived with the children nor contributed financially to their upbringing. For Yeatman, this ruling undermines legislation aiming to recognize the completeness of lesbian families—namely, the Human Fertilization and Embryology Act 2008, which permits both biological and non-biological mothers to become the legal

²¹⁸ Park, p. 3.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

²²¹ Lucy Yeatman, ‘Lesbian Co-Parents: Still Not Real Mothers’, *Family Law*, 43 (2013), 1581–87.

parents of children conceived by artificial insemination.²²² In the second case, a biological mother successfully applied for the sole legal parentage of her twins following the breakdown of her and her partner's relationship. She argued, and the judge concurred, that the agreement to share the legal parentage of the children was void because the couple had signed the required paperwork at the wrong time. Yeatman decries the biological mother's guile and condemns the ruling as reliant on a legal loophole.²²³

Rachel Shoaf's look at the ambiguous legal status of American lesbian comothers demonstrates that, as in the UK, many US states award custody primarily on the basis of biology. For Shoaf, this approach inadequately addresses the diversity among contemporary families, for it assumes that all children have exactly two parents and exactly one of each gender.²²⁴ Echoing Yeatman's example, Shoaf's case study describes a biological lesbian mother who won full custody of her daughter on the grounds that the joint custodial agreement between her and her ex-partner was invalid. The couple had become civil partners under Vermont law, but the union was later dissolved, and the biological mother returned to her home state of Virginia, where same-sex marriage and unions were at that time prohibited. The court in Virginia overturned the joint custodial agreement ratified by the Vermont court, depriving the comother of her legal status vis-à-vis her daughter. What is striking about these cases is that all three rulings violated laws that should have protected the non-biological mother: in Yeatman's cases, the Human Fertilization and Embryology Act; and in Shoaf's case, the clause in the American constitution binding each state to respect the public acts and records of every other state.²²⁵ As the following paragraph shows, cases like these sometimes produce outcomes that favour the coparent, but this disregard for legislation in itself testifies to the entrenchment of heteronormative and monomaterialist discourses in Western legal systems.

In France, the legal status of coparents is as ambiguous and unstable as it is in the UK and US. In 2013, France granted marriage and adoption rights to same-sex couples. Coparents can, as a result, legally adopt the child of their same-sex spouse. Accordingly, the terms "mother" and "father" have been erased from the legal texts regulating adoption

²²² Ibid., p. 1583.

²²³ Ibid., pp. 1585–86.

²²⁴ Rachel E. Shoaf, 'Two Mothers and Their Child: A Look at the Uncertain Status of Nonbiological Lesbian Mothers Under Contemporary Law', *William and Mary Journal of Women and the Law*, 12 (2005), 267–95 (p. 267).

²²⁵ Ibid., p. 269.

and replaced by the gender-neutral term “parent” in recognition of children who have two parents of the same gender.²²⁶ To a point, then, the French legal system now eschews monomaternism—that is, the assumption that a child can have only one real mother. However, the 1994 bioethics laws reinforce this very assumption: surrogate mothering is prohibited, and access to assisted reproductive technologies restricted to heterosexual couples struggling to conceive naturally. Currently, French lesbian couples are therefore obliged to seek fertility treatment abroad, typically in Belgium or Spain, which dramatically increases the cost of starting a family; or to inseminate artificially without medical help, which significantly reduces the likelihood of conception. Although the bioethics laws underwent reviews in 2004 and 2011, which considered decriminalizing surrogacy and relaxing the constraints on the use of reproductive technologies, no significant amendments were made. Yet the very fact that this debate was had illustrates that heteronormative and monomaternalist discourses are being challenged or at least questioned. Since the legalization of same-sex marriage, the French government has faced further pressure to revise the bioethics laws. In September 2014, the *Cour de cassation*’s declared that it was not in children’s best interests to deny adoption on the basis of their mode of conception. In April 2015, in six separate cases the courts of appeal in Aix-en-Provence and Versailles overturned the decisions to refuse six women the right to adopt the biological children—conceived by artificial insemination abroad—of their same-sex spouses.²²⁷ In June 2015, the *Haut Conseil à l’Égalité entre les femmes et les hommes* pledged support for the opening of reproductive technologies to all women irrespective of their relationship status or sexual identity.²²⁸ In sum, the French context both reinforces and resists the heteronormative and monomaternalist discourses entrenched in legal and political forums across the West.

This chapter analyses five texts that resist these discourses through their representation of polymatern lesbian families—that is to say, a family comprising two or more lesbian women who both, irrespective of their biological status in relation to their child, identify as his or her mother based on their shared contribution to his or her upbringing. Whereas Chapter Two focused on depictions of mothers who have children in the context of a

²²⁶ Gross, *Parent ou homo*, p. 78.

²²⁷ Catherine Mallaval, ‘Adoption pour tous: les juges récalcitrants prennent une claque’, *Libération*, 16 April 2015 <http://next.liberation.fr/vous/2015/04/16/adoption-pour-tous-les-juges-recalcitrants-prennent-une-claque_1243918> [accessed 23 September 2016].

²²⁸ Catherine Mallaval, ‘PMA, Procréation médicalement arbitraire...’, *Libération*, 1 July 2015 <http://www.liberation.fr/societe/2015/07/01/pma-procreation-medicalement-arbitraire_1341021> [accessed 23 September 2016].

heterosexual union, this chapter considers texts portraying a lesbian couple who start a family together. These texts thus understand mothering as a social function, or caregiving role, and only secondarily as a biogenetic process. This chapter follows Judith Butler's conception of kinship as a 'set of practices' that 'emerge to address fundamental forms of human dependency, which may include birth, child-rearing, relations of emotional dependency and support, generational ties, illness, dying, and death (to name a few)'.²²⁹ For Butler, then, kinship is not defined by biological ties but constructed through interpersonal relationships. This understanding of kinship owes much to her earlier work on gender performativity. According to Butler, gender does not stem from biological sex but is continually produced through behaviour; our gender identity—that is, our self-definition as a man, woman, or neither—is the effect, rather than the cause, of such behaviour. In Butler's words: 'There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results'.²³⁰ Butler suggests that kinship, like gender, is performative—that is to say, kinship is produced through the practices that are assumed to be its results. In the same way, a maternal identity is constructed through the caregiving role that is thought to be the effect of being a mother.

Drawing on Butler's seminal work, this chapter focuses on the argument that the texts under consideration resist monomaterialism by redefining mothering as a performative rather than a biogenetic process. Although of different genres, these five texts have in common their portrayal of an emerging but still marginalized form of kinship: a family comprising two mothers and, in some cases, a present father. As such, they reflect the ongoing deconstruction of gender and sexual norms in France and, I contend, give visibility and voice to the identities created by this contemporary cultural and social phenomenon. Indeed, these texts are political in the sense that they contribute to and, in some cases, even prefigure the debates on gay and lesbian families in France. I begin by examining the reasons for which the lesbian couple in each text opt in favour of or against the incorporation of a father into their family. I then examine how far the texts consider planned lesbian families to compare with normative or heterosexual modes of kinship. While these texts certainly work to redefine what a mother is by deviating from the dominant mother–father–child triangulation, they also stress the similarities between heterosexual and lesbian parents—namely, the desire to have and nurture a child. Finally,

²²⁹ Butler, 'Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?', pp. 14–15.

²³⁰ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 34.

I analyse the texts' treatment of assisted reproductive technologies, drawing on feminist insights to interrogate France's bioethics laws and conception of fertility.

Before I develop my analysis, it is pertinent to briefly outline the context and plot of each text. Significantly, all were written during a key period in recent French history: between 1999 and 2013—that is to say, after the creation of the PaCS but before the legalization of same-sex marriage. At that time, homosexual relationships could, thanks to the PaCS, benefit from some legal protection, but gay and lesbian families had no official recognition. As a result, the couples in these texts plan to start a family despite the threat of legal instability. In Éliane Girard's novel, *Mais qui va garder le chat?* (2005), Cécile, the future biological mother, and her new partner, Fanny, decide to create a child through what they humorously refer to as the “syringe-and-yogurt-pot method”—that is, artificial insemination with a known donor without medical help. The donor, Gilles, offers to provide the couple with his sperm but will take no part in the child's upbringing.

In Laurence Cinq-Fraix's novel, *Family Pride* (2006), the narrator, Cécile, and her partner, Anna, enter a coparenting arrangement with a gay couple, Éric and Benoît. Anna and Éric are the biological parents, and Cécile and Benoît the coparents. Towards the end of the novel, Cécile and Anna dissolve their civil partnership but maintain amicable relations for the benefit of their daughter, Angèle. The novel ends at Angèle's fifth birthday party, which her four parents attend. Unlike Girard's novel, which is largely recounted from the biological mother's perspective, Cinq-Fraix privileges the comother's point of view, thus legitimizing the caregiving role and the performative notion of mothering that she embodies. The novel's title juxtaposes two normatively dichotomized notions—family and homosexuality—the word “pride” being strongly associated with the gay rights movement.

Brigitte Célier's *Maman, Mamour, ses deux mamans: Grandir dans une famille homoparentale* (2008) is an autobiographical, retrospective account of planning for a child and parenting. The narrator, Brigitte, her partner, Dominique, the future biological mother, and Dominique's friend, Christian, became parents to their daughter, Géraldine, in 1985, but Célier only began to compose her book when Géraldine entered her twenties. The narrator tells us that the parents had planned to have two children simultaneously—one from each mother—but this project was abandoned when Christian discovered that he had contracted HIV. Christian, we are told, passed away before Géraldine's birth, yet ‘[Dominique et moi] avons très vite constaté qu'il était fortement inscrit dans la vie

psychique de sa fille'.²³¹ *Maman, Mamour* is divided into chapters that each foreground a particular challenge facing (lesbian) parents, and is interspersed with extracts from letters from Brigitte to Géraldine. Like Cinq-Fraix's, Céliér's title is a play on words, combining the French words "maman" and "amour", which symbolizes the superior importance of love relative to biology and parental sexuality in matters of family and kinship. The word "mamour" also recalls the expression "se faire des mamours"—a colloquialism meaning "to cuddle". It therefore connotes the physical care that is central to the text's understanding of mothering and to Brigitte's role as a mother. More simply, "mamour" is the term that Géraldine uses to address Brigitte.

In Myriam Blanc's *Elles eurent beaucoup d'enfants... Et se marièrent: Histoire d'une famille homoparentale* (2012), the narrator and her partner, Astrid, have two daughters, both conceived by artificial insemination in Belgium. Myriam is the biological mother of their eldest daughter, Augustine, and Astrid the biological mother of Assia. The girls have different, unknown sperm donors. Blanc's title juxtaposes norms of femininity—marriage and mothering—with a reference to non-normative modes of parenting. Her text is similar to Céliér's in terms of form and genre. Like Céliér's, this text is written retrospectively and is an autobiographical work. Divided into short sections, which present the attitudes and political debates that inform the characters' experience of parenting, Blanc's text is a self-proclaimed handbook of *homoparentalité*, aimed both at gay and lesbian parents and at heterosexuals. It is the expanded edition of a quasi-eponymous work published in 2005 entitled *Et elles eurent beaucoup d'enfants...: Histoire d'une famille homoparentale*. Blanc was commissioned to update this text in the wake of François Hollande's election in 2012 and his promise to introduce equal marriage.

In Claire Bénard's autobiographical novel, *Prince Charmante: Que fait-on quand on tombe amoureuse d'une femme?* (2013), Zélie has two daughters in the context of a heterosexual marriage before beginning an affair with Alice. Towards the end of the text, Zélie, Alice, and the children move in together, and the couple travel to Barcelona, where Zélie undergoes fertility treatment. The text ends during the third trimester of Zélie's pregnancy. The title of Bénard's text—an ungrammatical subversion of the gender-normative figure of the fairy-tale prince—underscores Zélie's nascent lesbianism as the novel's central theme. Indeed, this text is primarily concerned with desire between

²³¹ Brigitte Céliér, *Maman, Mamour, ses deux mamans: Grandir dans une famille homoparentale* (Paris: Anne Carrière, 2008), p. 20; subsequent references to this book appear within the text in the form (MM pp).

women rather than with their desire to have a child. By contrast, the other authors foreground their characters' desire to have and nurture a child. As Blanc wryly puts it in *Elles eurent beaucoup d'enfants*: 'Mon livre est scandaleusement dépourvu de détails croustillants, et, par exemple, vous n'apprendrez rien sur la manière dont on fait l'amour entre filles. Juste comment on fait des bébés...'.²³² Procreation is not, of course, a matter *entre filles*. Would-be lesbian parents have an important decision to make about what role men will have in their immediate family: some couples decide to parent alone, in which case the male role is purely biological; others decide that they want their child to grow up with one or more fathers. It is to the representation of this decision in my corpus of texts that I now turn. The texts' treatment of this decision enables them to deal with cultural norms and psychoanalytic theories that dictate that children grow up best when surrounded by a man and woman.

Un père qui n'en est pas un? The Role of the Father in Lesbian Families

The consensus that children grow up best when surrounded by a mother and father is often used to attack gay and lesbian families.²³³ In France, this consensus is defended by two major discourses: religion and psychoanalysis. Despite French secularism, Catholicism still holds considerable influence in France, and the Church campaigned against same-sex marriage on the grounds that the creation and rearing of children by a man and woman is natural, ergo unchangeable and untouchable.²³⁴ The website of the French Catholic Church features a dossier dedicated to the same-sex marriage debate, which defends sexual difference as the foundation of the family: 'Le mariage traditionnel consacre socialement l'homme et la femme en vue de la fondation d'une famille: on pense qu'il y a un bien spécifique à cette union, un bien social qui vient de la différence sexuelle'.²³⁵ The role of Christianity in opposing same-sex marriage is a shared feature of this debate across the West and was, perhaps, to be expected in a traditionally catholic country like France. But the influence of psychoanalysis in the debates on gay and lesbian

²³² Myriam Blanc, *Elles eurent beaucoup d'enfants... Et se marièrent: Histoire d'une famille homoparentale*, new edn (Paris: Le bec en l'air, 2012 [2005]), p. 52; subsequent references to this book appear within the text in the form (HFH pp).

²³³ See Gross, *Parent ou homo*, pp. 175–84.

²³⁴ On the role of religion in defending the mother- and father-headed family, see Céline Béraud, 'Un front commun des religions contre le mariage pour tous?', *Contemporary French Civilization*, 39 (2014), 335–49; Odile Fillod, 'L'invention de la "théorie du genre": Le mariage blanc du Vatican et de la science', *Contemporary French Civilization*, 39 (2014), 321–33.

²³⁵ Xavier Lacroix, "'Une mesure discriminatoire pour l'enfant'", 7 January 2013 <<http://www.eglise.catholique.fr/actualites/dossiers/dossiers-2013/le-mariage-pour-tous/359669-une-mesure-discriminatoire-pour-lenfant/>> [accessed 2 February 2017].

families is unique to the French case. Camille Robcis demonstrates how French left- and right-wing deputies frequently drew on some of the most complex ideas of psychoanalysis and structural anthropology, specifically in the works of Jacques Lacan and Claude Lévi-Strauss, to promote what Robcis calls ‘familialism’—that is, the normative heterosexual family.²³⁶ As was discussed in Chapter One, Freudian psychoanalytic theory holds that the resolution of the Oedipus complex depends on the mother–father–child triangulation. In Freudian thinking, the father ensures the infant’s separation from its mother and its formation of a gendered identity. Psychoanalysis has faced sharp criticism from scholars working on gay and lesbian parenting. Park, for instance, contends that another mother is just as capable as a father of preventing the fusion between infant and biological mother.²³⁷ Gross, who shares Park’s view, convincingly argues that psychoanalysis falsely assumes that child development takes place in isolation from wider society and from a broader network of social relations.²³⁸ Gross maintains that children, regardless of their parents’ gender, come to understand sexual difference because of the gendering of society.

Gross’s distinction between two-parent and multiparent gay and lesbian families provides insights into the rationale behind same-sex couples’ chosen family form:

Selon la [famille biparentale], un enfant aurait surtout besoin d’être élevé au sein d’un seul foyer par deux personnes qui s’aiment et qui l’aiment. Dans cette représentation, le couple ‘conjugal’ et le couple ‘parental’ ne font qu’un. Le choix portera sur l’adoption, l’insémination artificielle de donneur inconnu ou connu, ou la gestation pour autrui. Selon la [famille pluriparentale], l’intérêt de l’enfant nécessiterait la présence d’un père et d’une mère. Le choix portera alors sur la coparentalité ou bien, pour les lesbiennes, sa version allégée: le ‘donneur connu–géniteur identifié’.²³⁹

Gross suggests that the choice between these two forms of parenting is made according to what, in the minds of the couple, is best for the child. Virginie Descoutures, however, counterargues that although the distinction between two-parent and multiparent families is pertinent from an ethnographic standpoint, Gross’s interpretation of the reasons for which couples choose one configuration or the other is reductive and rests on the normative discourse of the best interests of the child:

Réduire à l’intérêt de l’enfant les justifications du choix de deux types de configurations familiales fort

²³⁶ Camille Robcis, *The Law of Kinship: Anthropology, Psychoanalysis, and the Family in France* (London: Cornell University Press, 2013), p. 2.

²³⁷ Park, p. 10.

²³⁸ Gross, *Parent ou homo*, pp. 178–79.

²³⁹ Gross, *Qu’est-ce que l’homoparentalité?*, pp. 91–92.

différentes me semble masquer la distinction principale entre deux modèles: la présence d'un père indispensable pour les unes, quand pour les autres il ne l'est pas.²⁴⁰

Descoutures contends that Gross's categorization of gay and lesbian families might be explained not simply with reference to the number of parents but in terms of the configuration's adherence to or transgression of the gender binary. She further proposes that this choice could instead depend on the legal and practical options available to the couple.²⁴¹ For instance, wealthier couples and those living close to the Belgian or Spanish borders might be inclined to undergo fertility treatment. From a gender studies perspective, Descoutures's analysis is more intriguing because it pertains to the importance of sexual difference: whereas multiparent lesbian families preserve the male–female binary, albeit with the addition of a “second” mother and/or “second” father, two-parent lesbian families go beyond it by doing away with the male role. As Gross herself points out, the lack of opposition to heterosexual adoptive and blended families suggests that the argument that children grow up best when surrounded by a mother and father is not a defence of the status of biological parents but an assumption that children develop optimally in an environment of sexual alterity.²⁴² Conservatives therefore regard gay and lesbian parenting as a step towards the erasure of the male–female binary. While the words “mother” and “father” have, as noted earlier, been erased from the French legal texts regulating adoption and replaced by the gender-neutral term “parent”, this amendment aimed not to efface the gender of individuals but to recognize that children can have two parents of the same gender. This section examines the texts' interventions in the debate on the widely assumed superiority of the mother-and-father-headed family.

In Girard's *Mais qui va garder le chat?*, Cécile and Fanny must first look beyond their own heteronormative reservations before opting into parenting. Cécile explains that she has always wanted children but for a long time regarded her sexuality as preclusive to mothering. Children, she believed, require a mother and father, and she thought it selfish to bring children into a non-normative environment, such as a polymaternal lesbian family. By at first casting Fanny as a traditionalist, Girard encourages more conservative readers into identifying with Fanny before persuading them to reform their opinion alongside her. Cinq-Fraix's narrator, also named Cécile, must resolve her own concerns about having a child. She refuses point blank to be the birth mother and has no desire to

²⁴⁰ Descoutures, p. 97.

²⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 98–99.

²⁴² Gross, *Parent ou homo*, p. 176.

travel to Belgium to receive fertility treatment. Critically, she must, in addition, look beyond the equation of lesbianism with childlessness before opting into parenting. Reflecting on her partner's proposal that they become parents, Cécile asks:

Est-ce qu'on en avait le droit? Si indigent soit-il, l'état actuel de mes connaissances scientifiques et juridiques me permettait d'affirmer sereinement que l'homosexualité n'est plus une pathologie ni un délit. Jusqu'ici tout va bien. Et puis après, naturellement, tout se complique. Comme si cette reconnaissance enfin admise m'empêchait d'aller plus loin. Comme beaucoup de mes congénères, j'ai toujours vécu avec cette idée profondément ancrée que le fait d'être homosexuel interdit d'avoir des enfants. Une idée partagée unanimement par mes non-congénères. Le beau consensus. Moi, ça m'arrangeait plutôt puisque je ne voulais pas d'enfant. Mais enfin, on peut s'interroger, non? Pourquoi ce déni de maternité ou de paternité concernant les homosexuels? En quoi serai[en]-ils inaptes à être parents?²⁴³

This passage represents Cécile's internalization of a countermovement to gay liberation that compels sexual minorities to settle for the rights that they now have and trivializes their continued demands for equality. Her recognition that homosexuality no longer carries the stigma that it once did prevents her from "going further", from aspiring to become a parent. She therefore accepts the equation of homosexuality with childlessness. However, she immediately challenges the heterosexual monopoly on parenting and disassociates lesbianism from unfit parenting. Having children, Cécile suggests, is not a right but a capacity: 'Il ne s'agit pas de revendiquer le droit d'avoir des enfants et d'obtenir la permission de les faire. Nonobstant une stérilité, une femme peut toujours procréer' (FP 107). Cécile's rapid change of attitude towards gay and lesbian parenting empowers lesbian readers and works to inscribe the cultural and social phenomenon that she represents—namely, the growing demands of homosexuals to start a family.

Although Cécile thus quickly reconciles lesbianism and mothering, confronting the opinions of her family proves more challenging. Her brother, Franck, reacts angrily to her and Anna's plan to start a family:

"Calme-toi, Franck. On est homosexuelles, ça ne veut pas forcément dire qu'on est stériles."

"Arrête tes conneries, Cécile. Qu'est-ce que vous allez faire?"

"Comment ça, 'qu'est-ce que vous allez faire'?"

"Pour l'enfant! Il va s'en prendre plein la tête ce môme..."

"Parce que tu crois qu'on n'y a pas réfléchi."

"T'aurais pu nous en parler, quand-même."

²⁴³ Laurence Cinq-Fraix, *Family Pride* (Paris: Philippe Rey, 2006), pp. 106–07; subsequent references to this book appear within the text in the form (FP pp).

“Eh bien, non. Tu m’en as parlé, toi, quand tu as décidé de faire un enfant avec Corinne?”

“Arrête, ce n’est pas du tout pareil.” (FP 189–90)

Cécile resists three common heteronormative and homophobic arguments used to oppose or preclude gay and lesbian parenting: first, that homosexuality is synonymous with infertility; second, that children raised by homosexuals are more likely than those growing up in heterosexual families to be victims of bullying; finally, this passage reveals a heteronormative double standard, which Éric Garnier refers to as the heterosexual right to a child.²⁴⁴ Detractors of gay and lesbian parenting frequently claim that no one has the right to a child. Garnier argues that, in fact, these detractors defend heterosexual couples’ right to have a family, since this is “natural”, but deny this right to homosexual couples. Whereas, for Franck, Cécile and Anna require permission to have children, for him and Corinne that permission is taken for granted.

Anna dismisses her partner’s unwillingness to seek fertility treatment in Belgium by proposing a coparenting arrangement:

“Mais qui te parle d’insémination artificielle? Tu sais, sous mes airs libérés, je reste quand-même assez ‘tradi’. Je ne peux pas envisager un enfant sans père, c’est comme ça. Je n’arrive pas à m’affranchir des schémas, des histoires de référents, tout ça. Je voudrais un papa. Un papa présent. Mais un enfant surtout, né de notre désir à nous. Tu comprends?” (FP 105–06)

Unlike the mothers in the works of Girard, Blanc, and Bénard, Anna cannot see beyond the mother–father–child triangulation. She is, however, quick to underscore her and Cécile’s desire to have and nurture a child. Anna, it should be noted, is not blind to the normativity of the heterosexual nuclear family. Her insistence on the need for a *papa présent* is therefore not intended to be prescriptive and is portrayed as a personal choice that suits her and her partner and that she concedes is ‘tradi’. Although Anna is, then, aware of her inner-conservatism, her and Fanny’s desire for a *papa présent* ultimately points to a slightly orthodox stance on sexual difference because this arrangement preserves the mother–father–child triangulation.

This argument equally pertains to the couple in *Maman, Mamour*. Célier makes plain that, despite his absence, the influence that Christian has had on their daughter’s psyche has helped Géraldine immensely. Like Anna, however, she does not claim that a coparenting arrangement is the right way for homosexuals to become parents:

[C]’est sans difficulté que je peux imaginer qu’un enfant ait plus qu’un seul père ou qu’il ait deux mères

²⁴⁴ Garnier, p. 36.

et pas de père, ou deux pères et pas de mère. Si je ne me sens ni désireuse ni autorisée à donner mon avis sur toutes ces situations et autres choix, je suis en revanche convaincue qu'il est incontestablement important que les parents soient clairs sur leur identité et sereins quant à leur choix de vie. (MM 68)

Like *Family Pride*, *Maman, Mamour* underlines the need for the parents to be comfortable with their choice of family form. Rather than favour one configuration over another, Brigitte underscores the diversity among gay and lesbian families, thus making a queer-sounding claim that gay and lesbian families are not reducible to one homogeneous group. The text's first chapter discusses the multiple configurations of such families, suggesting the writer's will to inscribe and give visibility to an emerging cultural and social phenomenon, as well as her own personal account. Following a short address to Géraldine, *Maman, Mamour* opens with the bold and empowering claim that '[q]ue l'on soit d'accord ou que l'on s'y oppose avec force, l'homoparentalité existe, on est bien obligé de l'admettre. Progressivement devenue sujet de nombreuses discussions, cette réalité n'est plus à discuter' (MM 12–13). Célier's claim functions to "out" gay and lesbian families in a post-PaCS but pre-equal marriage era when they benefitted from no institutional recognition.

In *Family Pride*, Cécile, Anna, Éric, and Benoît decide that their child's time will be spent equally between the two couples. In this respect, the novel reflects Gross's point that coparenting arrangements closely resemble those of a post-divorce family: "En gros," says Anna, "on fonctionne comme un couple de divorcés" (FP 163).²⁴⁵ Gross makes a further point that in multiparent families, like in post-divorce families, family life extends beyond a single household: 'Dans la pluriparentalité, la vie familiale se constitue au sein d'un réseau familial plutôt que d'une cellule. Vacances, week-ends, fêtes et anniversaires sont autant d'occasions de composer le mode de fonctionnement du réseau'.²⁴⁶ The transgressive potential of multiparent families lies not in terms of the gender binary—for, as has been noted, the mother–father–child triangulation remains intact in multiparent configurations—but in its enlarging of the kinship network. In *Family Pride*, the parents collectively buy a disused printing shop and convert it into two neighbouring apartments, so that each couple can live virtually separate lives while always being near to the child. This arrangement suggests the parents' belief that a fixed location provides the child with greater stability. Further, it exemplifies the creativity, ingenuity, and thought that often go into forming gay and lesbian families, which seems

²⁴⁵ Gross, *Qu'est-ce que l'homoparentalité?*, p. 103.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

to be a statement about how committed gay and lesbian parents are to ensuring the best interests of their children, as well as how badly they want them. It also testifies to the novel ways in which parenting is being done in the contemporary West and, interestingly, is reminiscent of family groupings in parts of the world where members of the extended family play a greater role in childrearing. The set-up in *Family Pride*, then, exposes the normative status of the heterosexual nuclear family in the West and the fact that this is out of sync with much of the world.

In *Maman, Mamour*, Brigitte tells us that Géraldine has developed positive relationships with her paternal extended family, underlining the proliferation of the kinship network in coparental configurations. While Géraldine suggests that parents only come in twos—for she deploys the phrase “mes parents” to refer collectively to Brigitte and Dominique or to Dominique and Christian but never to Brigitte, Dominique, and Christian—Brigitte affirms that ‘dans la tête de Géraldine, Papa, Maman et Mamour ont cohabité sans grande difficulté’ (MM 86). Géraldine defines Brigitte as her “second” mother, since she has always clearly identified as her mother ‘celle qui l’a portée dans son ventre et lui a donné le sein’ (MM 86). Although this seems to privilege a biologically essentialist definition of mothering, neither Géraldine nor her parents have ever reduced Brigitte to the status of an aunt, godmother, or friend. While Brigitte is a “second” mother, then, she is in no way of secondary importance, as she says: ‘Ma compagne me considère depuis toujours et sans aucune hésitation comme mère de sa fille, à part entière’ (MM 89). While Brigitte’s self-identification as Géraldine’s mother is unproblematic, some of her family and friends demonstrate the attachment to the biologically essentialist definition of mothering that *Maman, Mamour*, like all the texts treated in this chapter, endeavours to challenge:

Pensant à l’enfant que je souhaitais avoir mais que je n’ai donc jamais “porté”, une amie m’a dit un jour qu’elle imaginait quel renoncement avait dû être le mien. Certes, ma situation n’a pas toujours été confortable. Le statut social de co-parent étant inexistant, j’ai dû progressivement inventer et légitimer ma place aux yeux de beaucoup, mais je sens si profondément Géraldine être “ma fille”, et pas seulement “comme ma fille”, que le sentiment d’avoir renoncé à avoir un enfant m’est totalement étranger. (MM 91)

Brigitte’s friend assumes that being the comother requires a sort of sacrifice. The implication, here, is that being the comother is second best to being the biological mother. Brigitte, however, neatly deproblematizes this by equalizing the status of biological mothering and its performative, caregiving function. In this way, she dismisses

monomaterialist ideas about “real” mothering and, as she puts it, gradually invents and legitimizes her identity as Geraldine’s “real” mother. Moreover, Brigitte uncouples maternal feeling from biology, thereby challenging the assumption that this is natural and demonstrates that it can, rather, stem from caring for a child.

To return to Cinq-Fraix’s novel, Cécile and Anna are adamant in their belief that their child needs a father, yet *Family Pride* presents the potential disadvantages of coparenting arrangements. Cécile expresses her concern about her lack of legal protection in the event that relations between the couples break down. Anna voices the same anxiety:

“Si je meurs par exemple,” poursuit Anna, “Eh bien je tiens à ce que Cécile puisse continuer d’assumer le rôle qu’elle va avoir auprès de cet enfant. J’irai même plus loin: je voudrais qu’elle soit la mère de cet enfant. Ce n’est pas moi qui décide, c’est sûr. Mais j’aimerais que ce soit écrit quelque part.” (FP 163)

The couple’s anxiety can be read as a critique of the French system of filiation, which offered no legal protection to coparents in the immediate post-PaCS context in which this novel is set. Had republican candidate François Fillon gone on to win the 2017 presidential election, gay and lesbian parents could once more have found themselves in the same position as Cinq-Fraix’s couples, since Fillon had promised to revoke same-sex couples’ right to full adoption granted by the 2013 marriage for all law. In response, feminist historian Élisabeth Badinter spoke out in defence of same-sex parents’ right to adopt, arguing that they ‘ne feront ni moins bien ni mieux que [les hétéroparents]’.²⁴⁷ The continuing presence of gay and lesbian parenting on the political scene illustrates how hotly debated this phenomenon is in France.

While relations between Cinq-Fraix’s couples never become hostile, the friendship that forms during the planning stages of their *projet d’enfant* regresses to cordiality. Sharing a child, as Cécile wryly notes, is not easy. Indeed, dividing the child’s time equally between the two couples becomes problematic when Anna refuses to let Éric and Benoît take Angèle on a ten-day holiday, as she cannot bear to be separated from her newly born daughter. This seems to be a conservative statement about biology and the psychological bond between biological mother and child. In Célier’s *Maman, Mamour*, Brigitte and Dominique thought it essential that the father of their child was a friend, so that their baby, especially if it turned out to be a boy, could later envisage his or her conception as an affective act. As in *Family Pride*, this suggests a surprisingly traditional

²⁴⁷ <<http://www.marianne.net/video-elisabeth-badinter-defend-les-parents-homos-face-sainte-famille-naturelle-100248208.html>> [accessed 4 February 2017].

outlook on gender and the family. By creating a child with a friend, the couple hoped, presumably, to avoid a souring of interparental relations like that depicted in *Family Pride*. Ultimately, however, Brigitte and Dominique’s decision to opt for a coparenting arrangement was motivated by their desire to create a child as “naturally” as possible: ‘[N]ous souhaitons que ce soit le plus naturellement du monde que les petites graines se rencontrent’ (MM 19). Although this sounds like a claim to equal rights with heterosexual couples, we might ask why, for a family based on a performative rather than biologicistic definition of parenting, it matters that their child is created as “naturally” as possible. Although *Family Pride* and *Maman, Mamour* are, then, progressive in many ways, they are compromised by the odd pinch of conservatism that, it might be argued, chimes with the defence of sexual difference that is at the core of the families’ configuration.

Girard’s, Blanc’s, and Bénard’s texts undermine the assumption that children thrive only when surrounded by a man and woman. In *Prince Charmante*, Zélie and Alice give no thought to incorporating a father into their family. Their rejection of the presumed necessity of a father likely stems from the reluctance of Zélie’s ex-husband, the father of her two daughters, to undertake responsibility for childcare or any domestic tasks. Indeed, this father’s laziness, which the following passage exemplifies, implies that, far from being a prerequisite of his children’s healthy development, he is in fact partially expendable:

Mon Homme fait l’homme avec les autres hommes, il va chercher du vin, mais ne fait les courses qu’en râlant; bien qu’il soit un excellent cuisinier, ne prépare pas à manger; ne met pas la table; ne fait pas le ménage; ne débarrasse pas; ne range jamais la cuisine, valable pour tous les repas sans exception.²⁴⁸

This passage testifies to the gendered division of domestic responsibilities that is the target of criticism in some of the texts studied in Chapter Two. More significantly, the fact that the husband remains unnamed—he is referred to throughout the text as “l’Homme” or “mon Amour”—works to call attention to Zélie’s relationship with Alice. While Zélie’s marriage is, as the preceding passage suggests, conflictual and ends in divorce, the namelessness of the husband is neither an attempt to erase the relationship from memory nor a denial of the love that Zélie once felt for him. Rather, his anonymity foregrounds the novel’s central theme: desire and love between women. Similarly, Zélie’s daughters are referred to as “Fille Aînée” and “Grande” or “Cadette Chérie”. This is not

²⁴⁸ Claire Bénard, *Prince Charmante: Que fait-on quand on tombe amoureuse d’une femme?* (Paris: La Boîte à Pandore, [2013]), p. 100; subsequent references to this book appear within the text in the form (PC pp).

to indicate a conflict between the mother and her daughters; on the contrary, the ease with which Zélie eventually comes out to her children and the incorporation of Alice into the family—events that the novel describes only in passing—suggest a harmonious relationship between mother and children. The suddenness of Zélie and Alice’s decision to undergo fertility treatment, which takes place in a single, final chapter, normalizes lesbian couples’ desire for a family and suggests that lesbian family planning need not be more complicated or protracted than that of would-be heterosexual parents.

Like Bénard’s text, *Elles eurent beaucoup d’enfants* rejects outright the need for a *papa présent*. For Myriam and Astrid, a father would have been an intrusion into their life together, and Myriam defends their decision to bring two fatherless children into the world: ‘On a pensé que certes, un papa c’est très bien, mais que deux mamans, ça n’a pas que des inconvénients’ (HFH 81). Myriam insists that having two mothers does not amount to suppressing the existence of sexual difference:

Mettons bien les choses au point: pas de papa ne veut pas dire pas d’homme; il n’a jamais été question de faire croire à nos filles qu’elles ont été conçues sans intervention masculine (bien qu’Assia, par un bel hasard, soit née le jour de l’Immaculée Conception...), ni que les hommes n’existent pas. (HFH 81)

Like Gross, who points out the unfeasibility of a same-sex couple pretending to have conceived naturally, Myriam rebukes the stereotype that gay and lesbian parents deny the existence of sexual difference and lie, or need to lie, to their children about their origins.²⁴⁹ Moreover, Myriam’s allusion to the Immaculate Conception, which in Catholic dogma refers to the conception of the Virgin Mary, is a humorous reminder of the ideological centrality throughout Christendom of a mother who, like Myriam and Astrid, gave birth to a child conceived by unnatural means. *Elles eurent beaucoup d’enfants* stands out among the texts treated in this chapter for its engagement with psychoanalytic theories of child development and sexuality. Like many scholars of gay and lesbian parenting, Myriam argues that another mother is just as capable as a father of preventing mother–child fusion. Moreover, she condemns the homophobia of modern psychoanalysts who oppose gay and lesbian parenting on the grounds that homosexuality is the result of a traumatic childhood and that children of gay and lesbian parents cannot understand their origins.

Although the couple reject the indispensability of a father, their interactions with people attest to the entrenchment of the heterosexual family and sexual union. While

²⁴⁹ Gross, *Parent ou homo*, p. 180.

awaiting the birth of Assia, for example, Myriam ironically remarks that ‘c’est moi qui fai[s] l’homme puisque c’est Astrid qui est enceinte’ (HFH 64). The text thus reveals two founding principles of Western kinship: first, the heterosexual couple is the standard frame of reference for conceiving of affective relationships. Because pregnancy is an exclusively female experience, Astrid, as the baby’s carrier, is assumed to be “the woman” in her relationship. Within the dominant Western framework of affectivity, Myriam must, therefore, occupy the male position. The implication is that Astrid, as “the woman”, is also the baby’s mother and Myriam, as “the man”, its father. As such, the second founding principle of Western kinship postulates that children have only two parents and only one of each gender. Myriam voices her frustration at the deep-seatedness of this heteronormative and monomaterialist (and monopaternalist) model of kinship—‘Mais pourquoi faudrait-il à tout prix un homme dans cette affaire?’ (HFH 65)—and resists it by deploying humour and irony: ‘[S]i seulement j’avais un peu moins l’air d’une femme. Je ferais presque tapette comme mec, tiens’ (HFH 64). Myriam and Astrid are, then, at ease with their sexuality and parental role; the problem for them is the ignorance of others surrounding their relationship and family. Instead of seeking to legitimize lesbian relationships through their assimilation to the heteronormative model, the text does so by challenging that model’s authority and, as such, equalizes the traditional power imbalance across the hetero–homo binary. Like Blanc’s text, those by Girard and Bénard criticize the heteronormative and monomaterialist discourses prevalent in Western societies. *Prince Charmante* exposes the “everyday heterosexism” with which homosexuals have to contend. When, for example, Zélie visits a pharmacy to purchase medicine for Alice, the pharmacist assumes that Zélie’s *amie*—‘[l]e mot neutre par excellence’ due to its unvoiced feminine inflection (PC 319)—is a man. In *Mais qui va garder le chat?*, Cécile’s boss assumes that Cécile will be a single mother when he learns that she is expecting and has no male partner. The boss’s heteronormative assumption is, as Cécile reflects, also a monomaterialist one: ‘Le pire est que Jean-René n’a même pas imaginé qu’on pouvait être deux. Deux femmes’.²⁵⁰ As for Myriam and Astrid, a problem for Cécile is the ignorance surrounding gay and lesbian parenting in wider society.

Of the texts analysed in this chapter, Girard’s *Mais qui va garder le chat?* deliberates most extensively over the need for a father. The couple must negotiate the reservations of their family and friends about their plan to raise a fatherless child. These characters

²⁵⁰ Éliane Girard, *Mais qui va garder le chat?* (Paris: JC Lattès, 2005), p. 202; subsequent references to this book appear within the text in the form (MQV pp).

represent a society wherein kinship is founded on two heteronormative and monomaterialist assumptions: first, as we have already seen, that children have only two parents and only one of each gender; and second, that kinship denotes a system of biogenetic relationships rather than a network founded on mutual caregiving. Cécile's former partner, Magali, contends that the child will suffer without the presence of a father. Fanny's father brands his daughter a false father, and Cécile's mother, unable to envisage a fatherless family, presumes that Fanny, as the non-biological mother, will act as the child's father and that Cécile, as the birth mother, is the real mother. Like Myriam in *Elles eurent beaucoup d'enfants*, Cécile resists the assimilation of her family to the heteronormative and monomaterialist framework epitomized by Magali and the couple's parents: "Non Fanny n'est pas un papa, ça se voit non?" (MQV 148). In *Maman, Mamour*, Brigitte is equally resistant to the monomaterialist assumption:

Il y a aussi tous ceux qui nous ont connues après la naissance et qui (se) demandent laquelle est la vraie mère. Cette curiosité, simplement naturelle pour certains, suggère pour d'autres l'idée qu'ils en imaginent une fausse, ou plus exactement que, pour eux, comme pour beaucoup, seule la filiation biologique est à considérer comme incontestable. (MM 93)

Brigitte argues that claims about real mothering presuppose the existence of false mothers, where "real" is synonymous with the biological facets of mothering. The resultant equation of functional mothering with falsity excludes non-biological mothers from kinship. While these texts thus recognize the heteronormative and monomaterialist discourses that lesbian mothers face, they ultimately challenge these forces by reordering filiation and kinship around caregiving. Brigitte openly calls for the formal recognition of parent-child relationships built on affectivity, lucidly arguing that this would be merely an extension of existing laws governing adoption:

Hier, avec l'adoption, un lien juridique a remplacé un lien biologique. Ne pourrait-on une nouvelle fois modifier la loi et reconnaître un autre lien, de type contractuel par exemple, qui avaliserait un lien parental déjà vécu d'un point de vue affectif et de plus en plus reconnu d'un point de vue social? (MM 193)

Girard's Cécile and Fanny conclude that having two committed parents, regardless of their gender or their biological status in relation to the child, is what counts in terms of the child's development: "Fanny et moi ne sommes pas encore tout à fait d'accord sur la nécessité d'un père présent [...]. D'un côté ça paraît évident, dans un autre sens on se demande si deux parents ce n'est pas suffisant" (MQV 110). It is telling that Cécile's claim about the obvious need for a paternal figure remains unsubstantiated, for this

exposes the heteronormativity engrained in this remark. Like Céliér's text, the novel redefines parenting as a performative function rather than a biogenetic process. Gilles, Cécile and Fanny's sperm donor, refers to himself as "un père qui n'en est pas un" (MQV 113) and states: "[J]e veux bien endosser le rôle de père biologique mais je ne veux pas être papa" (MQV 115). In the same way, Cécile's response to Gilles's offer to donate his sperm carefully distinguishes between biological fathering and the novel's redefinition of fathering as a social role: "Tu es parfait, Gilles. Justement. Mais tu sais il faut que tu réfléchisses. Si on fait un enfant ensemble, il sera de toi mais pas à toi. Tu comprends?" (MQV 114). Cécile's strict definition of Gilles's role exhibits her and Fanny's reluctance to admit a third party into their family. As in *Prince Charmante* and *Elles eurent beaucoup d'enfants*, a caregiving father is regarded by the couple as intrusive and superfluous. More generally, these passages suggest that the right to call oneself a parent does not come from biology but from one's commitment to the caregiving role.

Mais qui va garder le chat? further queers the established definitions of "mother" and "father" by positing that a parent's identification as one or the other is not predetermined by his or her biological sex. Sabine Choiseul, a psychologist specializing in gay and lesbian parenting, questions why the paternal role is necessarily a male one—"Pourquoi le rôle du père devrait-il être tenu par un homme?" (MQV 158–59)—and does not rule out the possibility that Fanny identifies as the child's father. While Sabine's question is transgressive and is not, unlike the view of Cécile's mother, a naïve defence of the heterosexual family, it arguably retains a hint of the male–female binary that is intrinsic to heteronormative kinship. Although Sabine seeks to uncouple fathering from masculinity, a more radical argument would be to collapse the gender binary by dispensing altogether with the terms "mother" and "father" and referring to all primary caregivers simply as "parents". The fact that she does not means that the novel stops short of a total degendering of parenting and wholesale overthrow of sexual difference. Just as the novel challenges the definition of fathering as a male role, it also disrupts the nexus between gestation and mothering, for although Fanny wishes to be a mother, she has no desire to carry a child. Fanny's impatience with those, including her own mother, who regard gestation as the only path to mothering—"Combien de fois va-t-il falloir que je me justifie de ne pas vouloir être enceinte tout en ayant un désir d'enfant?" (MQV 91)—is a critique of the rigidity of normative, biologically defined kinship. While the novel thus valorizes the status of the lesbian comother, it seeks above all to emphasize the multitude of women's relationships to maternity. In contrast with Fanny, Cécile covets pregnancy:

“[J]e crois que j’ai envie de le porter cet enfant. J’aurais peur que la grossesse me manque. J’ai envie d’être enceinte, de l’avoir en moi, de le sentir grandir” (MQV 112–13). *Mais qui va garder le chat?* does not, then, trivialize the physiological elements of mothering but works to equalize the legitimacy of biological and functionalist modes of kinship in a pre-equal marriage era when filiation was defined almost entirely in biological terms.

Whereas Girard’s and Bénard’s novels neatly distinguish between biological and functionalist mothering, Blanc’s polymaternal lesbian family comprises two women who have both given birth to a child and who both assume the role of comother. In this respect, Blanc’s text goes beyond the transgressive potential of those by Girard and Bénard by allowing both for the possibility of a polymaternal family and for a family unit in which there is more than one biological mother. Despite this, Myriam frequently affirms that her family has no basis in biology: ‘Biologie, pas biologie, mes deux filles ont la même immense place dans mon cœur depuis qu’elles sont nées, et même avant’ (HFH 42); ‘L’amour enfonce la biologie, c’est clair’ (HFH 139). When, for example, Myriam discusses her and Astrid’s decision to use different sperm donors for each daughter, she asks rhetorically: ‘Pourquoi créer un lien biologique entre nos enfants, alors que de toute évidence notre famille n’est en rien fondée sur la biologie?’ (HFH 96). Unlike Cécile and Fanny in *Mais qui va garder le chat?*, Myriam and Astrid do not find it necessary to provide their children with a clear filiation. By downplaying the biological in favour of the functional, Blanc’s text revolutionizes the basis of kinship ties. As it is for the mothers in Girard’s and Bénard’s texts, mothering, for Myriam and Astrid, is a set of performative acts—that is, a caregiving role—and only secondarily a biogenetic function. The conception of kinship as performative rather than biological challenges the normative definition of parenting. In this respect, the families portrayed in the texts are undoubtedly different from the heterosexual nuclear family, yet whether this difference informs the acts of caregiving performed by gay and lesbian parents is disputable and a source of disagreement among activists, gay and lesbian parents, and scholars. The following section examines how the texts engage with the sameness–difference debate as this is playing out in political and theoretical discussions of gay and lesbian parenting.

Lesbian Families and the Sameness–Difference Debate

Homosexuals’ stance on kinship has long been a thorn in the side of gay and lesbian activists and scholars. In the 1970s, the *Front Homosexuel d’Action Révolutionnaire*,

which regarded the family as instrumental in homosexuals' oppression, denounced equal marriage and parenting as complicit with heterosexual norms. By the 1990s, however, equal marriage legislation and the right to start a family were thought to be the pinnacles of hetero-homo equality, both in France and across the West. The extent to which these families transform and differ from normative modes of kinship, and the reconcilability of difference with the demand for equality, is a point of debate among activists, gay and lesbian parents, and scholars. As was discussed in Chapter One, early social scientific studies of gay and lesbian families generally uncovered no notable differences between mixed- and same-sex-parented children; the psychological, sexual, and social development of gay- and lesbian-parented children was found to compare with that of children living in heterosexual families. Recent contributors to feminism and queer theory, however, oppose the "no differences" model on account of its unquestioning acceptance of heterosexual parenting as the standard by which gay and lesbian parents ought to be judged. In this section, I debate the extent to which the selected texts contradict or support current theoretical positions on gay and lesbian parenting and endeavour to explain any disparities between these positions and the practices of lesbian families as represented in the texts.

Despite homosexuals' widespread demands for parental rights, some of the texts' characters subscribe to the pessimistic view of gay and lesbian kinship advocated by the FHAR, including Bénard's Alice. In *Mais qui va garder le chat?*, Magali internalizes the equation of homosexuality with childlessness and the nexus between heterosexuality and parenting: "[J]'ai l'impression que c'est singer les hétéros d'essayer de m'insérer dans la société en construisant une famille. Perdre une partie de mon identité" (MQV 133). Magali's claim condescendingly dismisses homosexuals' desire to become parents as an attempt to conform to heterosexual norms. Fanny's lesbian activist friend, Claire, argues that '[p]rocréer c'est accepter l'hétéro-centrisme' (MQV 136). These perspectives, fictional and theoretical, assume that parenting is a heterosexual prerogative and that parenting entails parenting normatively. Modern theorists counter the equation of parenting with heteronormativity by arguing that raising children does not necessarily mean raising them in normative ways.²⁵¹ Whereas Claire and Magali envisage parenting as de facto heteronormative, Blanc's autobiographical self echoes the stance on gay and lesbian parenting advocated in modern theoretical tracts: 'J'ai plutôt l'impression que

²⁵¹ See, for example, Park, p. 19.

l'homoparentalité invente quelque chose de nouveau' (HFH 80). In *Mais qui va garder le chat?*, Cécile's friend, So, takes the same view: "Vous [Cécile et Fanny] avez aussi tout à inventer. Vous pouvez redistribuer les rôles. C'est une certaine liberté" (MQV 126). Cécile's response, however, betrays her and Fanny's disquiet about the unconventionality of their future family: "Et une grande responsabilité. On n'a pas des siècles d'expérience derrière nous pour nous montrer la voie" (MQV 126). The lack of models of gay and lesbian family supports Butler's vision of kinship as performative; the fact that there is no prototype of this family configuration that Cécile and Fanny can imitate exposes the constructed nature of all family types. Although these texts thus acknowledge the relative novelty of planned lesbian families, the mothers aspire and lay claim to ordinariness. In *Elles eurent beaucoup d'enfants*, Myriam writes: 'On se sent tellement des parents comme les autres qu'on en oublie parfois qu'on est différentes' (HFH 61); and her daughter, Augustine, states: "Je trouve ça tellement normal d'avoir deux mamans que je n'en parle jamais" (HFH 20). Furthermore, Myriam normalizes her and Astrid's desire to become parents:

Un désir d'enfant banal donc. Un vrai désir de serrer un bébé dans ses bras, de lui faire des bisous dans le cou, de l'appeler mon amour ma chérie, mon câlin ma poupette mon canard, de le faire rire aux éclats, de l'entendre dire non et gâteau et maman et papa (euh, ça non, voir plus loin), de lui apprendre à faire du tricycle et à coller des gommettes. Comme tout le monde, eh oui!, on a choisi sur un banc public les prénoms de nos premiers bébés. Comme tout le monde. Sauf que... On a été obligées de se poser deux questions qui n'effleurent pas la plupart des gens: 1) est-ce qu'on a le droit? 2) comment? (HFH 80)

By deploying the images and language of stereotypical parental behaviour and repeatedly stating the common experiences of heterosexual and lesbian parents, Myriam endeavours to present her family as just like any other. In *Maman, Mamour*, Brigitte too downplays the originality of same-sex couples' wish to start a family: 'Notre projet initial n'était assurément pas d'une grande originalité: nous souhaitions seulement fonder une famille' (MM 41). Yet the resurfacing of the structural specificity of the family in both texts elucidates the tenacity of difference. Myriam, as the above passage indicates, cannot escape the terms of the sameness–difference debate. Similarly, Brigitte notes that her and Dominique's lesbianism haunts Géraldine at school: 'Ne pas avoir "une famille comme les autres" n'a cependant pas toujours été simple pour Géraldine, tant il est vrai qu'un enfant désire justement être comme les autres' (MM 105).

Moreover, Myriam repeatedly affirms that her and Astrid's emotional attachment to their children is no different from that of heterosexual parents:

Malgré cette petite mais néanmoins voyante différence, nos préoccupations sont les mêmes que celles des autres parents [...]: voir nos enfants rire, jouer, apprivoiser leur corps, leur cerveau, apprendre, vivre avec les autres, les respecter et se respecter puis rire et jouer encore. Comme presque tout le monde. En tout cas dans ce domaine-là, si spécificité il y a, elle est étrangère à notre statut sexuel. (HFH 61)

Like Célier and Blanc, Girard concedes the structural distinctiveness of gay and lesbian families—“[J]e crois qu’il faut casser les cloisons, abattre les barrières, sortir des modèles,” says Fanny, “Nous ne sommes pas dans une situation classique” (MQV 148)—but underscores a desire to start a family that is equally familiar to hetero- and homosexual couples: ‘Jusque-là j’avais passé plus de temps à justifier l’existence de cet enfant, de sa conception, plutôt que de valoriser le désir qui nous animait’ (MQV 159). Ultimately, these texts contend that the structure of families is less important than the parents’ desire to have and nurture a child. Indeed, Cécile realizes that the emphasis that she has put on the configuration of her family, rather than on her desire for it, is misguided. Myriam’s use of the adjective “petit” diminishes the importance of family structure relative to the emotional commitment to one’s child—a strategy that can be found elsewhere in the text: ‘[Notre famille] ressemble à toutes les familles, à ce détail près qu’elle compte deux mères et pas de père’ (HFH 7). In the above quotation, Myriam also uncouples the specificities of her family from her and her partner’s lesbianism. In doing so, she goes beyond the limits of the traditional sameness–difference debate; instead of thinking about the differences between heterosexual and lesbian families, which rests on the normative hetero–homo binary, Myriam endorses a somewhat queer view by suggesting that alterity might be reconceived of in terms other than parental sexuality. This allows for a multitude of configurations of kinship that are not based on categories of gender and sexuality.

Like Myriam, Brigitte underscores the specificity of all family units, rather than categorizing families according to the sexual identity of the parents. Célier understands gay and lesbian parenting as a step towards the gradual deconstruction of the nuclear family—in other words, as part of the history of gender and sexual norms outlined in the Introduction. Echoing Gross and other advocates of the 2013 marriage for all campaign, Brigitte points out that cohabitation, divorce, contraception, and abortion threatened the hegemony of the nuclear family long before gay and lesbian parenting became a visible cultural and social phenomenon.²⁵² Of the texts examined in this chapter, *Maman*,

²⁵² Gross, *Parent ou homo*, pp. 12–13.

Mamour endeavours the most to look beyond the sameness–difference debate:

Lorsque la sexualité de ces familles ne questionnera pas plus que celle des autres, un grand pas aura été franchi vers ce que réclament les gays et les lesbiennes, le droit à la différence d’abord, le droit à l’indifférence ensuite. Restons optimistes et souhaitons qu’on ne parle bientôt plus que de parentalité, sans obligation de préciser s’il s’agit d’homoparentalité ou d’hétéroparentalité. (MM 135)

Brigitte wants her and Dominique’s sexuality to be ‘un paramètre parmi d’autres’, rather than the defining feature of her family (MM 44). As such, she presents sexuality as part of a spectrum of differences and, in doing so, moves beyond the reductive hetero–homo binary. For Brigitte, equality will only have been achieved when the sexuality of one’s parents, and of oneself, is no longer a talking point. She claims that, as it stands, gay and lesbian families differ from heterosexual families only in their lack of legal recognition:

Au fil des pages, le lecteur remarquera que la vie d’une famille homoparentale est presque identique à celle d’une famille traditionnelle, en ce qui concerne leur vie quotidienne tout au moins, car tel n’est pas le cas sur le plan juridique, si l’on considère notamment la protection dont bénéficient les enfants de ces familles. (MM 14)

Again, Brigitte emphasizes the common ground between heterosexual and gay and lesbian families. Her allusion to the legal disparities between heterosexual and gay and lesbian families suggests that the latter’s alterity derives from their othering within contemporary heteronormative and monomaterialist culture and the legal system. Indeed, Brigitte’s words bring to mind the injustices of the legal cases discussed earlier. *Family Pride* posits the same view. When, for example, Anna and Cécile attend a haptonomy class, the instructor is shocked when Anna informs her that Cécile will attend the birth. As Cécile remarks wryly: ‘Nul doute, la situation était inédite pour elle autant que pour nous les mystères de l’haptonomie’ (FP 202). Anna’s mother, who, incidentally, is highly open-minded, nonetheless says to Cécile: ‘C’est compliqué, votre histoire’ (FP 194). Like *Maman, Mamour, Family Pride* affirms that the daily lives of gay and lesbian parents and same-sex-parented children are no different from those of their heterosexual counterparts:

Mieux vaut le savoir: le quotidien d’un enfant de parents homosexuels ne diffère en rien de celui d’un enfant de parents hétérosexuels. [...] Mieux vaut le savoir (bis): le quotidien de parents homosexuels ne diffère en rien de celui de leurs homologues hétérosexuels. (FP 245)

Like Blanc’s text, the novel works to trivialize gay and lesbian parenting by deploying the images and language of stereotypical parental behaviour. In one scene, for instance, Cécile is explaining the different seasons to Angèle and telling her about their plans to take her on holiday. By portraying the “everyday” of the parent–child relationship, scenes

like these normalize gay and lesbian parenting, but they also serve to underline the pleasure that Cécile takes from her relationship with her child: ‘J’avais naturellement beaucoup de choses à lui dire et adorais nos conversations’ (FP 234). Cinq-Fraix also exploits the innocence and naivety of children to further trivialize multiparent configurations. In the final chapter, Angèle, now aged five, explains to her cousin Joseph that she has four parents:

“Toi, tu as deux parents. Moi, j’ai quatre parents. Ma maman, c’est pas Cil, c’est Anna ma maman. Mais moi, je suis aussi la fille de Cil. Tu comprends? Toi, t’es pas mon cousin, mais t’es aussi mon cousin, tu comprends?” (FP 259)

Although Angèle, as a young child, lacks both the intellectual power and the vocabulary to explain the nuances of kinship, she challenges the meaning of mothering by identifying Anna as her mother while identifying herself as Cécile’s daughter. Similarly, Joseph both is and is not her cousin. Angèle thus understands that kinship can be a biological tie or a relationship founded on caregiving, and Joseph’s albeit delayed reaction—“Comme ça, oui. Alors, d’accord” (FP 259)—emphasizes how natural this mode of kinship seems. Contrary to claims made by the *Manif pour tous* about the best interests of the child, these children are neither adversely affected nor disturbed by their involvement with a homosexual couple. Cinq-Fraix further utilizes the child’s perspective to critique the exclusion of homosexual couples from marriage. Until Cécile explains otherwise, Angèle mistakenly believes that same-sex couples are able to wed:

“Joseph a raison, mon cœur. Des filles ne peuvent pas se marier ensemble. Parce qu’elles n’ont pas le droit. Des garçons non plus, d’ailleurs, ne peuvent pas se marier ensemble. C’est comme ça, c’est la loi. Mais tu vois, Joseph, des filles peuvent être amoureuses d’autres filles. Et des garçons amoureux de garçons. Regarde Anna et moi, par exemple, on est des amoureuses.” (FP 259)

Angèle’s assumption that same-sex couples can wed illustrates the injustice of a marriage law with a heterosexual bias and shows, again, how natural this mode of kinship is in the eyes of a child. Cécile is quick to affirm that homosexuals’ exclusion from marriage does not preclude homosexual love; the legitimacy of desire is not dependent on institutional recognition.

Although the mothers in these texts largely reject the assimilation of the structures of their families to heteronormative standards, while maintaining that their emotional attachment to their children is no different from that of a heterosexual couple, they campaign for institutional and legal parity between heterosexual and gay and lesbian families, as the above passage illustrates. In this light, the normalization of lesbian

mothering can be interpreted as a strategy for the acquisition of legal rights for lesbian comothers in relation to their children, as Myriam says:

Reste une taraudante question: aspirons-nous vraiment à la normalité? Je n'en suis pas très sûre. Mais il s'agit d'une boutade, évidemment, car si nous désirons convoler, ce n'est pas pour un motif de conformité, fût-elle sociale. Ce n'est pas non plus pour nous donner une preuve d'amour dont nous n'avons nulle nécessité, ni nous jurer une fidélité éternelle. La vraie, sinon la seule, raison de nos noces, c'est qu'ensuite nous pourrons—enfin!—adopter nos filles. (HFH 39)

Myriam's insistence on the need for equal marriage is not a defence of the institution per se; marriage is not, she suggests, proof of fidelity or love. Rather, the appeal of marriage is the right that it will grant Myriam and Astrid to adopt each other's biological daughter. In this sense, Myriam seems to support Park's attitude towards institutional recognition: 'There is no doubt that cooperative mothering would be facilitated by transformed public policies. However, as queer theory has taught us, kinship need not (and should not) be dependent on state recognition'.²⁵³ Although Park thus calls for the recognition of queer families at an institutional level, she contends that state recognition is not the only legitimate mode of kinship. For the same reason, Butler cautions against the conflation of equality with state-endorsed modes of kinship.²⁵⁴ For Butler, the focus on marriage risks reinforcing marriage as a norm, thus ostracizing a multitude of extramarital kinship forms, and accepts uncritically the state's power to confer legitimacy. It may, in Butler's view, be possible to acquire legitimacy without state mediation: 'Are there not other ways of feeling possible, intelligible, even real, apart from the sphere of state recognition? And should there not be other ways?'.²⁵⁵ That said, Butler maintains that state recognition is politically valuable.²⁵⁶ Unlike Park and Butler, Myriam does not go as far as challenging the state's authority to determine what constitutes a relationship, but she certainly considers marriage to be little more than a means to an end—namely, her and her partner's legal protection and the wellbeing of Augustine and Assia. Indeed, *Elles eurent beaucoup d'enfants* inverts the rhetoric of the best interests of the child, which is often used to oppose gay and lesbian parenting, to call for the legal enshrinement of configurations of kinship founded on caregiving rather than biology. Myriam recalls her daughters' distress at not being able to use the surname of their non-biological mother. At the same time, Myriam demonstrates an acute, quasi-Butlerian awareness of the limitations of legal

²⁵³ Park, p. 8.

²⁵⁴ Butler, 'Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?', p. 26.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

rights: ‘[I]l faudra sans doute plus qu’une loi pour faire évoluer les dogmes bien-pesants. Mais au moins l’aurons-nous pour nous, la loi’ (HFH 45). This suggests that the text itself, as part of a body of cultural representations of same-sex parenting, has a role to play in the ideological change to which Myriam refers. Literature has the power to inscribe marginalized realities and, as a result, to foster acceptance and tolerance. This quotation is, then, a statement about the importance of cultural and social visibility to the cause of gay and lesbian parents, which will be considered at length in Chapter Four.

Whereas Cinq-Fraix’s and Blanc’s texts call for institutional recognition, Girard’s *Mais qui va garder le chat?* exposes and opposes the impact of not having recognition, especially on the comother. Because this role lacks legal and social validation, Fanny struggles to construct an identity in relation to the child for which she and Cécile are planning: “‘Tu [Cécile] es la mère, c’est TON enfant et personne ne pourra le remettre en question. Mais moi? Moi? Je te pose la question?’” (MQV 151). The novel thus reveals, and can be said to critique, the deep-seated monomaterialism that characterizes Western kinship. Moreover, it testifies to the power of institutional recognition to create and regulate social roles, including who has the right to identify as a mother: “‘Là où ni la biologie, ni la loi ne donne de droits, les autres ne t’en donnent pas plus. Je n’existe pas par rapport à cet enfant, tu viens d’en avoir la preuve’” (MQV 151). Collectively, these passages reveal the dominance of biology and the law in defining family ties such that no place is given to a parent’s commitment and desire to have and nurture children. Cécile and Fanny understand that the latter’s biological and legal estrangement from the child makes it crucial that she fashions herself a maternal identity. With no biological or legal status in relation to her child, Fanny’s identity as a mother is unstable and difficult to put into words:

Il me plaît que le père de mon enfant soit, je le répète, un beau mec. Je viens d’écrire “le père de mon enfant” sans même y réfléchir. Une phrase absurde en soi au regard de la loi et de la société, puisque Gilles ne sera pas père et moi encore moins mère. Que serai-je alors? Avec Cécile, on s’est longuement posé la question. Une co-mère, comme elle dit? Le mot est trop moche. Un co-parent, comme on est co-équipier, co-propriétaire? Le problème est que je suis la seule à avoir l’honneur de porter ce si joli titre. Cécile est mère. Point. (MQV 117–18)

It is a testament to monomaterialism that Gilles, as the sperm donor, will have a greater claim to being a parent than Fanny, despite the latter’s commitment to the long-term care of the child. A coparent, as Fanny puts it, is ‘un mystère aux yeux de tous, un parent virtuel que l’on peut zapper à tout instant’ (MQV 118). Indeed, the excerpt from Fanny’s

diary demonstrates her acute awareness of her own marginal existence. Fanny's question—"Que serai-je?"—and her dissatisfaction with the social scientific terms "comother" and "coparent" indicate the inconceivability of her role at the level of language. Put simply, the vocabulary that would facilitate Fanny's construction of a maternal identity does not exist. The novel thus reveals the centrality of language in the construction of identity—a point that will be developed in Chapter Five. Sabine Choiseul advises Cécile that Fanny, in order to feel that she has a role in the child's life, must be designated a name that the child will call her, as Brigitte in *Maman, Mamour* does. In Fanny's case, her maternal name remains unclear, but her own mother, the child's non-biological grandmother, decides what the child will call her: "“Je veux qu'il m'appelle Mamoune, Mamie, ça fait trop vieux”" (MQV 187).

This section has examined the texts' engagement with the sameness–difference debate in relation to discussions of gay and lesbian parenting. Overall, the texts concede the structural distinctiveness of lesbian families while emphasizing that lesbian parents' emotional attachment to their children is no different from that of heterosexual couples. Ultimately, they contend that family structure matters less than the parents' desire to have and nurture a child. It is notable, and more than a little ironic, that although gay and lesbian parents are often accused of not thinking of the wellbeing of children, the parents in these texts seem to think only of their children. Their demands for legal parity between heterosexual and gay and lesbian families stem not from a desire to assimilate to a heterosexual standard but from a will to protect their children and the non-biological mother. The following section centres specifically on one of the legal inequalities between heterosexual and same-sex parents in France—namely, the exclusion of lesbian and single women from the right to access assisted reproductive technologies.

Procréation médicalement... arbitraire

On 1 July 2015, *Libération* featured an article entitled 'PMA, Procréation médicalement arbitraire'.²⁵⁷ The headline's provocativeness underscores the frustration of the journalist and of gay and lesbian campaigners at the French government's continued refusal to open access to assisted reproductive technologies to lesbian and single women. Feminism's relationship with this technology is an ambivalent one. In *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970), Shulamith Firestone suggests that reproductive technologies could eliminate sex classes

²⁵⁷ Mallaval, 'PMA, Procréation médicalement arbitraire...'

by restoring control of reproduction and ownership of the female body to women. Later feminists countered Firestone's optimism. Michelle Stanworth, for instance, states categorically: '[T]he view that reproductive technologies have given women control over motherhood—and thereby over their lives—simply will not do'.²⁵⁸ According to Stanworth, women's access to methods of fertility control depends on their position in the social order.²⁵⁹ While Stanworth is talking specifically about women on low incomes, whose financial position inhibits their access to reproductive technologies, the point also pertains to French lesbian couples, whose access to reproductive technologies is denied on the basis of their position outside the heteronormative and patriarchal sexual order. There is, in addition, the question of what Marilyn Strathern calls 'prescriptive fertility'—that is, the view that if one can have children one should.²⁶⁰ Indeed, reproductive technologies exist alongside an ideology of motherhood that, as this chapter has shown, defines mothering as a biogenetic process and, more generally, as a cornerstone of normative femininity. While ideological and legal obstacles to women's access to artificial conception endure, reproductive technologies cannot be said to have liberated the female body from patriarchal control. In this section, I draw on various feminist perspectives on reproductive technologies to examine how my corpus of texts critiques France's bioethics laws and its understanding of infertility.

In Girard's *Mais qui va garder le chat?*, Cécile and Fanny point to the exclusion of lesbian couples from access to assisted reproductive technologies, although they welcome Gilles's offer to donate his sperm, reasoning that knowing the donor will enable their child to eventually understand his or her origins. Further, they note the impracticalities of arranging and financing fertility treatment in Belgium. *Elles eurent beaucoup d'enfants* reveals the potential costs of artificial insemination with an anonymous donor, and Myriam criticizes the limitations of equal marriage legislation, one of which is lesbians' continued exclusion from access to assisted reproductive technologies. The bill, Myriam argues, stops short of an overhaul of the French system of filiation:

À l'évidence, Madame Taubira n'a pas l'intention de saisir la chance historique qui lui est offerte de devenir celle qui reformera de fond en comble le droit français de la famille. Dommage pour elle. Pas de procréation médicalement assistée (PMA): dommage pour les lesbiennes qui devront continuer à

²⁵⁸ Michelle Stanworth, 'Reproductive Technologies and the Deconstruction of Motherhood', in *Reproductive Technologies: Gender, Motherhood and Medicine*, ed. by Michelle Stanworth (Cambridge: Polity Press/Blackwell, 1987), pp. 10–35 (pp. 13–14).

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁶⁰ Marilyn Strathern, *Reproducing the Future: Essays on Anthropology, Kinship and the New Reproductive Technologies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), p. 36.

arpenter l'Europe pour faire des enfants. Pas de gestation pour autrui (GPA): dommage pour les couples de gays et les hétéros infertiles à qui on ne fait même pas l'aumône d'un débat sur le sujet. Pas de présomption de parentalité ni d'adoption pour les concubins et les pacsé(e)s: dommage pour nous. (HFH 39)

Myriam's critique of the limitations of the Taubira Law exposes the equal marriage bill for what it is: although a big step towards equality, it reinforces the dominance of heterosexuality by prohibiting all but one of the means—adoption—through which homosexual couples can become parents. Like the PaCS, which stopped short of extending parental rights to gay and lesbian couples, the Taubira Law's potential to enforce complete legal parity between hetero- and homosexual couples is curtailed to satisfy the more conservative deputies in the National Assembly. Indeed, as was noted earlier, a right wing victory in the 2017 presidential election could even have led to the revocation of same-sex couples' right to full adoption, which demonstrates the fragility of legal rights, which can be revoked by subsequent governments. In addition, the Taubira Law fails to redress the French system of biologically defined filiation by withholding shared parental status from a person acting as a stepparent to his or her civil partner's child. Myriam thus calls for the legal endorsement of the care-based form of kinship represented in the texts presently under consideration.

Girard's and Blanc's texts can therefore be said to foreshadow the recent politicization of gay and lesbian parenting during the 2012 equal marriage campaign and the opposition to the rigidity of the bioethics laws among scholars working in France. Martine Gross, for example, argues that forcing lesbian couples to access reproductive technologies abroad condemns them to procreative exile.²⁶¹ She continues:

Malgré la diversification des familles contemporaines, le législateur privilégie un modèle procréatif pour lequel seuls les couples dont l'union sexuelle est potentiellement procréatrice peuvent recourir aux techniques de PMA [...]. La philosophie générale des lois de bioéthique est de restreindre l'accès à la PMA à des cas relevant du "pathologique" et d'exclure tous les cas liés à l'évolution des formes de vie conjugale et familiale.²⁶²

Gross doubts the coherence of a bioethics policy that is founded on the arbitrary concept of pathology. Indeed, it could be argued that, as a non-degenerative condition, infertility is not pathological and that understanding infertility as a pathology risks stigmatizing those who cannot procreate naturally as ill. Since, by definition, infertile relationships,

²⁶¹ Gross, *Parent ou homo*, p. 22.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 20–21.

whether hetero- or homosexual, are not potentially procreative, debarring lesbian couples from accessing fertility treatment based on their inability to conceive naturally seems unjustifiable. This suggests a need to replace or at least to supplement the current, individual-centred model of infertility with a theory that revolves around the couple. It may, in other words, be more pertinent to think not about infertile people but about the fertility status of relationships, for this would allow for a system of reproductive technologies that does not discriminate between hetero- and homosexual couples. While individual lesbians are not necessarily infertile, a lesbian relationship unquestionably is; in this respect, lesbian couples are no different from heterosexual couples who cannot procreate “naturally”. Currently, heterosexual couples’ exclusive access to reproductive technologies is justified by the argument that these are intended to treat infertility. But, as Strathern points out, ‘[n]ew techniques of “fertilisation” do not remedy fertility as such, but childlessness; they enable a potential parent to have access to the fertility of others’.²⁶³ In other words, reproductive technologies “treat” a couple’s desire to have a child—a desire that, as the texts treated in this chapter demonstrate, is as familiar to homosexual couples as it is to would-be heterosexual parents. The underlying argument, in France, is that because only heterosexual unions are naturally procreative only heterosexual couples should have the right to procreate artificially. The French policy on reproductive technologies implies that a heterosexual couple has a greater right to children than a lesbian couple or single woman. This reinforces the dominance of heterosexuality and the heterosexual couple, the supposed superiority of dual parenting over single mothering, and the belief that to be in a (monogamous) relationship is more desirable than to be single. Indeed, as I have discussed, the texts treated in this chapter underscore the parents’ commitment to their children rather than their number or gender.

Blanc’s autobiographical self is equally critical of the bioethics laws. Indeed, her interest in and commitment to engineering legal and political change are exemplified by citing an extract from the 1994 bioethics legislation:

“L’homme et la femme formant le couple doivent être vivants, en âge de procréer, mariés ou en mesure d’apporter la preuve d’une vie commune d’au moins deux ans et consentants préalablement au transfert des embryons ou à l’insémination.”

[...] Le législateur n’a même pas cru nécessaire de préciser que le couple doit être formé d’un homme et d’une femme, à ses yeux il l’est, par définition. (HFH 88)

²⁶³ Strathern, p. 37.

The extract from the bioethics laws reveals the heteronormative and monomaterialist discourses that define Western kinship. As we have seen, the heterosexual union is the gold standard against which all affective relationships are compared, and the mother–father–child triangulation the dominant mode of kinship.

The prohibition on single women’s use of reproductive technologies demonstrates that the bioethics laws preserve the dominance of heterosexuality and the view that the couple constitutes a superior parenting framework. *Mais qui va garder le chat?* goes some way towards questioning this view. At the end of the novel, Cécile’s friend, So, a heterosexual, single woman, decides to create a child with the sperm donor used by Cécile and Fanny. So’s decision to opt into mothering alone challenges the traditional, patriarchal control over women’s fertility. Indeed, the current French bioethics laws serve the interests of patriarchy by maintaining a degree of control over the female body. In effect, they stipulate that procreation must be overseen by men because only women in a long-term relationship with a man can access reproductive technologies. In this sense, the bioethics laws exemplify Rich’s theory of motherhood as an institution discussed in Chapter Two. Indeed, Stanworth further argues that the regulation of reproductive technologies enables men to retain possession of human reproduction:

[M]en’s alienation from reproduction—men’s sense of disconnection from their seed during the process of conception, pregnancy and birth—has underpinned through the ages a relentless male desire to master nature, and to construct social institutions and cultural patterns that will not only subdue the waywardness of women but also give men an illusion of procreative continuity and power.²⁶⁴

France’s bioethics laws might thus be attributed to an unconscious male desire to feel involved in the process of reproduction. Of course, male and female gametes are equally indispensable in the creation of life, but women’s biological status in relation to their children is rarely questioned because of the patentability of pregnancy and childbirth, whereas the male reproductive function is less visible.

Reconceiving of infertility in terms of the procreative potential of relationships rather than of individual people does much to reduce the blaming and shaming of an individual who, whatever their sexuality, cannot procreate naturally. As Germaine Greer notes, ‘[b]arrenness is by many peoples associated with sin, and particularly sexual sin. If children are the gift of God, the lack of them is God’s punishment’.²⁶⁵ If, according to

²⁶⁴ Stanworth, p. 16.

²⁶⁵ Germaine Greer, *Sex and Destiny: The Politics of Human Fertility* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1984), pp. 50–51.

religious dogma, fertility is associated with morality, infertility must be a mark of depravity, which explains in part why, despite the decline of Christianity in the West, infertility still carries a stigma. Further, Naomi Pfeffer argues that couples struggling to conceive are often thought to be desperate to the extent that ‘sometimes it appears that what troubles infertile men and women is not the absence of a child as such but some form of emotional disorder related to their failure’.²⁶⁶ Pfeffer suggests that an infertile couple’s desperation is likely to be a product of the stigmatization of infertility rather than a result of the condition. This is, perhaps, questionable, since infertile couples seeking fertility treatment do, after all, want children. Nonetheless, Pfeffer’s underlying point is valid: people, especially women, without children are often considered to be unfulfilled, as evidenced by Brigitte’s friend’s assumption in *Maman, Mamour* that being a comother is a sort of sacrifice. Célier further argues that attitudes towards infertility vary depending on the couple concerned. ‘Le plus souvent,’ she writes, ‘ces problèmes de stérilité suscitent la compassion, tant le désir d’enfant est considéré comme essentiel et sa réalisation indispensable pour l’épanouissement d’une femme, d’un homme ou d’un couple’ (MM 25–26). Disabled and same-sex couples, however, are less likely to receive sympathy:

Devant le risque de transmettre une maladie héréditaire, beaucoup pensent qu’une stérilité naturelle serait très opportune. Les gens que l’on appelle communément normaux ont des difficultés à imaginer que des handicapés mentaux, sensoriels ou physiques souhaitent eux aussi donner la vie s’ils ont un risque réel de transmettre leur handicap. (MM 26)

Similarly, ‘[s]’il s’agit, par contre, de l’infertilité due à l’impossibilité de faire un enfant au sein d’un couple homosexuel, la réflexion s’oriente différemment. La morale prend le relais des préoccupations affectives, économiques ou matérielles’ (MM 26–27). Célier thus suggests that society imposes on disabled and same-sex couples a moral duty to act in the interests of the child by remaining childless. *Maman, Mamour* offers a more nuanced view of attitudes towards infertility than that proposed by Greer and Pfeffer by accounting for how these attitudes intersect with those towards disability and sexuality. It also exposes which people, according to society, have the right to a child: fertility is indispensable for the fulfilment of the able-bodied, heterosexual couple but unnecessary, even undesirable, for homosexuals and the disabled.

²⁶⁶ Naomi Pfeffer, ‘Artificial Insemination, In-Vitro Fertilization and the Stigma of Infertility’, in *Reproductive Technologies: Gender, Motherhood and Medicine*, ed. by Michelle Stanworth (Cambridge: Polity Press/Blackwell, 1987), pp. 81–97 (p. 82).

Gross argues that France’s bioethics laws intend to preserve the normative appearance of parenting as a biogenetic process by erasing the couple’s need to procreate artificially, which renders infertility a source of shame by implying that recourse to methods of artificial conception needs to be covered up.²⁶⁷ Indeed, French law requires that egg and sperm donors remain untraceable. Similarly, adopted children are certified as the biological and legal offspring of their adoptive parents; officially, then, the actual biological parents no longer exist in relation to their child.²⁶⁸ The taboo around infertility impacts negatively on both men and especially women due to the traditional equation of mothering with femininity. Although this equation and, accordingly, the stigmatization of infertility are not as widespread as they used to be, the bioethics laws send out a message that infertility is shameful. In addition, their endeavour to maintain the appearance of biological filiation precludes gay, lesbian, and single parenting because homosexuals and unpartnered women cannot, of course, pass for having procreated naturally, whereas heterosexual couples can. Bénard’s *Prince Charmante* mocks the attempt to maintain the appearance of parenting as a biogenetic process when Zélie and Alice travel to Barcelona to receive fertility treatment. Although Alice will have no biological connection to the child, she must go through the motions of becoming a biological parent. For instance, she must undergo the same health check undertaken by men providing sperm to a heterosexual couple, and she and Zélie must list their physical characteristics so that their baby might look like them:

Deux colonnes. Mère. Père. Sourire. Dans chaque colonne, déclinaison d’identité, puis une trentaine de critères physiques: couleur de peau, teint, type, couleur des cheveux, des yeux, morphologie...

Il est précisé que si on nous demande tout ça, c’est pour faire en sorte que notre même nous ressemble. “Aaaaahhhh?” s’amuse Alice, “parce qu’on peut choisir la couleur de ses yeux?”

“C’est pas l’but, non. C’est pour éviter que des couples caucasiens se retrouvent avec un p’tit black. De toute façon, il faut joindre une photo de chacune.” (PC 409)

Despite lesbian couples’ right to access reproductive technologies in Spain, the documentation that the couple must complete reinforces heteronormative and monomaternalist assumptions: first, the form presumes that the patients are male and female; and second, the doctor instructs Zélie to fill out the mother’s form and Alice to fill out the father’s. This implies that, because Zélie will carry the child, she is the mother and that Alice must, therefore, be the father, which recalls Blanc’s ironic observation that

²⁶⁷ Gross, *Parent ou homo*, p. 80.

²⁶⁸ Garnier, p. 33.

during her partner's pregnancy she was perceived as the "man" in her relationship. Furthermore, the couple mock the protocol that aims to make the conception of their child appear natural when Alice ironically suggests that they can choose the baby's eye colour. In this respect, the text questions the desirability of parent-child resemblance and, therefore, the biologicistic definition of kinship. On the other hand, Alice's indifference to the child's eye colour conflicts with the importance that Zélie unquestioningly attaches to its skin colour. By reiterating the norm of racial continuity within the family, the text declines to radically deconstruct the biologicistic definition of kinship. Finally, this quotation evokes deep, polemical questions about the role that technology should have in the creation and manipulation of life. If, as Alice remarks, attempting to decide the baby's eye colour is superficial, the use of reproductive technologies to prevent the transmission of severe chronic illnesses, for example, is arguably in the best interests of the child and of the family. Bénard's text thus asks what limitations, if any, should be imposed on the relationship between life and science.

The texts reveal how the French bioethics laws reinforce the biologicistic definition of kinship and unconsciously reiterate the patriarchal control over women's reproductive function by prohibiting lesbian and single women from using reproductive technologies. In particular, *Maman, Mamour* is critical of attitudes towards infertility that privilege able-bodied, heterosexual couples. Further, this section has argued that the current, individual-centred model of infertility that underpins the bioethics laws should be replaced or at least supplemented with a theory that revolves around the couple. Considering the fertility status of relationships, rather than that of individuals, would enable a bioethics policy that does not discriminate between hetero- and homosexual couples and that the texts collectively demand. Overall, the texts expose the exclusion, through the bioethics laws, of non-normative groups from parenthood and intervene in debates on the relationship between procreation and technology that are fundamental to humanity.

Conclusion

Drawing on Judith Butler's work, this chapter has centred on the argument that the texts redefine mothering as a performative function rather than biogenetic process in order to accommodate gay and lesbian families, as well as other non-nuclear forms of kinship. In doing so, the texts resist heteronormative and monomaternalist discourses that, as the introduction demonstrated, are simultaneously being reinforced and challenged both in

France and across the West. In this sense, the texts can be said to participate in the move towards redefining the concepts of mothering, the family, and kinship. Importantly, as Part I showed, the texts do not succumb to inscribing new norms of kinship by proscribing one configuration of lesbian family over another. Rather, they seem to call for the acceptance and recognition of multiple family forms. Part II examined how far the families portrayed in the texts considered themselves to conform to or resist the normative heterosexual family model. In the main, the texts do not suggest that lesbian and heterosexual parents are radically different in practice but that they differ hugely in their legal status and, therefore, in their legitimacy in the eyes of society. Written during a key period in recent French history—that is, between the creation of the PaCS in 1999 and the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2013—when gay and lesbian parents benefitted from no legal recognition, the texts ultimately call for marriage and adoption rights to be extended to homosexual couples so that they might better protect themselves and their children. France subsequently legalized same-sex marriage and adoption in 2013, but access to assisted reproductive technologies remains closed to lesbian and single women. Part III focused specifically on the texts’ responses to the discrimination embedded in the 1994 bioethics laws, which reinforce heteronormative and monomaterialist discourses of the family. In this respect, the texts intervene in the debate on lesbian and single women’s access to assisted reproductive technologies that has resurfaced since 2013. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the texts campaign for fewer restrictions on the use of technologies. Whereas Chapters Two and Three have centred primarily on the mothers represented in the corpus of texts, the following chapter goes beyond this focus by offering, first, an analysis of the attitudes of the mothers’ extended family, specifically their own parents, followed by a discussion of the texts’ position in society in order to account for the wider context in which lesbian families and texts treating them are placed.

4

Beyond the Mother

Chapters Two and Three largely centred on the implications of lesbian mothering for the mothers represented in the texts analysed in this thesis. This chapter, by contrast, explores the representations of the repercussions of lesbian mothering beyond the mothers themselves. Focusing on Girard's *Mais qui va garder le chat?*, Cinq-Fraix's *Family Pride*, and Mallet's *Le Choix de la reine*, this chapter begins by examining the impact of the characters' status as lesbian mothers on their own parents, the grandparents or future grandparents of their children. While grandparents do not usually act as primary caregivers, they often play a vital parenting role. As Arthur Kornhaber and Kenneth Woodward claim in *Grandparents/Grandchildren: The Vital Connection* (1985), 'the bond between grandparents and grandchildren is second in emotional power and influence only to the relationship between children and parents'.²⁶⁹ It cannot, of course, be assumed that all children are close to their grandparents; nor can it be taken for granted that the bond that children have with their parents is the most influential. Nonetheless, Kornhaber and Woodward's underlying point is valid: grandparents often feel powerfully connected to their grandchildren and have an important hand in raising them. Longer life expectancy, increasing maternal employment, and the number of single-parent families have made grandparents both available and necessary as forms of parental support in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Social scientific research since the 1980s has, with growing frequency, addressed grandparents' influence on child development and wellbeing, and has, in some cases, found that having frequent contact with grandparents impacts positively on children.²⁷⁰ Although insightful, this body of research has focused,

²⁶⁹ Arthur Kornhaber and Kenneth L. Woodward, *Grandparents/Grandchildren: The Vital Connection* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1985), p. xx.

²⁷⁰ See, for example, Kornhaber and Woodward, *Grandparents/Grandchildren*; Andrew J. Cherlin and Frank F. Furstenberg, *The New American Grandparent: A Place in the Family, a Life Apart* (New York: Basic Books, 1986). For a concise but comprehensive review of research addressing grandparents' influence on child development and wellbeing, see Rachel Dunifon, 'The Influence of Grandparents on the Lives of Children and Adolescents', *Child Development Perspectives*, 7 (2013), 55–60.

almost without exception, on grandparents in heterosexual families. The first section of this chapter examines the representation of grandparent–parent–child relationships in lesbian-led families, focusing on the grandparents’ attitudes towards the mothers’ coming out and subsequent status as a lesbian mother.

The repercussions of lesbian mothering extend even beyond members of the extended family to wider society. As such, the second section of this chapter explores how the texts represent the impact of lesbian mothering at a social level, centring on their portrayal of gay and lesbian parenting associations. The formation of gay and lesbian parenting associations, such as the *Association des Parents et Futurs Parents Gays et Lesbiens*, the *Association des Familles Homoparentales*, and the *Enfants d’Arc en Ciel*, testifies to the impact that gay and lesbian couples’ desire to become parents is having on French society. The APGL, the country’s leading gay and lesbian parenting association, was founded in 1986. Until the end of the 1990s, it had just 70 members. In tandem with the increasing visibility of gay and lesbian parenting at the time of the PaCS debate, membership rose sharply to 600 between 1996 and 1999 and to 1 500 by 2002. In 2016, the association had 2 000 fully paid-up members. The APGL aims to offer information to gay and lesbian parents and future parents and to provide a forum for the sharing of their experiences. In addition, it fights for the legal recognition of gay and lesbian families, irrespective of their mode of conception, and to end the discrimination against gay and lesbian parents and their children. Thanks to the APGL, the neologism “homoparentalité” entered the *Petit Robert* in 2001. As a result of its political and social activism, the APGL is, with growing frequency, being consulted by politicians and the media on matters of the family, both in France and in Europe, and has, since 2015, held a position in the *Union Nationale des Associations Familiales*.²⁷¹ The references within the texts to the social repercussions of lesbian mothering invite us to consider the repercussions of the texts beyond the narrative. As such, the second section is also concerned with the impact the texts by Girard and Cinq-Fraix, as well as Célier’s *Maman, Mamour* and Blanc’s *Elles eurent beaucoup d’enfants*, on French society. As Chapter Three argued, these texts undoubtedly intervene in, even prefigure, the wider political debates on gay and lesbian kinship, but this chapter asks how far-reaching and instructive this intervention has been. Ultimately, the chapter demonstrates the repercussions of lesbian mothering, both on the other characters in the

²⁷¹ See the association’s website for details of its aims and membership figures: <https://www.apgl.fr/article/item/503-30-ans-apgl-dates> [accessed 21 April 2016]. The most recent membership figure was obtained through personal communication with the APGL.

texts and on wider society.

The Role of Grandparents in Lesbian Families

According to Kornhaber and Woodward, the grandparent–grandchild connection is ‘a natural, organic relationship between the generations that is based on biology, verifiable psychologically and experienced as feelings through emotional attachments’.²⁷² Problematically, the biologism of this understanding reinforces the normative status of the heterosexual nuclear family. Adoptive, blended, and gay and lesbian families challenge the biologicistic definition of the grandparent–grandchild relationship. In planned lesbian families, for instance, in which at least one parent has no biogenetic connection to the child, the grandparent–grandchild relationship must, for at least one set of grandparents, be built on an emotional bond. Unlike their biological counterparts, these grandparents lack the established cultural framework of biological kinship that justifies their involvement in the child’s life. In an insightful study of parent–grandparent relationships in the context of lesbian childbirth, Petra Nordqvist states:

[Non-biological grandparents] are faced with the tasks of making sense of what it means for them to be “family-in-law” to the genetic mother, and deciding how to relate to the child, in the absence of there being any established social script for understanding this kinship affinity.²⁷³

Like that of the non-biological mother, the status of the non-biological grandparents vis-à-vis the child is unintelligible due to the culturally important role of biology in defining kinship in the West. There is, however, an important difference between the status of non-biological parent and that of non-biological grandparent: since parents jointly decide who will and who will not be biogenetically connected to the child, the non-biological parent assumes this status willingly; grandparents, on the other hand, are not given a choice. Non-biological grandparents in adoptive, blended, and gay and lesbian families are therefore expected to relate to a grandchild whom they may not regard as theirs.

Becoming a mother, biological or social, therefore has repercussions not just on the mother herself but on her extended family, particularly her own parents. As will be discussed further below, social scientists have recently begun to explore these repercussions by investigating how grandparent–grandchild relationships in gay and

²⁷² Kornhaber and Woodward, p. xx.

²⁷³ Petra Nordqvist, “‘I’ve Redeemed Myself by Being a 1950s ‘Housewife’’: Parent–Grandparent Relationships in the Context of Lesbian Childbirth’, *Journal of Family Issues*, 36 (2015), 480–500 (pp. 483–84).

lesbian families vary according to their biogenetic status. Drawing on this emerging strand of research, this section considers the impact of lesbian mothering on the grandparents or future grandparents in Girard's *Mais qui va garder le chat?*, Cinq-Fraix's *Family Pride*, and Mallet's *Le Choix de la reine*. In particular, it examines how the grandparents in these texts make sense of their relationship to their grandchild, particularly in the absence of a culturally all-important biogenetic connection. In doing so, it asks how far the grandparents can see beyond the established cultural frameworks of biological kinship and heterosexuality. I begin by analysing Marinette's role as mediator in the conflict between her lesbian daughter, Elena, and her heterosexual granddaughter, Marion, in *Le Choix de la reine*. I then examine the grandparents' reaction to their daughter's coming out, since their acceptance of their daughter's lesbian family depends on their tolerance of lesbianism in general. Finally, I consider the extent to which the grandparents in *Mais qui va garder le chat?* and *Family Pride* attach importance to having a biogenetic connection to their grandchild.

In *Le Choix de la reine*, lesbian mother Elena and daughter Marion resolve their differences thanks to Marinette, who acts as a mediator between her daughter and granddaughter and facilitates Marion's acceptance of Elena's sexuality. It is instructive, at this point, to draw on Cristina Herrera's analysis of the grandmother's mediation of the heterosexual mother–lesbian daughter conflict in Chicana lesbian writing. Herrera argues that the grandmother, as an older, wiser woman, recognizes the adverse consequences of heteronormative discourse and protects her granddaughter in the mother's stead.²⁷⁴ While *Le Choix de la reine* diverts from Herrera's model in that it is the granddaughter or, as I emphasized in Chapter Two, the granddaughter's shock that compels her to spread heteronormative discourse, the novel depicts Marinette as an embodiment of tolerance and of the stereotypical wisdom that accompanies maturity. Indeed, when the truth of Elena's sexuality is revealed, both Elena and Marion turn immediately to Marinette for advice and support. It is significant, perhaps surprising, that the grandmother's views on sexuality and on the normative link between parenting and heterosexuality are less conservative than those of her daughter and granddaughter. The novel thus challenges the expectation that the elderly are generally more conservative and therefore less tolerant of sexual minorities than the younger generation. The grandmother, as the following

²⁷⁴ Cristina Herrera, "The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About": Rejection, Redemption, and the Lesbian Daughter in Carla Trujillo's *What Night Brings*, *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 39 (2009), 18–36 (pp. 20–21).

quotation shows, acts not as a mouthpiece for compulsory heterosexuality but as a voice of sexual progressivism:

“Je ne te reconnais plus, ma petite fille... Cette violence... à ton âge... pour une chose aussi... aussi...”

“Banale? Ordinaire? Courante? C’est ça que tu penses?”

“N’exagère pas, Marion! De nos jours, l’homosexualité n’est plus...”

“Je m’en balance, moi, de l’époque à laquelle on vit! Pour moi, les choses sont claires: je n’avais déjà pas de père et aujourd’hui, je n’ai plus de mère!” (CDLR 29)

As was noted in Chapter Two, Marinette’s progressive view of homosexuality contrasts sharply with Marion’s sexual conservatism. In *Le Choix de la reine*, then, Elena’s status as a lesbian mother has no negative repercussions for the grandmother. Why the novel presents this unlikely contrast between an older woman’s open-mindedness and a teenager’s volatile intolerance is an interesting question. It is perhaps an allusion to the pressure on young people to conform to and reinforce heterosexuality and to their frequent desire to not stand out among their peers. Alternatively, it could be a suggestion that if the elderly, who grew up at a time when homosexual acts were fiercely repressed, can throw off heteronormative ideals and accept homosexuality and homosexual parents, then it should be easy for others to do so.

What seems to matter most to Mallet, though, is the empowerment of a range of female identities. The novel’s depiction of a multitude of female identities—the mother, the daughter, the older woman, and Elena’s two lovers—and its relative lack of male characters work to give voice to what Luce Irigaray calls a ‘genealogy’ of women, the recognition of which, she contends, is imperative if we are to deconstruct patriarchy: ‘Je pense qu’il est nécessaire aussi [...] que nous affirmions qu’il existe une généalogie de femmes. Généalogie de femmes dans notre famille: après tout, nous avons une mère, une grand-mère, une arrière grand-mère, des filles’.²⁷⁵ According to Irigaray, the dominance of the father–son line and the proportionate disregard in legal and political terms of female genealogies are instrumental in maintaining patriarchy. The absence of the paternal line from the novel works to foreground that between its mothers and daughters. Mallet does not, however, succumb to naive essentialism by axing men from the plot. Although few, if any, references are made to Elena’s father, she is mistaken for her boss’s daughter when she visits him in hospital, and he says half-jokingly, half-seriously: “[C]e serait assez plausible... si on arrive à se tutoyer!” (CDLR 193). This misunderstanding demonstrates

²⁷⁵ Irigaray, *Le corps-à-corps*, pp. 29–30.

that perceptions still rely on the patriarchal lineage that the novel seems to dismiss. Moreover, the absence of Marion's father does not lead to her wholesale resentment of men, as evidenced by the romance that blossoms between her and her classmate Tristan. The prominence of female roles in *Le Choix de la reine* thus answers Irigaray's call to defend a female specificity while not elevating the feminine to a position of superiority over the masculine. The novel culminates in the peaceful coexistence of a plurality of identities—of different ages, genders, and sexualities—that are diverse in nature but equal in value. This also seems to recall Irigaray's and Hélène Cixous's opposition to patriarchal ideals of women as a fixed, homogeneous group.

Because Marion was born into a heterosexual nuclear family, meaning that she and Marinette are connected biogenetically, Elena's lesbianism has few repercussions on the grandmother or on the grandmother–granddaughter relationship. Since Marinette's relationship with Marion falls within the established cultural framework of biological kinship, the novel does not invite reflection on non-biological grandparent–grandchild ties. In *Mais qui va garder le chat?* and *Family Pride*, one set of grandparents must, unlike Marinette, do without the security of an ideologically meaningful biogenetic connection to their grandchild. The non-normative grandparent–grandchild relationship created by the decision to start a family can foster conflict between parents and grandparents. Although the grandmother's role is greatest in *Le Choix de la reine*, it is, as will be discussed later, *Mais qui va garder le chat?* and *Family Pride* that say more about the complexities of the kinship network in planned lesbian families, as well as the increasingly diverse modes—biological and non-biological—of being a grandparent in contemporary France.

Janet Finch and Jennifer Mason identify the central role of time in constructing kinship relations. It is therefore vital to be aware of the history of the relationships between family members in order to comprehend how these relationships unfold in the present.²⁷⁶ Drawing on Finch and Mason, Nordqvist argues that it is essential to know the history of the relationship between lesbian mothers and their parents if we are to understand how this develops at the time of the mothers' pregnancy and childbirth.²⁷⁷ In other words, it is necessary to consider how parents react to their daughter's coming out as a lesbian in order to contextualize their reaction to her plans for a family. Despite the growing

²⁷⁶ Janet Finch and Jennifer Mason, *Negotiating Family Responsibilities* (London: Tavistock/Routledge, 1993), pp. 60–62.

²⁷⁷ Nordqvist, pp. 485–86.

acceptance of sexual minorities, coming out to one's family remains a daunting and sometimes disastrous ordeal. Collectively, the novels treated in this section portray a range of coming-out experiences. *Le Choix de la reine* declines to tackle this experience because Elena's mother, Marinette, is aware of her daughter's sexuality from the beginning of the novel. Marinette thus embodies unquestioning acceptance of a lesbian child and, as I have demonstrated, impacts positively on her daughter's experience of lesbian mothering. Similarly, Marinette's silence on the presumed irreconcilability of lesbianism and maternity connotes her rejection of this stereotype. Put simply, Elena's sexuality is of no importance to Marinette.

In *Mais qui va garder le chat?*, the parents' reactions to their daughter's coming out range from the relatively unproblematic to the disastrous. Like *Le Choix de la reine*, the novel deals with these experiences retrospectively. Although Cécile remains closeted from her colleagues, her parents are very accepting of her sexuality and have welcomed her ex-girlfriends into the family. In addition, her parents loan her money so that she and Fanny can buy their house, suggesting a closeness between parents and daughter and the parents' desire to see Cécile and Fanny's relationship prosper. Cécile considers herself fortunate to have such tolerant parents, yet this in itself shows that homosexuality could still be source of family conflict in the late twentieth century when Cécile came out. Indeed, Fanny tells us that she struggled to come out to her mother, owing to the latter's relatively well-to-do background, illustrating the fostering and maintaining of sexual norms among the middle and upper classes. Fanny's mother believed that her daughter's lesbianism was a phase that would pass with marriage and motherhood, reflecting the view that lesbianism is only possible in the absence of a natural and preferred heterosexuality. We are told that Magali's parents had no inclination of their daughter's sexuality, and their reaction led to a loss of contact and to Magali becoming depressed. Although contact was gradually re-established, Magali's sexuality remains an unspoken truth. The homophobic reaction of Magali's parents explains why she and Cécile kept their relationship a secret from all but their close friends:

On avait vécu comme deux adolescentes. La société, la famille, nous y avait poussées. Se cacher, ne pas dire, inventer, monter des bateaux: des restes d'enfance. Adultes, on apprend à dire, à affirmer, à s'imposer. Magali et moi, étions "dans le placard" dès le palier de notre appartement. À l'extérieur, à part pour nos amis, nous étions deux bonnes copines. Point. (MQV 38)

Despite the growing cultural and social acceptance of homosexuality, Cécile and Magali's experience suggests the difficulty, even in the early 2000s, in publicly affirming a lesbian

relationship and the need to hide it behind a mask of platonic friendship. A scene in which Magali and her new girlfriend are sexually harassed by a homophobic mob and receive no sympathy from the police further reinforces the novel's exposure of homophobia. Magali's parents' homophobia may also explain her conservative stance on lesbian mothering, which was noted in Chapter Three. For Magali, becoming a mother might add strain to the already fragile relationship that she has with her parents.

In *Family Pride*, which also portrays the parents' reactions to the news of their daughter's lesbianism retrospectively, Cécile and Anna have contrasting experiences of coming out. Cécile told her parents about her sexuality only after she and Anna had been together for two years. On the surface, her parents take the news well—"Tu restes notre fille et l'important c'est que tu sois heureuse" (FP 21)—but Cécile later learns that 'la pilule avait eu du mal à passer et qu'elle leur restait encore un peu aujourd'hui en travers de la gorge' (FP 21). In one scene, Cécile wonders how she became a lesbian, thus betraying the interesting heteronormative assumption that people are de facto heterosexual. Anna came out to her mother, Béatrice, aged fourteen, and suffered no negative repercussions: 'Disons même qu'une fois le choc passé [...] [Béatrice] en retirait une certaine fierté. Son seul regret peut-être: celui de ne jamais pouvoir être grand-mère' (FP 27). Béatrice thus rejects the stigma attached to having a lesbian daughter. Although she upholds the assumed incompatibility of lesbianism with parenting, it should be remembered that, as Nordqvist argues, it is understandable that some of the older generation view homosexuality as irreconcilable with parenting because they grew up at a time—in Anna's mother's case, probably the 1950s—when LGBT kinship was largely invisible and homosexuality itself a taboo.²⁷⁸ The daughter's decision to become a mother thus compels the future grandparents to question their own longstanding assumptions about the supposed irreconcilability of homosexuality and parenting. Moreover, the novel nods towards the impact that having a homosexual child has on the identity of the parents, as one of Béatrice's colleagues says to Cécile, who also worked for Béatrice at the time when she met Anna:

"C'est assez ironique, non? Sa fille est du bâtiment! Sans rire, qui pourrait imaginer qu'une femme pareille ait une fille homo? Je crois d'ailleurs qu'elle en est assez malheureuse. La fille, Anna—c'est comme ça qu'elle s'appelle, non?—, a l'air de lui en faire voir de toutes les couleurs." (FP 26)

Cécile's boss suggests that only certain women have lesbian daughters and that Béatrice,

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 488.

perhaps because she belongs to the middle classes, is not one of “those” women. Having a lesbian daughter, for Cécile’s boss, somehow reflects on Béatrice herself. Not only does Anna’s lesbianism thus queer her own identity, it has a similar effect on that of her mother.

Lesbian mothering causes relationships within the family to be reconfigured. Nordqvist suggests, for instance, that carrying a child can enable a daughter to ‘render her lesbian life intelligible to her own mother (and father) and slot back into a liveable life’.²⁷⁹ Through mothering, the role that was traditionally regarded as the most natural for women, lesbians can re-enter the norm. In her study of intergenerational relationships in gay and lesbian coparenting arrangements in Belgium, Cathy Herbrand shows that the child can function as a ‘facteur de réconciliation’ between parents and lesbian daughters that enables parents to ‘dépasser leur rejet de [l’]homosexualité [de leur fille] et de la vie qu’elle avait décidé de mener avec une femme’.²⁸⁰ To some extent, this is the case for Cinq-Fraix’s Anna, whose mother, as was noted earlier, was disappointed by her daughter’s lesbianism only because she thought that her chances of becoming a grandmother were over. Whereas Anna’s mother therefore embraces the news that her daughter is starting a family, the reaction of Cécile’s parents, Jean-Louis and Solange, in *Mais qui va garder le chat?* is described ironically as the Apocalypse, ‘un silence assourdissant, comme on pouvait lire dans les romans d’avant. Une forteresse vide’ (FP 186). This suggests that, in the eyes of some grandparents, for a lesbian daughter to become a mother is an additional transgression that works to further distance her from the norm. Indeed, as Cinq-Fraix notes ironically, ‘[h]omosexuels, passe encore, mais parents, faut quand même pas exagérer’ (FP 14). In other words, to be a lesbian is one thing; to become a mother as a lesbian opens a whole-new can of worms.

Studies further suggest that grandparents, both in heterosexual and in homosexual families, attach considerable importance to being biogenetically connected to their grandchildren, both in France and across the West. Martine Gross shows that a biogenetic link is integral to grandparent–grandchild relationships in gay and lesbian families in France.²⁸¹ US-based researchers Megan Fulcher and her colleagues compared children

²⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 490.

²⁸⁰ Cathy Herbrand, ‘Les rendre grands-parents: L’Enjeu des relations intergénérationnelles au sein de coparentalités gaies et lesbiennes en Belgique’, in *Homosexualité et parenté*, ed. by Jérôme Courduriès and Agnès Fine (Paris: Armand Colin, 2014), pp. 175–88 (p. 180).

²⁸¹ Martine Gross, ‘Être grand-parent dans un contexte homoparental en France: Chassez le biologique par la porte, il revient par la fenêtre’, *Recherches féministes*, 22 (2009), 69–76.

conceived via donor insemination in both heterosexual and lesbian families and found that, although contact with grandparents did not vary as a function of parental sexuality, grandparents were more likely to have contact with their grandchildren if they were biologically related to them.²⁸² Danielle Julien and her colleagues found that, in lesbian families in Quebec, children are more likely to feel close to and be in frequent contact with their biological grandparents than with their non-biological grandparents.²⁸³ Based on a study of gay and lesbian coparenting arrangements in Belgium, Cathy Herbrand argues that ‘la présence d’un lien biologique et légal facilite en effet le fait de se sentir concernés et de s’identifier comme grands-parents’.²⁸⁴ The emerging scholarship on grandparent–grandchild relationships in gay and lesbian families is concerned, then, with the extent to which they transcend biological ties and demonstrate, on the whole, that grandparents are more likely, at least at the moment, to reinforce the normative biologicistic definition of the family.

Collectively, the texts illustrate the potentially conflict-inducing repercussions of becoming a lesbian mother. In line with the social scientific literature just outlined, *Mais qui va garder le chat?* and *Family Pride* suggest that grandparents attach considerable importance to being biogenetically connected to their grandchildren. In this respect, the texts do not go beyond the normative model of kinship because grandparents act as guardians of the normative kinship system. In *Mais qui va garder le chat?*, Fanny’s parents, Gabriel and Simone, express disappointment that it is not their daughter who is pregnant. Gabriel’s reasons for this are primarily dynastic: he wants the child to bear his name. Yet, as was noted in the preceding chapter, he refers to Fanny as a false father, implying his subscription to gender-normative ideas about parenting. Simone, as the following exchange with Fanny demonstrates, worries that she will be considered inferior to the biological grandmother:

“Ce ne sera pas mon petit-enfant.”

“Si, nous allons l’élever comme un couple.”

“Mais tu n’es pas le père!”

“Non, il aura deux mères.”

²⁸² Megan Fulcher and others, ‘Contact with Grandparents among Children Conceived via Donor Insemination by Lesbian and Heterosexual Mothers’, *Parenting*, 2 (2002), 61–76.

²⁸³ Danielle Julien, Marie-France Bureau, and Annie Leblond de Brumath, ‘Grand-parentalité et homoparentalité au Québec: Nouvelles dispositions législatives et proximité des liens en fonction de la composition familiale’, in *Grands-parents et grands-parentalités*, ed. by Benoît Schneider, Marie-Claude Mietkiewicz, and Sylvain Bouyer (Ramonville Sainte-Agne: Érès, 2005), pp. 199–217.

²⁸⁴ Herbrand, p. 188.

“Pourquoi ce n’est pas toi la vraie mère?”

“Je ne voulais pas être enceinte et Cécile, elle, en avait très envie. Le choix s’est fait comme ça. Mais c’est mon enfant.”

“Je ne comprends rien.”

“Je sais, c’est difficile à appréhender comme situation. Mais tu seras sa grand-mère, je te le garantis.”

“Moins que l’autre, la mère de la vraie mère.” (MQV 184)

Simone’s confusion stems from her unquestioning acceptance of the heterosexual nuclear family as the cornerstone of kinship. Unlike Fanny, who is able to envisage a family comprising two mothers and no father, Simone cannot imagine a situation other than the biogenetically linked mother–father–child triangulation. Whereas Fanny thus underscores her and her mother’s role as functional parents, Simone delegitimizes their relationship to the child because it is not grounded in biology. Indeed, as Cécile reflects, ‘[l]e seul point [que Simone] comprenait était que ce n’était pas sa fille qui portait l’enfant, donc elle ne voyait pas très bien ce que Fanny venait faire là-dedans’ (MQV 185). Cécile’s parents, who are initially delighted by the news of their daughter’s pregnancy, are shocked when they learn that the couple’s sperm donor will have no hand in raising the child and try to assimilate Fanny’s status as a comother to the normative paternal role. Like Simone, then, they unquestioningly accept the biogenetically linked mother–father–child triangulation as the founding principle of kinship and, therefore, assert that the donor, because of his biogenetic connection to the child, is *de facto* a father.

In *Family Pride*, Anna’s mother, Béatrice, is delighted by Cécile and her daughter’s plan to become mothers via a coparenting arrangement, yet she admits to Cécile that she is relieved to be the child’s biological grandmother:

“Ça ne doit pas être évident pour [tes parents]. Tu sais, je ne sais pas comment je réagirais moi, si Anna m’apprenait que tu es enceinte. Malgré toute l’affection que je te porte, je ne serais pas précisément transportée de joie. C’est compliqué, votre histoire. Et même si Anna s’est chargée de faire mon éducation en m’en faisant voir des vertes et des pas mûres, eh bien, ce n’est pas évident.” (FP 193–94)

Despite her open-mindedness, then, Béatrice gains reassurance from being able to position herself within the culturally recognized framework of biogenetic kinship and sympathizes with Cécile’s parents because they are, as non-biological grandparents, excluded from this framework. Béatrice thus exposes the hierarchy in the kinship network. On the other hand, she demonstrates her understanding of the coparenting arrangement—“j’ai à peu près compris comment ça marchait entre vous quatre” (FP 195)—when she asks to meet the child’s fathers, pointing out that they will, on occasion,

cross paths.

Although several of the grandparents in *Mais qui va garder le chat?* and *Family Pride* are confused or troubled by their daughter's plan to parent, it would be hasty to conclude that these novels portray grandparents as staunch defenders of the normative status of biogenetic kinship. Indeed, they quickly come to terms with the prospect of becoming the grandparent of a lesbian-parented child. In *Mais qui va garder le chat?*, Simone is persuaded by her best friends that she will be a grandmother to the child, despite the absence of a biogenetic connection. In *Family Pride*, Jean-Louis and Solange, having reacted unfavourably to the revelation of Anna's pregnancy, subsequently invite Anna and Cécile for Christmas, leading to the family's reconciliation. To some degree, then, the grandparents' initial defence of the heterosexual nuclear family is an in-the-moment response to the news of their daughter's plans. With time, they are quickly able to work through the discourses that preclude gay and lesbian kinship—namely, the importance of biology in the definition of kinship relations—and position themselves within their daughter's family. Following Gross, who argues that non-biological grandparents' capacity to relate to their grandchildren depends ultimately on the stability of their daughter's identity as a non-biological mother, the texts suggest that the non-biological grandparents are able to come to terms with their status vis-à-vis the child because the parents, as Chapter Three shows, insist on equalizing the importance of biology and caregiving as modes of parental involvement.²⁸⁵ The texts therefore contend that, ultimately, caregiving is recognized, even by the older members of the family, as a mode of parenting that is as legitimate as biology.

Family law in Belgium and Quebec has accepted gay and lesbian parenting for longer than in France, yet the studies cited earlier suggest that grandparents across the West attach considerable importance to being biogenetically connected to their grandchildren. If legal reform offers some protection for non-biological parents and grandparents, it does not automatically provide the impetus for ideological change. This points to the need for the cultural and social visibility of non-normative modes of the grandparent–grandchild relationship, of which literary representations are an example. The novels by Girard and Cinq-Fraix expose the biogenetic definition of kinship to which grandparents are often attached, but they ultimately call for a socially constructed understanding of the grandparent–grandchild connection. All three novels show the impact that becoming a

²⁸⁵ Gross, 'Être grand-parent dans un contexte homoparental en France', p. 75.

mother has on the mother's extended family. Equally, the novels illustrate the impact of extended family members on experiences of mothering. Indeed, reversing Gross's claim, Herbrand argues that non-biological grandparents' acceptance of their role is essential to the coparent's recognition of his or her own status as a legitimate parent.²⁸⁶ The repercussions of lesbian mothering extend even beyond the extended family to wider society. In France, one sign of this is the formation of gay and lesbian parenting associations. This chapter now turns to the portrayal of these associations in the texts, to the texts' view of identity politics, and to their impact on wider society.

Beyond the Family, Beyond the Narrative

Gay and lesbian parenting associations are based on identity politics: they promote the interests of the social groups with which their members identify on the grounds that these groups are, by virtue of their identity, victims of discrimination and oppression. Central to this cause is the groups' cultural, political, and social visibility. The modern LGBT movement has its roots in identity politics. Early gay liberationist tracts like Denis Altman's *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation* (1971) and Jeffrey Weeks's *Coming Out* (1977) call on gays and lesbians to publicly declare their sexuality in order to expose and challenge their oppression.²⁸⁷ The development of queer theory since the 1990s has given rise to doubts about the effectiveness of identity politics as a force of ideological change. In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler warns that identity politics is limited by its reliance on categories that serve to support normative regimes: 'The mobilization of identity categories for the purposes of politicization always remain[s] threatened by the prospect of identity becoming an instrument of the power one opposes'.²⁸⁸ By taking as its starting point social groups with which people identify, identity politics presupposes the stability and universality of identity categories. Against this, Butler advocates a permanently unstable notion of identity. For Butler, identity is performatively constituted: it is the always-incomplete product, rather than a fixed prerequisite, of constantly reproducing behaviour. In Butler's view, then, political change lies not in fighting for social groups with a supposedly shared identity, but in the radical critique of identity itself: if identity is performative, the norms to which we are expected to conform lack a

²⁸⁶ Herbrand, p. 188.

²⁸⁷ Denis Altman, *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation* (New York: New York University Press, 1993 [1971]); Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present*, 2nd edn (London: Quartet Books, 1990 [1977]).

²⁸⁸ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, pp. xxvii–xxviii.

basis in reality. In *Beyond Identity Politics: Feminism, Power & Politics* (2005), Moya Lloyd rejects the assumption made by identity politics that a stable subject precedes and is independent of politics; rather, the subject 'is itself a political effect'.²⁸⁹ While she acknowledges that the 'idea of "woman" and her pain has mobilized many feminist campaigns', Lloyd suggests that these campaigns do not 'act on behalf of a pre-existing subject' but, rather, 'produce a subject through their activity'.²⁹⁰ For Lloyd, destabilizing the subject does not foreclose but, on the contrary, makes feminist politics possible. She therefore argues that feminism, instead of clinging to the belief that it requires a stable subject for the purpose of political action, must adopt a conception of the subject as permanently in-process.²⁹¹ Identity politics has also been criticized for reifying differences. Even Altman and Weeks oppose the separatism of gay liberationists and concede that the movement's insistence on coming out risks ghettoizing homosexuals.²⁹² Yet to not come out is to remain invisible. The desire for visibility versus the danger of self-othering is, then, a paradox of identity politics.

A way around this paradox is Gayatri Spivak's notion of strategic essentialism or, in her words, 'a *strategic* use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest'.²⁹³ Strategic essentialism, then, operates on a false notion of identity as fixed and universal in order to engineer political change. This does not preclude the nuanced vision of identity just outlined. As Lloyd argues in her study of feminism and identity politics, '[r]ecognizing that the subject is permanently in-process does not mean that politically feminists cannot act, at times, *as if* women share features in common, even an essential, unchanging womanliness'.²⁹⁴ In the present context, strategic essentialism entails falsely presenting gay and lesbian parents as a unified category in order to secure their legal and social parity. The portrayal of gay and lesbian parenting associations in Girard's *Mais qui va garder le chat?* and Cinq-Fraix's *Family Pride* suggests that there is still a need for strategic forms of identity politics. I begin by analysing the portrayal of these associations in these texts, arguing that the fictionalization of these associations functions to underscore the impact that gay and lesbian couples' decision to become parents is having on wider society. I then examine how far these texts, as well as Céliier's *Maman, Mamour*

²⁸⁹ Moya Lloyd, *Beyond Identity Politics: Feminism, Power & Politics* (London: SAGE, 2005), p. 30.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

²⁹² Altman, p. 238; Weeks, p. 7.

²⁹³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, Routledge Classics (London: Routledge, 2006 [1987]), p. 281.

²⁹⁴ Lloyd, pp. 27–28.

and Blanc's *Elles eurent beaucoup d'enfants*, subscribe to identity politics and to efforts to increase the visibility of gay and lesbian parents. Lastly, I study their reception among readers in order to consider the impact of the texts beyond the level of the narratives and suggest that they are having an influence on wider society.

Family Pride makes explicit reference to the APGL, thus blurring the divide between fiction and reality. These associations are important because they show gay and lesbian parents that they are not alone in their situation. Indeed, Anna takes heart from finding the testimonies of other gay and lesbian parents, as she tells Cécile: “Nous ne sommes pas seules au monde, comme tu vas pouvoir le constater” (FP 108). The information that these associations provide in turn provides the couple with a sense that their *projet d'enfant* is both feasible and legitimate:

Coparentalité, homoparentalité, parent biologique, parent social, parent légal... un Nouveau Monde familial s'ouvrit alors sous mes yeux. Oui, c'était intéressant et surtout nouveau. Des études, des témoignages, une réalité, une réflexion, des actions. Tout un vocabulaire inédit que je découvrais avec curiosité. (FP 109)

It is significant, given that Anna discovers her pregnancy in 2000—that is, before the term “homoparentalité” entered the dictionary—that the text engages with the “language” of gay and lesbian parenting and that it refers to the APGL at a time when the association had less than 1 000 members. In this respect, Cécile and Anna are represented as frontrunners in the drive to become lesbian mothers and to make gay and lesbian families visible. Cécile and Anna's unsuccessful Internet search for same-sex parenting—the search engine yields no results and suggests that “homoparentalité” is a spelling error—is a reminder of the invisibility of this phenomenon at the time when the novel is set. The novel goes on to cite definitions of “homoparentalité” and “coparentalité”:

“Homoparentalité: *terme englobant plusieurs situations différentes de parentalité dans lesquelles au moins un parent est homosexuel: enfants nés d'une union hétérosexuelle antérieure, enfants adoptés, enfants nés grâce à la procréation médicalement assistée, insémination artificielle avec donneur ou participation d'une mère pour autrui, enfants nés dans le cadre d'une coparentalité.*

Coparentalité: *projet de parentalité impliquant un homme et une femme dont l'un au moins est homosexuel, et leurs partenaires éventuels.*” (FP 109)

In this passage, the novel develops its engagement with the jargon of gay and lesbian parenting. By deploying and explaining these terms, the novel works to legitimize the social phenomenon that they represent—that is to say, the fact that homosexuals are and aspire to be parents.

Mais qui va garder le chat?, although it too alludes to the language of gay and lesbian parenting, also points to the limitations of this lexicon, as I suggested in Chapter Three. Fanny dismisses the term “co-mère” as ugly and mockingly compares the term “co-parent” to the words “co-équipier” and “co-proprétaire”. While these terms meet the needs of the social scientific literature on same-sex parenting, they are too clinical for “real” homosexual parents. The texts thus expose the limitations of the language that is used to talk about homosexuals parenting. Nonetheless, the incorporation of a neatly and newly coined language of same-sex parenting into the French lexicon reflects the repercussions of homosexuals’ desire to become parents on wider society. The words “homoparentalité” and its adjectival cognate “homoparental” have no direct equivalent in English. Indeed, their possible direct translations—“homoparentality”, “homoparenting”, “homoparenthood”, and “homoparental”—are rarely used, even in academic and activist circles. Instead, English speakers prefer to modify the root term, “parenting”, using adjectives, thereby creating terms such as “same-sex parenting”, “LGBT parenting”, and “gay and lesbian parenting”. The opposing linguistic strategies for inscribing a shared phenomenon are a mark of the culturally constructed nature of kinship and of how different cultures are, on a linguistic level, dealing with, and having to deal with, the demands of gay and lesbian couples to become parents. While this might in part be attributed to the differing linguistic norms of English and French, it is interesting that “same-sex parenting”—perhaps the most common translation of “homoparentalité”—explicitly foregrounds the same-sex couple, whereas “homoparentalité” underscores the homosexuality of the parent(s). On the one hand, the meaning of “homoparentalité”, which refers to any family configuration in which at least one parent is homosexual, is thus broader than that of “same-sex parenting”. On the other, the French emphasis on the homosexuality of the parents seems to exclude other non-heterosexual identities, such as bisexuality, from parenting and to preserve the hetero–homo binary.

Whereas *Family Pride* refers explicitly to the APGL, *Mais qui va garder le chat?* fictionalizes a gay and lesbian parenting association, which is represented by gay and lesbian parenting expert Sabine Choiseul. Following a meeting with Sabine, Cécile becomes a member of this association. As in *Family Pride*, gay and lesbian parenting associations are portrayed as institutions that bestow on the lesbian couple a sense that their desire to opt into parenthood is legitimate. This legitimacy is vital in the context of the novels, which were published before gay and lesbian families obtained legal recognition, and remains important even after the adoption of the Taubira Law, given the

ongoing attempts of anti-same-sex marriage groups, most notably the *Manif pour tous*, to spread negative discourses of gay and lesbian parenting. Through the fictional association in *Mais qui va garder le chat?*, Cécile and Fanny go to a picnic organized by and for gay and lesbian parents and their families. As in *Family Pride*, in which Anna, Cécile, Éric and Benoît receive an invitation to a gathering of would-be gay and lesbian parents, the couple benefit from being able to meet other gay and lesbian couples with children. From the start, Cécile and Fanny have lesbian and gay friends who have children. Indeed, the novel's opening scene depicts Cécile and Fanny attending a gathering organized by their friends, Anne, Laetitia, and Serge, to mark the seventh birthday of their daughter. By beginning the novel in this way, Girard immediately positions her protagonists alongside another gay and lesbian family and gives the reader a sense of what will come to pass. The presence of other gay and lesbian families in the novel works also to normalize them and to create, as Cécile puts it, “[u]ne vraie pub pour la famille homo” (MQV 72). Moreover, Anne participates in a documentary about same-sex parents; thus, the novel fictionalizes the increasing interest in and wider cultural and social impact of gay and lesbian parenting, as Cécile reflects at the end of the novel: ‘La cause des parents homos commençait à devenir intéressante pour les politiques’ (MQV 211).

Although *Mais qui va garder le chat?* fictionalizes gay and lesbian parenting networks and recognizes the entry of same-sex parenting into the political sphere at the time of publication, the narrator, Cécile, is relatively resistant to lesbian identity politics. Her and Magali's decision to be discreet about their relationship to all but their closest friends and the fact that Cécile remains closeted at work challenge gay liberationists' insistence that coming out is integral to homosexuals' emancipation. Unlike gay liberationists, Cécile sees little need to claim and proclaim a lesbian identity. Moreover, she is reluctant to join and attend the events organized by the same-sex parenting network discussed above. Most strikingly, Cécile is annoyed by her friend Claire's commitment to lesbian activism and dismisses her critique of the heterosexist and patriarchal norms that curtail expressions of lesbian sexuality. Claire laments that women, unlike men, are stigmatized if they “pull” overtly or change sexual partners frequently; and that butch lesbians are regarded as wannabe men if they do not conform to norms of femininity, whereas camp gay men are branded as effeminate but not as women. Although the novel thus acknowledges the lesbian activist perspective, the narrator's immediate disavowal of this perspective suggests the novel's overall scepticism of identity politics: ‘Ce discours m’agaçait. Je n’avais jamais été attirée par un militantisme quelconque et la cause lesbienne était pour

moi une nébuleuse à laquelle je n'avais pas l'impression d'appartenir' (MQV 102). For lesbian readers, it is perhaps frustrating that the novel's narrator rejects the radical stance of the character in the minor role and that Cécile's view reads more like a backlash against lesbian freedom than a queer-inspired critique of the limits of identity. The narrator sees little point in furthering the presence of alternative identities in the public sphere.

Other characters in the novel are less resistant to forms of identity politics. Anne's perspective on the talk-show in which she participates defends the merits of seeking visibility for oppressed groups: 'Elle pensait que plus on parlerait de ce genre de sujet, plus ils entreraient dans les mœurs' (MQV 87). Furthermore, Fanny is willing to participate in the gay and lesbian parenting association that Cécile resists. She is also undecided on the matter of gay and lesbian separatism. Following the harassment scene, Fanny writes in her diary:

Je n'ai jamais été confrontée à ce genre de situation. Cécile dit que c'est parce que je me protège en restant le plus possible dans un milieu homo. Si c'est vrai je m'en félicite. Je m'en veux aussi, ça me coupe des réalités. Celles de la société. Sont-elles vraiment nécessaires à affronter? Ne vaut-il pas mieux se créer sa propre réalité, un monde à soi? (MQV 64)

For Fanny, gay and lesbian separatism affords her a degree of protection from the harassment of heterosexist society. Fanny suggests the need for a specifically homosexual reality where homosexuality can be practised freely.

Unlike *Mais qui va garder le chat?*, *Elles eurent beaucoup d'enfants* explicitly supports lesbian identity politics. Indeed, the very fact that Blanc updated and republished the 2005 edition of the text testifies to her commitment to increasing the visibility of gay and lesbian parenting. Furthermore, Blanc explains that she briefly worked for the APGL, which suggests her belief that gay and lesbian parents need to be politically represented. Strikingly, *Elles eurent beaucoup d'enfants* functions as a call to gay and lesbians to come out: 'Montrons-nous, et montrons-nous heureux, montrons nos enfants épanouis, nous le leur devons bien!' (HFH 52). Here, in what would be the introduction to the first edition, Blanc insists on the need for gay and lesbian parents to claim their identity; the use of the first person imperative functions almost as a call to arms and is a mark of the collectiveness integral to identity politics. Blanc reinforces her claim to a lesbian identity when she explains, perhaps ironically, that she wanted to give her text the provocative title *Comment l'enfant vient aux goudoues*. Forced to renounce this title due to its potential offensiveness, Blanc settles for writing: 'Goudoue je suis, donc. J'ai cédé pour le titre, mais ne vous croyez pas quittes pour le reste du livre!' (HFH 53). Sarcastic intent

or not, the text's alternative title illustrates a defiance that resonates with Blanc's defence of gay pride. Although she questions the term—is one proud to be gay?—she recognizes the need for an event that lifts the traditional shame surrounding homosexuality. Unlike Cécile in *Mais qui va garder le chat?*, Blanc opposes the need felt by some same-sex couples to hide. While she and her partner avoid public displays of affection—or 'exhibitionnisme', as Blanc puts it (HFH 60)—for fear of harassment, the specificity of their family is known to their immediate community. For Blanc:

Si nous voulons que nos princesses soient bien dans leurs godasses d'enfants de goudoues, le moins que nous puissions faire pour elles, c'est de montrer que nous n'avons pas honte de ce que nous sommes, ni de notre famille. D'être visibles enfin. (HFH 60)

Blanc argues that it is in her children's interests that she and her partner publicly identify with their lesbianism and that visibility is essential to establishing the legitimacy of same-sex-parent families: 'Si nous homoparents restons des fantômes, nous suscitons peur ou dégoût. C'est en nous montrant que nous désamorçons la bombe' (HFH 60).

Blanc's subscription to identity politics recalls Spivak's notion of strategic essentialism. Following Spivak, Blanc uses identity as a means through which to push for legal rights for same-sex parents. For example, Blanc insists on the need to legalize same-sex marriage and adoption in order to protect same-sex parents and their children: 'Ils ont un besoin urgent de ces droits' (HFH 47); 'Oui, la loi sur le mariage et l'adoption est urgente!' (HFH 48). Blanc's recourse to identity aims not to group all same-sex-parent families into an essentialist, homogeneous category—indeed, Blanc does not claim to speak for all gay and lesbian parents or deny the specificities of all families—but to secure legal recognition for them. In her study of coming-out narratives, Judith Roof criticizes the logic of strategic essentialism, arguing that it fails to account for the constructed nature of identity categories: 'Even imagining visibility as a politically effective ploy for the establishment of gay male and lesbian rights and recognition means understanding visibility as bound up with a knowledge of identity.'²⁹⁵ This view is undoubtedly inspired by queer theory's emphasis on the performativity of identity. Roof's argument is pertinent, but Blanc's approach also has merit in that it puts practical concerns ahead of somewhat abstract theoretical drawbacks.

The above readings are supported by the fact that, beyond the narratives, some of the

²⁹⁵ Judith Roof, *Come As You Are: Sexuality and Narrative* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 146.

authors are working hard to engrain gay and lesbian couples' desire to become parents into the French collective imaginary. Blanc's commitment to increasing the visibility of gay and lesbian families is further underlined by the appearance of her story in mainstream newspapers, magazines, and on the radio, and the text has been the object of several book signings. In an interview with Michel Duponcelle for TQ Magazine, Blanc says about living in the countryside, which are generally held to be more conservative than urban areas: 'Je pense même, avec modestie, et à notre échelle, que nous contribuons à plus d'ouverture d'esprit et de compréhension envers les homos en général et les familles homoparentales en particulier'.²⁹⁶ This is a statement not just about the importance of visibility for same-sex parents but is Blanc's claim to be making an impact. Indeed, Blanc refers at another point in the interview to her "contribution" to same-sex parents' activism. The appearance of Blanc's story in mainstream media testifies not only to the need for visibility but to a public interest in gay and lesbian parents, since it is reasonable to assume that media production is in part dictated by the interests of the market. Articles about Blanc's text have appeared in well-reputed broadsheet newspapers such as *France Soir* and the regional newspaper, *Le Dauphiné Libéré*, as well as in the Belgian newspaper *Le Soir*. The journalists' overwhelmingly positive reception of the author and her text—the article published in *Le Soir* refers to it as 'un petit livre délicieux et percutant'²⁹⁷—is evidence of changing attitudes towards homosexuality and homosexual parenting. Like Blanc, Célier seems committed to promoting the visibility of gay and lesbian families. In 2009, she, Dominique, and Géraldine featured in a one-hour documentary entitled *Parents comme ci, enfants comme ça*, which, like Célier's text, seeks to undermine stereotypes about the negative effects of same-sex parenting on children. A story about Célier and her partner's marriage in 2013 featured in the regional newspaper, *La Montagne*, and an interview with Célier was published in gay and lesbian magazine *Têtu*.²⁹⁸ Blanc's and Célier's participation in the public sphere, both as writers and in the media, reinforces the claims made in their texts about the need to make same-sex parenting visible.

Regardless of the authors' opinions on identity politics, their decision to publish their

²⁹⁶ Michel Duponcelle and Myriam Blanc, 'Myriam Blanc: "et elles eurent beaucoup d'enfants..."', *TQ Magazine*, 237, September 2005, pp. 30–31 (p. 31).

²⁹⁷ Hugues Dorzée and Jean-Pierre Borloo, 'Deux "goudoues" et un couffin', *Le Soir*, 30 May 2005, p. 7.

²⁹⁸ Véronique Lacoste-Metty, 'Une très longue manche de fiançailles', *La Montagne*, 7 July 2013, p. 6; Taina Tervonen and Brigitte Célier, 'Maman, Mamour, ses deux mamans: Interview de Brigitte Célier', 30 June 2008 <http://www.univers-l.com/maman_mamour_ses_deux_mamans_interview_brigitte_celier.html> [accessed 31 March 2017].

work and appearances in interviews and newspapers are ultimately a demand for visibility. By virtue of their very presence in the public sphere, the texts contribute to the visibility of gay and lesbian parents. An effective means of assessing the texts' visibility is to consider how they have been received by readers. The texts have yet to receive attention from renowned literary critics, suggesting that the texts have largely appealed only to a niche market. However, on the websites of Amazon and Fnac, a small number of readers have commented, mostly positively, on the texts and rated them four or five stars. Of course, only a fraction of readers take the time to review a text; only readers with strong feelings, positive or negative, are likely to comment, and those vehemently opposed to gay and lesbian parenting are perhaps less likely to purchase these texts. This partly explains why the reception of these texts seems positive. It is more instructive, then, to examine what readers' reviews say, and what they do not say, about the texts.

The readers' reviews of these texts exhibit three principal trends or tendencies. Firstly, and most significantly, a number of readers relate the texts' representation of lesbian mothering to the wider social and political debates on same-sex parents. For example, one reviewer of *Maman, Mamour* writes:

L'histoire de Maman et Mamour est d'actualité. Face aux mots des manifestants, une histoire pleine d'amour et de tendresse, sans tabou les questions sont posées, abordées et des réponses tentent d'être apportées.

Un beau témoignage qui peut permettre d'élever le débat!

Similarly, a reviewer of *Family Pride* writes: 'Une histoire qui décrit le combat pour se sentir parent, la solitude de ces personnages quand la société les abandonne ou les renie. Les histoires d'amour qui tentent de survivre à l'arrivée d'un enfant'. Finally, a reviewer of *Mais qui va garder le chat?* refers to the novel as 'un roman d'utilité publique' that 'soulève et répond à de nombreuses questions que le grand public peut se poser sur les couples lesbiens et sur l'homoparentalité'. The readers' references to same-sex parenting testify to the social and political visibility of this phenomenon in contemporary France. The review of *Mais qui va garder le chat?* is particularly significant in that it alludes to the power of literature to engineer ideological and political change. Indeed, one reader of *Elles eurent beaucoup d'enfants* evokes the text's questioning of negative stereotypes about the effects of same-sex parenting on children: 'Leurs filles ont grandi, elles sont aussi loufoques et équilibrées que les miennes. Elles veulent se marier, moi je divorce! Et après ça, on dit que ce sont les couples homos qui ne tournent pas rond...'. Blanc's text has seemingly compelled this reader to publicly

challenge the view that same-sex parenting is bad for children and that a same-sex couple cannot provide the stable environment required to raise a child. Another review echoes Blanc's own view that lesbian families are, at least in terms of the emotional attachment between parents and children, no different from other families: '[C]ette histoire c'est la leur [...], celle des familles homoparentales, celle d'une famille plutôt comme les autres'. Studying readers' responses to the texts reveals that they are keen to use their reviews as a chance to make their own largely progressive ideological and political statements about gay and lesbian parenting. This points to the gradual erosion of norms of the family in contemporary France and to the impact of the texts on wider society. That said, one particularly long review of Blanc's text illustrates the continued entrenchment of these norms. The text, this reader argues, is sexist: '[C]e genre de témoignage relégu[e] les hommes à des jets de sperme et mutil[e] les enfants dans leur filiation'. This reviewer justifies his/her conservatism by painting his/her argument as a defence of the rights of fathers and children and by supporting it with references to associations and texts opposed to same-sex parenting, which s/he describes as 'un peu de variation dans le politiquement correct ambiant'. The reviewer misguidedly equates Blanc's defence of lesbian mothering with an attack on fatherhood—an interpretation that recycles patriarchal images of lesbians as man-haters. In fact, Blanc openly recognizes the rights of fathers when she calls for the legalization of surrogacy, the use of a surrogate mother being a means by which gay male couples could become parents.

Secondly, it is notable that a handful of reviews interpreted the texts as "truth claims" about same-sex parenting. Although undeniably problematic—indeed, Blanc and Célier resist the interpretation of their experiences as truth claims, instead presenting them merely as contributions to the debate on gay and lesbian parenting—readers' references to the "authenticity", "realism", and "truth" of the works grant same-sex-parents a legitimacy that they have traditionally been denied. Moreover, they presuppose the existence of negative stereotypes that, according to readers, are rightly being challenged. This attitude underscores the increasing acceptance of same-sex parent families in contemporary France.

Finally, what becomes most evident in reading the reviews is the pleasure that reviewers obtained simply from reading the texts. Indeed, most reviewers refer to the authors' agreeable style, charm, light touch, and good sense of humour. The form and genre of the texts will be examined further in Chapter Five, but suffice it say, for now, that the enjoyment derived from reading these texts demonstrates that, for readers,

representations of lesbian mothering serve not only to inform political and social debate but to entertain. It would be cynical to interpret this as a transformation of lesbian mothering into an object of consumption. Rather, it is surely a sign of the gradual integration of lesbian mothering into the definition of the accepted family and of the sense of legitimacy that lesbian-parent readers acquire through reading the text. Since to publish a text is, by definition, to make it public, to demand visibility, it also demonstrates the effectiveness of visibility as a force of ideological change.

This section has examined the impact that the decision to become parents made by the couples in the texts by Girard, Cinq-Fraix, Célier, and Blanc has repercussions beyond both their respective families and the narratives themselves. The growing number of gay and lesbian couples making this decision has given rise to the formation of same-sex parenting associations, which, in the novels by Girard and Cinq-Fraix, play a role in legitimizing the couples' desire to become parents. Despite its largely positive portrayal of these associations, Girard's novel is sceptical of identity politics in general. In contrast, Célier and Blanc are committed to campaigning for equality for gay and lesbian people and their families. Beyond the narratives, Célier and Blanc are adding to the repercussions of gay and lesbian parenting on French society. Finally, the largely positive reviews of the four texts and, in particular, readers' references to the debates on same-sex parenting, demonstrate the impact that the narratives are, in real terms, having on French society as a whole.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to illustrate the ways in which the decision to become a lesbian mother has repercussions beyond mothers themselves. Focusing on the mothers' own parents, the first section of this chapter examined how and to what extent the grandparents in the texts covered position themselves in relation to their grandchildren, notably in the absence of a culturally legitimized biological link. While some grandparents defend the normative biologicistic definition of the family, the texts ultimately recognize caregiving as an equally valid mode of parenting. Postulating that the repercussions of lesbian mothering extend beyond what is traditionally designated as the family, the second section of this chapter began by discussing the representation of gay and lesbian parenting associations in Girard's and Cinq-Fraix's novels, arguing that the portrayal of these associations functions to emphasize the impact that gay and lesbian couples' desire to become parents is having on wider society. The references within the texts to the impact

of gay and lesbian parenting on wider society made it pertinent to explore the texts' position on identity politics and their impact on society beyond the narratives. Overall, the texts, particularly those by Céliier and Blanc, defend the need for strategic forms of identity politics. Although the texts have yet to draw the attention of established literary critics, suggesting that their visibility remains relatively limited, readers' reviews indicate that they are contributing to the deconstruction of negative stereotypes about gay and lesbian parents in French society. The following chapter brings together the ten texts studied in this thesis through a discussion of literary form and genre.

5

Gender and Genre

In his introduction to *Modern Genre Theory* (2000), David Duff explains that the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were marked by efforts to dispense with the notion of literary genres.²⁹⁹ The word “genre” has two meanings: it refers, on the one hand, to the form of a text—for example, we might say that a text is an autobiography, essay, novel, or poem, to name a few; on the other hand, the word is often used to describe the broad themes of a text, so we might classify a text as a bildungsroman, romance novel, tragedy, work of science fiction, and so on. For the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century critic, genre, in both senses of the term, ‘carries unmistakable associations of authority and pedantry’.³⁰⁰ When a text claims to be a particular genre, the reader expects it to adhere to particular conventions. Heather Dubrow illustrates this point with a straightforward example: if, in a detective novel, the murderer being pursued turned out to be a ghost, the reader would feel cheated; were the text a Gothic novel, however, the reader would accept, even anticipate, that a ghost could be the culprit.³⁰¹ The very notion of literary genres—the assumption that all texts belong to groups sharing particular conventions—seems, to some degree, to contest the autonomy of the author, the originality of the text, and any claim to self-expression.³⁰²

Towards the end of the twentieth century, however, the negative connotations of genre started to fade. As the rise of autofiction shows, genre and the creation of new generic categories can in fact be an instrument of literary creativity. Serge Doubrovsky claims to have written his first autofiction, *Fils* (1977), in order to address a gap in Philippe Lejeune’s definition of autobiography. Specifically, Doubrovsky was interested in creating a text in which author, narrator, and protagonist share the same name but which

²⁹⁹ David Duff, ‘Introduction’, in *Modern Genre Theory*, ed. by David Duff (London: Longman, 2000), pp. 1–24 (p. 1).

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

³⁰¹ Heather Dubrow, *Genre* (London: Methuen, 1982), pp. 1–3.

³⁰² Duff, p. 1.

has an overtly fictionalized narrative framework.³⁰³ In the preface to *Fils*, Doubrovsky further defines autofiction as a work that challenges the elitism and linguistic norms of autobiography:

Autobiographie? Non, c'est un privilège réservé aux importants de ce monde, au soir de leur vie, et dans un beau style. Fiction, d'événements et de faits strictement réels; si l'on veut, *autofiction*, d'avoir confié le langage d'une aventure à l'aventure du langage, hors sagesse et hors syntaxe du roman, traditionnel ou nouveau.³⁰⁴

Doubrovsky suggests that genre can amplify rather than constrain the possibilities of literature. In particular, writers can use generic norms as a starting point for the revision and subversion of genres and the invention of new literary forms.

Jacques Derrida's 'La Loi du genre' (1980) is an important intervention in the debate on the pros and cons of genre. Ultimately, Derrida defends the inevitability and necessity of genre, suggesting that it is genre that shapes a text's meaning: '[P]eut-on identifier une œuvre d'art [...] qui ne porte la marque d'un genre et qui ne la signale, remarque ou donne à remarquer de quelque façon?'.³⁰⁵ Derrida substantiates this claim by pointing out the deliberate ambiguity of the essay's opening sentences:

Ne pas mêler les genres.

Je ne mêlerai pas les genres.

Je répète: ne pas mêler les genres. Je ne le ferai pas.³⁰⁶

Derrida argues that, as long as these sentences are undefined—that is to say, without a mark of genre—their meaning is unclear. On the one hand, the first statement, '[n]e pas mêler les genres', could be interpreted as the description, not the prescription, of a practice, in which case the following statement would not be a promise but a declaration of what is to come. On the other hand, it would be equally legitimate to understand the first statement as a command and the second as Derrida's submission to it. In this case, Derrida endorses the negative view of genre as a force of oppression:

Dès qu'on entend le mot "genre," dès qu'il paraît, dès qu'on tente de le penser, une limite se dessine. Et quand une limite vient à s'assigner, la norme et l'interdit ne se font pas attendre: "il faut," "il ne faut pas," dit le "genre," le mot "genre," la figure, la voix ou la loi du genre.³⁰⁷

Derrida goes on to deconstruct the law of genre by theorizing what he refers to, at various

³⁰³ Serge Doubrovsky, 'Autobiographie/Vérité/Psychanalyse', *L'esprit créateur*, 20 (1980), 87–97 (p. 89).

³⁰⁴ Serge Doubrovsky, *Fils*, Folio, 3554 (Paris: Galilée, 1977), p. 10.

³⁰⁵ Jacques Derrida, 'La Loi du genre/The Law of Genre', *Glyph*, 7 (1980), 176–232 (p. 185).

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

points in the essay, as the ‘law of impurity’, the ‘principle of contamination’, the ‘counter-law’, or ‘the law of the law of genre’. These hold that genres are de facto impure, contaminated, on the basis that no text can belong to a genre; rather, Derrida argues, a text participates in, but never belongs to, one or several genres. Put another way, the law of the law of genre stipulates that the law of genre cannot be obeyed. Although the essay makes plain the oppressive function of genre, Derrida’s deconstruction of the law of genre enables him to move beyond a reductive pro-genre–anti-genre binary.

Genre, as this discussion shows, has much in common with gender. Aside from their shared etymology—both derive from the Latin word “genus”, meaning “kind”—both gender and genre foster and are fostered by norms. Norms of genre, like norms of gender, can be reinforced, resisted, or subverted. The parallel between gender and genre can be illustrated more precisely by synthesizing the ideas of French literary theorist Jean-Marie Schaeffer with those of Judith Butler. On the relationship between genre and text, Schaeffer persuasively argues that genre does not produce the text but is produced by the text:

Si les objets naturels ont certaines caractéristiques communes, c’est parce qu’ils appartiennent à une même classe, c’est-à-dire viennent à l’existence à travers une causalité génétique qui est interne (à la classe). A l’inverse, si des objets artificiels peuvent former une classe, c’est parce qu’ils ont certaines caractéristiques communes; et ces caractéristiques communes, ils les ont en vertu de causes externes à la classe textuelle, à savoir notamment (bien que sans doute pas exclusivement) des intentions humaines.³⁰⁸

According to Schaeffer, then, artificial objects, like texts, can only form a class, or a genre, via human intervention. Just as Butler, as was discussed in Chapters One and Three, argues that gender is not caused but produced by a set of practices, Schaeffer claims that genre is the product, rather than the result, of shared literary characteristics. For both theorists, then, the phenomenon that is thought to be natural—gender for Butler, genre for Schaeffer—is in fact a norm created by commonly sanctioned conventions. Similar to Butler, who emphasizes the fluidity of gender and warns against the use of identity categories, Schaeffer insists on the malleability of genre and argues against the creation of new generic categories. Instead, the priority should, he further argues, be to analyse the function of genre.³⁰⁹ Following Schaeffer, this chapter considers the generic choices of the ten texts treated in this thesis, as well as the impact of genre on their

³⁰⁸ Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *Qu’est-ce qu’un genre littéraire?* (Paris: Seuil, 1989), pp. 71–72.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 69–70, 75.

representation of lesbianism and mothering. It examines how far these texts fit into established generic categories and how their subversive narratives are influenced, even enhanced, by their form. This chapter is divided into two parts: the first focuses on the novels, the second on the autobiographical texts. While there is, of course, some overlap between novels and autobiographical texts—for example, in an autobiographical novel—this structure, as will be discussed below, distinguishes between texts that are primarily fictional and those that draw extensively on an extratextual reality. Both sections begin by outlining the conventions of the genre in question. They then attempt to position the texts within the literary landscape of their time and, ultimately, to show how genre, particularly the transgression of genre, impacts on the representation of gender.

Before I turn to the texts themselves, it is productive to further outline feminist approaches to the gender–genre question. As Mary Eagleton shows in her comprehensive *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader* (1986), feminist work on gender and genre has taken three main directions.³¹⁰ The first seeks to explain the relationship between women and the novel—the genre with which women have, since the eighteenth century, primarily been associated. The second focuses on how women’s writing can subvert conventional literary forms, often exploring the nexus between conformist or subversive literary form and conservative or progressive portrayals of gender. It therefore suggests that women’s writing can fall outside existing generic categories and that a text’s power to transform normative gender relations may lie in its form. The fictional works of French feminists such as Hélène Cixous and Monique Wittig feature prominently in this strand of criticism due to their authors’ efforts to reconfigure a language that they believe to be fundamental to women’s oppression.³¹¹ The third and most recent strand of feminist work on gender and genre addresses women’s popular fiction, such as detective, romance, science, and utopian fiction. Specifically, this strand of criticism considers how far popular fiction challenges or reinforces normative gender relations and roles. ‘Romance fiction,’ Eagleton remarks, ‘poses particular problems for feminism. Overwhelmingly written by women for women, yet its gender ideology of masterful heroes and doe-eyed heroines is embarrassingly far removed from any feminist ideal of reconstructed male/female

³¹⁰ Mary Eagleton (ed.), *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996 [1986]), pp. 137–43.

³¹¹ For a discussion of French feminist theories of language, see Chapter One. On the fictional works of Cixous and Wittig, see Davis, *Beautiful War*; Gill Rye, *Reading for Change: Interactions between Text and Identity in Contemporary French Women’s Writing (Baroque, Cixous, Constant)* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2001); Shaktini, ‘Displacing the Phallic Subject’; Shaktini, ‘Monique Wittig’s New Language’.

relations'.³¹² This strand of criticism opposes an elitist notion of literary merit that devalues popular fiction, and argues that feminist literary critics must engage with what women actually read. The study of popular fiction has been legitimized by feminism's growing interest in all forms of women's writing and the questioning of the distinction between "high" and "mass" culture brought about by the development of cultural studies.³¹³ Focusing on both literary and popular novels, the first half of this chapter falls mainly into the first and third strands of feminist work on gender and genre; the second half draws mostly on the second strand. It is to the novels by Monferrand, Girard, Cinq-Fraix, and Mallet that the discussion now turns.

The Novel

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, women novelists outnumbered and outshone their male counterparts, yet their contribution to the development of the novel has long been overlooked.³¹⁴ With a few exceptions—George Sand, Madame de Staël, Rachilde—the canonical authors of the nineteenth-century French novel are men: Balzac, Dumas, Flaubert, Hugo, Stendhal, Zola, and so on. However, women were, as Margaret Cohen shows, practising novelists for most of the nineteenth century, describing in their works the 'ills of the feminine condition'.³¹⁵ Thanks to the efforts of feminist literary critics like Cohen, the development of the nineteenth-century novel is now better understood, women's input is increasingly acknowledged, and their novels are analysed critically. Further, lesbian novels have, as was discussed in Chapter One, become the object of sustained academic study. It is in this critical context that the following discussion of the novels selected for this thesis takes place.

A discussion of the novel must begin by tackling the problem of its definition. In his introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to the French Novel* (1997), Timothy Unwin explains why establishing the genre's parameters is challenging:

Given that, in the French tradition in particular, the novel has a history of questioning itself, redefining itself, seeking itself out, challenging its own identity and status as a literary genre, and blending into

³¹² Eagleton, p. 141.

³¹³ Ibid., p. 141; for a discussion of the role of cultural studies in deconstructing the distinction between "high" and "mass" culture, see the Introduction.

³¹⁴ Margaret Cohen, 'Women and Fiction in the Nineteenth Century', in *The Cambridge Companion to the French Novel from 1800 to the Present*, ed. by Timothy Unwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 54–72 (p. 54).

³¹⁵ Margaret Cohen, 'In Lieu of a Chapter on Some French Women Realist Novelists', in *Spectacles of Realism: Gender, Body, Genre*, ed. by Margaret Cohen and Christopher Prendergast (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), pp. 90–119 (p. 91); see also Cohen, 'Women and Fiction'.

other genres, when do we decide that a novel is not a novel any longer?³¹⁶

For Unwin, the answer to this question is ‘to open up the field rather than to close it off’ — that is, to incorporate into a definition of the novel both the highbrow and the lowbrow, the famous and the unknown, the experimental and the traditional.³¹⁷ Similarly, Allan Pasco proposes in *Inner Workings of the Novel* (2010) a straightforward definition of the novel that provides a starting point for this discussion: ‘When I say or write the term, I mean *a long prose fiction that is unified, coherent, and literary*’.³¹⁸ By “literary”, Pasco ‘mean[s] only that the creation must be artistically fashioned, with the apparent intention of making something beautiful’.³¹⁹ Regardless of how successful this attempt is, which, for Pasco, is less important than the attempt itself, the texts by Monferrand, Girard, Cinq-Fraix, and Mallet can be classified as novels: they are all long (at least two hundred pages), coherent, literary, and unified pieces written in prose. Most crucially, although authors often draw on personal experience to write fiction, there is no evidence for reading these works as primarily self-referential. Unlike the texts treated in the next section, they are not marked as autobiographical, and the authors have never declared them to be so. In this section, I examine how the novels’ form and genre influence their treatment of lesbianism. I begin by comparing the highbrow and the lowbrow novels and, specifically, how they portray the lesbian love plot. Second, I discuss the intertextual references to French literary classics in Monferrand’s *Les Amies d’Héloïse* and, to a lesser extent, Cinq-Fraix’s *Family Pride*. I then turn to the absence of lesbian sex from the novels. Finally, I discuss at length the use of the epistolary form in *Les Amies d’Héloïse*.

In a short but insightful discussion of romantic bestsellers in France, Diana Holmes argues that critical responses to mass-market fiction testify to an ‘underlying consensus that easy reading is bad reading’.³²⁰ While literary critics thus dismiss mass-market fiction in favour of experimental literature, it is the former that most readers choose to consume. The claim that easy reading is bad reading is both elitist and false, yet it is reasonable to argue that the conventions of mass-market fiction make it easier to read than experimental works. Holmes emphasizes the clarity, the presence of an omniscient narrator, and the

³¹⁶ Timothy Unwin, ‘On the Novel and the Writing of Literary History’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the French Novel from 1800 to the Present*, ed. by Timothy Unwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 1–15 (p. 3).

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³¹⁸ Allan H. Pasco, *Inner Workings of the Novel: Studying a Genre* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. ix.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

³²⁰ Diana Holmes, ‘The Comfortable Reader: Romantic Bestsellers and Critical Disdain’, *French Cultural Studies*, 21 (2010), 287–96 (p. 289).

relatable characters of mass-market fiction—conventions that serve to foreground plot over form.³²¹ Suzanne Juhasz seconds Holmes’s point about the importance of plot in mass-market fiction: ‘[O]ne factor that distinguishes “literary fiction” from “pulp fiction” is the dependence in the latter on plot rather than style or language as the primary agent for the representation of meaning’.³²² The novels by Cinq-Fraix, Girard, and Mallet exhibit these conventions. Crucially, their style is transparent and, as will be explored below, differs strikingly from the opacity of François’s more experimental autobiographical novel, *Les Bonheurs*, in which description takes precedence over plot. By contrast, the novels by Cinq-Fraix, Girard, and Mallet are plot-centred, and the frequency of dialogue provides easy access to the characters’ emotions.

A recurring theme of mass-market fiction is romance. This, as Holmes demonstrates in *Romance and Readership in Twentieth-Century France* (2006), is equally true of women’s writing, both highbrow and lowbrow. Holmes writes that although romance has always had a place in literature, since the nineteenth century it has been associated with women. While women’s writing is not, as Holmes notes, reducible to love stories, it is often concerned with romance.³²³ For Holmes, central to the romance is the ‘question of whether and how the two primary characters will achieve, or fail to achieve, a lasting union with each other’.³²⁴ According to this definition, both *Les Amies d’Héloïse* and *Le Choix de la reine* are examples of romance fiction; both novels are premised on a love triangle between the protagonist and her two lovers. In a slight reformulation of Holmes’s definition, then, central to these novels is the question of which two of the three lovers will achieve a lasting union with each other. While Monferrand’s sequel and the novels by Girard and Cinq-Fraix are concerned with lesbian love, the plot does not centre on the question highlighted by Holmes but, rather, on experiences of mothering. Significantly, *Les Amies d’Héloïse* and *Le Choix de la reine* challenge the traditional heterosexism of the romance. This challenge should, however, be seen as part of a literary context in which empowering models of lesbian love have, as was discussed in Chapter One, been increasing since the second half of the twentieth century. These novels might be best understood, then, as broadly typical examples of the popular (Mallet) and literary

³²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

³²² Suzanne Juhasz, ‘Lesbian Romance Fiction and the Plotting of Desire: Narrative Theory, Lesbian Identity, and Reading Practice’, *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, 17 (1998), 65–82 (p. 67).

³²³ Diana Holmes, *Romance and Readership in Twentieth-Century France: Love Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 12.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

(Monferrand) French women's romance fiction. For Holmes, the popular and the literary differ 'in the degree of resolution they provide': popular romance 'provide[s] an imaginary experience of needs happily fulfilled, whereas "literary" novels may explore needs and desires in their tension with reality, and without offering solutions'.³²⁵ In keeping with Holmes's distinction, *Le Choix de la reine* ends with closure, with Elena and Raphaëlle reunited after a long period of separation. In *Les Amies d'Héloïse*, however, Héloïse and Erika's reunion is tarnished by Suzanne's death, and their future seems less certain than Elena and Raphaëlle's. Indeed, Héloïse's adultery and Erika's continuing possessiveness portrayed in *Les Enfants d'Héloïse* testifies to this uncertainty. Whereas Monferrand's ending is less clear cut, Mallet's novel ends happily. This harmonious ending is perhaps less creative than Monferrand's. Because Elena chooses Raphaëlle over Louise, the novel recycles stereotypes about the enduring, unsurpassable love for a companion presumed to have long ago disappeared for good. A more positive, reader-response-based position on the novel's ending might, however, emphasize the 'sense of optimism' that it invokes in readers, which is a source of the pleasure of popular fiction.³²⁶ Elena and Raphaëlle's unwavering love restores the reader's faith in relationships in an era when breakups and divorce are fast becoming the norm. In *Les Amies d'Héloïse*, the Héloïse–Erika–Suzanne love triangle challenges stereotypes and asks pervasive questions about the appropriateness of sexual relationships. For example, there is, as noted in Chapter Two, a considerable age gap between Héloïse, Erika, and Suzanne. It is also clear that Erika was Suzanne's pupil when they began their affair. Moreover, the love triangle complements most of the characters' laidback attitude towards fidelity. Even Manuela, Erika's half-sister, bears no resentment towards Héloïse for her affair with Suzanne. In this light, Monferrand's love triangle could be read as a critical stance on compulsory monogamy, embodied by Héloïse's statement that 'l'amour n'est pas exclusif' (ADH 135). By contrast, Mallet's novel, by foregrounding the heroine's need to choose between her lovers in its title, does not beg such questions.

A second feature that marks Monferrand's novels as distinctly highbrow is their abundant use of intertextual references to French literary classics. The Héloïse–Erika–Suzanne love triangle has an important role in linking *Les Amies d'Héloïse* with Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (1782). Laclos's deprecating representation of a love game played by a morally depraved aristocracy during the ancien régime bears some similarity

³²⁵ Ibid., p. 129.

³²⁶ Holmes, 'The Comfortable Reader', p. 288.

with the plot of *Les Amies d'Héloïse*, and Héloïse's manipulation of Erika and Suzanne is compared with that of the womanizing Valmont. Laclos's novel aside, Monferrand's closest textual relative is undoubtedly Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761). By aligning herself with two classic French epistolary novels, Monferrand positions *Les Amies d'Héloïse* within a renowned literary élite. In doing so, she writes lesbian identities into the French literary canon and challenges its androcentrism. Monferrand also deploys intertextual references to lesbian-themed novels and texts, both in *Les Amies d'Héloïse* and in *Les Enfants d'Héloïse*. For Héloïse's daughter, Mélanie, the burgeoning desire for other women is at first an isolating experience—an isolation that is perhaps compounded by Héloïse's discretion regarding her own lesbianism—before she gradually comes to terms with her sexuality by discovering and identifying with characters from the French lesbian literary canon, especially those in the works of Zola and Jeanne Galzy. In *Family Pride*, Cécile undergoes a quasi-identical process. She describes the difficulty in coming to terms with her sexuality, having read in an encyclopaedia that homosexuality was a pathology, before reaching self-acceptance by reading more empowering fictional representations of lesbianism. Like Mélanie, she gradually comes to terms with her sexuality by discovering and identifying with characters from the lesbian literary canon, including those in works by Nathalie Clifford-Barney, Renée Vivien, Liane de Pougy, Radcliffe Hall, and Violette Leduc: 'Ce n'est pas par amour de la littérature, je le jure, j'avais faim. Faim de noms, d'auteurs, de titres, d'histoires' (FP 56); 'Des bons, des pas bons, je m'en foutais, je voulais des histoires et des images' (FP 57). Cécile's thirst for literary representations of interfemale desire indicates the longstanding cultural and social taboo around lesbianism and the important role that literature can have in creating a space for the empowerment and visibility of marginalized identities. Through these intertextual references, Monferrand and Cinq-Fraix might be said to trace the development of, and to position their own work within, a French lesbian genre and, in doing so, to legitimize the treatment of same-sex desire. To return to the analysis of *Les Enfants d'Héloïse*, Mélanie first learns about lesbian desire by reading Zola's deprecating portrayal in *Nana*:

Donc cela existait et c'était tellement horrible que même Zola en était écœuré. Donc elle n'était pas seule et c'était rassurant. Enfin, rassurant? Dans la mesure où cela prouvait qu'elle n'était pas folle, c'est tout. Elle était tarée, et après tout quoi d'étonnant? On prétend toujours que les nobles sont dégénérés, et elle l'était, ce qui constituait une excuse. (EDH 340)

Although reading Zola proves to Mélanie that she is not alone in experiencing same-sex desire, and therefore not mad, Zola's alignment of lesbianism with depravity is of little

reassurance for Mélanie. Her interpretation of Galzy is considerably more positive, however: '[O]n n'était plus du tout dans les sous-entendus effrayants de Zola'; 'Oui, les héroïnes de Galzy se cachaient, mais elles n'avaient pas l'air de se sentir malades ou coupables' (EDH 375). In this way, Monferrand is overviewing the emergence of an empowering literary representation of lesbian desire and love. Whereas Zola aligns lesbianism with the unsayable, condemning it to silence—'Ce restaurant bon marché de Pigalle [...] avait quelque chose d'étrange à cause, justement, du ton allusif de l'auteur' (EDH 339)—Galzy's depiction is more overt. The abundance of intertextual references in the novels allows Monferrand to reappropriate the predominantly male literary canon in order to make female and lesbian identities count.

Héloïse and Mélanie also share a desire to inscribe their sexuality in writing. Interestingly, Monferrand thus fictionalizes both lesbianism and the process of writing about lesbianism. In her first novel, one of Héloïse's letters to Claire includes a love poem of her own creation, which describes the physical side of her relationship with Erika: 'Et le frémissement de ses mains immobiles | Qui me faisaient gémir et me faisaient ployer... | J'ai connu sa douceur dans un plaisir farouche | Et sa brutalité dans un soupir léger' (ADH 94). Héloïse deploys nouns and adjectives in oxymoronic distribution; the stillness of the lover's hands contradicts their quivering, while the narrator's gentle sigh contrasts with the lover's brutality, which is also dichotomized with her gentleness in the previous line. In *Les Enfants d'Héloïse*, Anne, Mélanie, Suzanne, and their cousins begin work on a story entitled *Le Feuilleton*, which initially focuses on the Thirty Years' War. As the others gradually lose interest, Mélanie begins to use the story as a space in which she can come to terms with her lesbianism: '[*Le Feuilleton*] lui servait de point de départ à des rêveries imprécises sur les gens, la vie en général, et surtout les attirances secrètes qu'elle ressentait pour certaines élèves à qui elle n'avait, la plupart du temps, jamais parlé' (EDH 242). By fictionalizing both lesbian desire and its literary construction, the novels underline the importance of writing as a medium of subversion, specifically the creation of a space for the inscription of non-normative gender and sexual identities. For Mélanie, writing becomes a means to affirm a lesbian identity safely: 'Dans ses livres elle se transformerait en homme et décrirait des femmes, des âmes de femme, des corps de femme, ce qui serait une manière de les aimer que personne ne pourrait critiquer' (EDH 341). Undoubtedly, it is problematic that Mélanie cannot assume her lesbianism openly. Yet, at the same time, she is empowered by and enjoys the process of writing about her sexuality.

Given the foregrounding of lesbian desire and love that is common to all of the novels included in this study, it is significant, perhaps surprising, that none contain a description of lesbian sex. Although the novels make it plain that sex takes place, they refuse to eroticize the act by avoiding explicit descriptions. In *Les Amies d'Héloïse*, Monferrand inserts an ellipsis as a substitute for the explicit details of lesbian sex, as in the following passage in which Héloïse recounts her encounter with Melitta:

“Montrez-moi votre chambre.” [...] Après, elle m’a dit: “Tu es complètement folle de t’être mariée, tu n’es pas faite pour ça du tout.”

“Mais non, ne crois pas ça. Ça marchait assez bien.”

“Allons donc! mieux que ça?”, puis [...].

J’ai repris: “Toi aussi tu étais mariée, après tout.” (ADH 343)

The bracketed ellipses indicate Héloïse’s omission of details that she is unwilling to disclose. The fourth occurrence of ‘ça’ preempts Melitta’s instigation of a second sexual act, but the form that this takes is left unsaid. It is easy to see why this could frustrate lesbian readers trying to come to terms with and understand their sexuality through literature: the fact that Héloïse stops short of an overt affirmation of her sexuality through a description of her experience with another woman appears to equate lesbian desire and sex with the unsayable. Perhaps, however, the relative lack of sex in the novel serves to endorse some feminists’ arguments about the potentially useful role of the unsaid in the valorization of female sexuality. According to Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, for instance, female sexuality cannot and should not be defined within the confines of phallogocentric language.³²⁷ Although convinced that female sexuality is characterized by multiplicity, Cixous and Irigaray argue that defining female sexuality follows the patriarchal tradition of restricting it to fixed codes. By omitting the details of sex, *Les Amies d'Héloïse* sidesteps this danger and challenges the traditional male dominance over representations of sex. Instead of describing it graphically, the novel speaks about sex in euphemisms, as exemplified by the references to ‘la chambre’ and ‘ça’ in the above quotation. Héloïse’s coming out to Claire further exhibits the novel’s taste for euphemism: ‘Hier soir je me suis retrouvée dans un lit avec Erika von Tauberg, et j’ai aimé ça’ (ADH 32). Being in a bed together means euphemistically that Héloïse and Erika have had sex. Claire’s subsequent reference to lesbian desire and sex as ‘ces choses-là’ is not a homophobic reaction but a discreet way of talking about sex (ADH 33). Héloïse then responds to

³²⁷ Cixous, p. 39; Irigaray, *Ce sexe*, p. 93.

Claire's letter with more details:

Nous avons décidé de prendre un bain avant de sortir dîner, et c'est là que tout s'est joué. Je me suis retrouvée dans ses bras d'abord, puis sur un lit au milieu d'un tas de serviettes-éponges. Je ne sais pas comment c'est arrivé; et ce qu'elle a fait, ce que nous avons fait toute la nuit, je ne peux pas le raconter. (ADH 35)

The phrases 'tout s'est joué' and 'c'est arrivé' indicate that "it" happened, but precisely what the women did is unclear. Héloïse's refusal to discuss the specifics of what happened suggests a degree of embarrassment, and perhaps the fear of rejection, that evidences her lack of sexual experience. Alternatively, 'je ne peux pas' might, following Cixous, be said to signify Héloïse's inability to communicate female sexual experience using traditional linguistic codes. The euphemistic description of sex enables lesbian readers to construct and fantasize about what is "missing" for themselves, rather than it being imposed on them. The novel thus counters the male tradition of dictating women's sexuality to them. In this light, the subtle inscription of sex is empowering and liberating for lesbian readers.

Of the novels discussed in this section, *Les Amies d'Héloïse* is by far the most intriguing in terms of its genre because it is written in the epistolary form. As Elizabeth Goldsmith remarks, '[t]he association of women's writing with the love-letter genre has been perhaps one of the most tenacious of gender-genre connections in the history of literature'.³²⁸ As early as the sixteenth century, when the letter began to be regarded as a literary form, male commentators observed an affinity between letter writing and the female voice, but to publish women's letters conflicted with norms of female modesty and virtue. As a result, '[w]omen's purported epistolary excellence principally concerned the practice of the genre as a social art while men, however less predisposed towards the genre, exercised it socially *and* literarily'.³²⁹ Indeed, the first epistolary texts were written by men attempting to replicate the style of women's letters. For Katherine Jensen, this appropriation of women's epistolary writing suggests a concern about women's power.³³⁰ The first epistolary texts took the form of instructive manuals teaching the reader how to write letters effectively and contained both invented and real letters written by men and

³²⁸ Elizabeth C. Goldsmith, 'Introduction', in *Writing the Female Voice: Essays on Epistolary Literature*, ed. by Elizabeth C. Goldsmith (London: Pinter, 1989), pp. vii–xiii (p. viii).

³²⁹ Katherine A. Jensen, 'Male Models of Feminine Epistolarity; or, How to Write Like a Woman in Seventeenth-Century France', in *Writing the Female Voice: Essays on Epistolary Literature*, ed. by Elizabeth C. Goldsmith (London: Pinter, 1989), pp. 25–45 (p. 28).

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

women. Jensen's illuminating study of these collections argues that, rather than control female power through the wholesale exclusion of women's letters, men did so by including women's texts as tokens that positioned women in non-literary, social domains or in private, sexual spaces and that represented them as the constant and willing sufferers of unreciprocated desire. Men sought to consolidate their own power and limit by incorporating supposedly representative texts depicting women's sexual subordination into their collections. Goldsmith thus theorizes an interesting paradox about the relationship between women and epistolary writing: 'The one genre with which women have been persistently connected has specialized in narrowing the range of possible inflections for feminine expression'.³³¹ The popularity of the French epistolary novel peaked in the eighteenth century with the publication of Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse* and Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses*. The title of Monferrand's novel echoes that of its Rousseauian predecessor, which itself draws inspiration from the twelfth-century correspondence between Heloise and Abelard. As we have seen, this intertextuality suggests an attempt by Monferrand to align herself with the most prolific epistolary novelists to come out of France and to claim a place for lesbian identities and texts in the French literary canon.

Given the association between women and letter writing, Monferrand's use of the epistolary form could be said to reify norms of femininity. On the other hand, Monferrand gives overwhelming precedence to the female voice, with men playing only a perfunctory role in the novel, thus reversing the male tradition of speaking about and in place of women identified by Cixous. Writing, then, becomes an exclusively female privilege in *Les Amies d'Héloïse*, thus answering Cixous's call for women to write.³³² The plot unfolds through a continuous exchange of letters between, principally, the eponymous heroine and her best friend cum confidante, Claire, but it is interspersed with letters and diary entries written by their female friends, lovers, and relatives. Although men feature in Monferrand's novel, often, like the female characters, in positions of socioeconomic power—for instance, Héloïse's father is an ambassador, and Erika's is a renowned entrepreneur—they feature only as objects of the at times disparaging discourse of their daughters, sisters, and wives. The multitude of voices in *Les Amies d'Héloïse* draws attention to the absence of an omniscient authorial or narrative voice, which, as Elizabeth MacArthur demonstrates in a study of the epistolary form, is a defining characteristic of

³³¹ Goldsmith, p. xii.

³³² Cixous, p. 39.

the genre.³³³ In *Les Amies d'Héloïse*, the chorus of female voices functions to challenge the patriarchal view of women as a fixed and homogeneous group.

To some extent, Monferrand challenges contemporary assumptions about what writing a letter involves. A letter, it is commonly believed, communicates quotidian information and sentiment between two parties in lieu of a face-to-face conversation. In *Les Amies d'Héloïse*, however, some letters include in-depth discussions of notable historical events, extracts from lesbian poetry, and transcriptions of entire conversations. By representing the letter as a space for intellectual and philosophical reflection, and not simply as a space for Héloïse and her lovers to express love for one another, the novel challenges the foregrounding of hopeless female desire in classical epistolary novels but reflects the tradition among artists of using the letter as a space for debate—a tradition that Monferrand might be said to be reclaiming. Other letters, in contrast, contain just a few words. At times, letter writing is portrayed almost as a reflex for Monferrand's characters in times of crisis. When, for example, Héloïse advises Claire to avoid getting pregnant before finishing university, Claire simply responds: 'Trop tard' (ADH 198). Following her first sexual encounter with Héloïse, Erika writes to Suzanne: 'C'est fait. Stop. Ouf. Stop. Tout va bien' (ADH 32). As a result, the letter is a diverse and unstable entity in *Les Amies d'Héloïse*. Erika's letter illustrates again the novel's tendency to hint at, rather than describe, the occurrence of sex. 'C'est' signifies sex, and 'ouf' connotes sexual satisfaction, but the novel refuses to codify lesbian sex.

The novel's instability is reinforced by its use of time. Although time remains linear in *Les Amies d'Héloïse*, with each chapter devoted to one calendar year, the novel distorts chronology by varying the time intervals between letters. Epistolary communication between Héloïse and Claire is, at times, almost daily. Sometimes, however, the gap between letters is greater, which is arguably a strategy to increase the realism of the characters' epistolary exchange, since communication by letter often breaks down. The chapter dedicated to the year 1969, for instance, ends with a letter from Héloïse to Claire, sent from Stockholm on 9 August. The next chapter begins with another letter from Héloïse to Claire, sent from Vienna on 18 January 1970. On 9 August, it is evident that the two will soon meet, as Héloïse states at the end of her letter that her mother is looking forward to seeing Claire and the children, but it is unclear what happens during the intervening six months or why Héloïse moves to Vienna.

³³³ Elizabeth J. MacArthur, *Extravagant Narratives: Closure and Dynamics in the Epistolary Form* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 9.

Les Amies d'Héloïse also reflects what Elizabeth Campbell identifies as a convention of contemporary epistolary novels:

In the epistolary novels of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries we are more likely to find despair as the letter writer either feels herself succumbing to the temptation of her seducer, or, having been seduced and abandoned, bewails her fate to another. In contemporary epistolary novels we are still likely to find despair, but more often we see women moving away from despair to revolt.³³⁴

Campbell demonstrates that contemporary epistolary fiction by women permits female protagonists to rebel against lovers who have mistreated them. Yet Campbell also stresses that contemporary epistolary novels retain the despairing female figure that populated those published in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Abandoned by Héloïse, after having fallen in love with her, Erika learns that Héloïse is sleeping with Suzanne, who, incidentally, seduced Erika while she was still at school. But instead of remaining a victim of ill-treatment, her heartache quickly turns to revolt as she shoots Héloïse in a fit of jealousy. Héloïse, Erika, and Suzanne all experience despair during the sixteen-year period that the narrative covers. Suzanne's suicide is probably the novel's most tragic moment. However, what motivates her suicide is a brain tumour, rather than a feeling of unrequited love or desire. On the contrary, Suzanne's final letter to Héloïse portrays love positively:

Pourtant, il faut que tu saches qu'on survit toujours à la mort de l'autre: je le sais, je l'ai fait. Et je répondrai maintenant à une question que tu m'as posée autrefois: combien de fois j'ai aimé: trois fois, et c'est bien assez dans une vie. C'est toi que j'ai le plus aimée. (ADH 277)

Suzanne's death is a rare tragedy in a novel that, overall, presents lesbianism as unproblematic. Nonetheless, *Les Amies d'Héloïse* is able to depart from the traditional portrayal of love as a curse in epistolary fiction because the suicide is prompted by illness. Suzanne suggests that suicide, far from being a defeatist act, is a rational choice: '[J]e suis obligée de me tuer car j'ai une tumeur au cerveau. [...] Je dois profiter de ce que je suis parfaitement saine d'esprit pour m'évader' (ADH 276). Suzanne's succinct tone questions the assumption that suicide is an act of despair. Nonetheless, her love for Héloïse, which she reiterates at the end of the letter, contrasts sharply with her imminent death. The uplifting portrayal of lesbian love arguably lessens the severity of the tragedy; love is not the cause of death but is perhaps what enables Suzanne to face it with a degree of optimism. Suzanne's pragmatism about love challenges still pervasive stereotypes of

³³⁴ Elizabeth Campbell, 'Re-visions, Re-flections, Re-creations: Epistolarity in Novels by Contemporary Women', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 41 (1995), 332–48 (p. 337).

women in love as helpless and passive, and this statement is rendered more powerful by the context of the character's imminent suicide. In this respect, *Les Amies d'Héloïse* follows the turn in contemporary epistolary novels, and in French lesbian writing, towards the portrayal of strong female characters.

Unlike in the epistolary novels of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, neither Héloïse nor Erika bemoans their ill-fortune in letters to their correspondents. Héloïse's mother, Anne de Marèges, explains to Manuela that following Suzanne's death Héloïse spends most of her time sleeping. Rather than express it, either in writing or in conversation, she internalizes her grief, thus challenging patriarchal stereotypes about women as dramatic and hysterical. Further, the novel resists contemporary claims that women need to talk about their feelings and that women are inherently more emotionally expressive and receptive than men. Even if this is a personality trait, it is telling that Héloïse, the novel's central character and the one who writes the largest number of letters, ceases all correspondence in the immediate aftermath of Suzanne's death. Like Héloïse, Erika isolates herself following their separation. To cover up her attempt on Héloïse's life, Erika's father orders her to return to Frankfurt to manage his lucrative business. That Erika abruptly stops writing letters to all of the protagonists after this point, choosing instead to write exclusively in the diary she keeps, suggests that, like Héloïse, she is refusing to communicate her grief to others. Although Erika writes in her diary more frequently following her move to Frankfurt, which is surely a testament to her solitude, she struggles to come to terms with what has happened. After a thorough critique of her own appearance, she writes: 'Le mental maintenant. Non, je ne suis pas prête encore à examiner ça. On verra [...] plus tard' (ADH 174). Four days later, she writes: 'Je ne rêve plus d'ELLES, toutes les deux ensemble. Oh merde, ça me fait mal, ça me fait encore mal de l'évoquer' (ADH 174–75). Despite her apparent dependency on the diary as a medium of expression, perhaps even salvation, during a difficult period in her life, Erika remains unable to confront her feelings, especially where Héloïse and Suzanne are concerned. Like Héloïse, she is internalizing her despair. The act of writing, or more precisely to write selectively or to decline to write, becomes an indicator of the women's psychological state in times of personal crisis. While *Les Amies d'Héloïse* maintains the suffering female protagonists who have loved and lost that were typical of early epistolary novels, the novel departs from this model in having the protagonists refuse to write their despair and share it with others.

Broadly, the writers' use of the novel is in keeping with the conventions of the genre.

Indeed, the range of literary possibilities that could come under the term novel means that few novels are truly radical in form. Like most mass-market fiction, the novels by Girard, Cinq-Fraix, and Mallet provide a degree of closure in the form of a happy ending. This ending invokes in readers the sense of optimism, or a ‘feeling of “reconciliation with the world”’, that is central to this genre.³³⁵ By contrast, Monferrand’s novels offer less closure. *Les Amies d’Héloïse* stands out for its use of the epistolary form. This works to position the novel within a renowned literary élite dominated by male authors. As well as demonstrating a taste for “high” culture typically associated with the social class of Monferrand’s characters, the appropriation of this genre and the frequent intertextual references in this novel constitute an attempt by the author to reclaim a predominantly male canon in order to make lesbian identities count. A notable feature of all the novels is their non-inclusion of lesbian sex scenes. In Monferrand’s *Les Amies d’Héloïse*, the euphemistic descriptions of sex resist the patriarchal tradition of establishing codes of female sexuality, thus enabling lesbian readers to imagine the sex scenes for themselves. In the other novels, notably those by Girard and Cinq-Fraix, the lack of sex might be explained by the authors’ primary interest in lesbian mothering, rather than lesbian desire and love. The following section addresses texts that, unlike the novels, draw overtly on an extratextual reality: the autobiographical novels and autobiographies.

Writing the Self

It is perhaps unsurprising in today’s individualistic era that autobiography is rising in popularity. Traditionally, however, it was regarded as a second-rate literary form. Writing about one’s own life was commonly thought to be immodest and insufficiently creative to qualify as literature.³³⁶ In France, autobiography began to gain serious critical approval in the 1970s. In particular, the year 1975 saw the publication of three texts that, for Michael Sheringham, have proved essential to the rise of French autobiography: Roland Barthes’s *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, Philippe Lejeune’s *Le Pacte autobiographique*, and Georges Perec’s *W ou le souvenir d’enfance*.³³⁷ The second of these establishes a definition of autobiography that provides a starting point for this

³³⁵ Holmes, ‘The Comfortable Reader’, p. 288.

³³⁶ Elizabeth H. Jones, *Spaces of Belonging: Home, Culture and Identity in 20th-Century French Autobiography* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), p. 90.

³³⁷ Michael Sheringham, ‘Changing the Script: Women Writers and the Rise of Autobiography’, in *A History of Women’s Writing in France*, ed. by Sonya Stephens (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 185–203 (pp. 185–87).

discussion: ‘Récit rétrospectif en prose qu’une personne réelle fait de sa propre existence, lorsqu’elle met l’accent sur sa vie individuelle, en particulier sur l’histoire de sa personnalité’.³³⁸ Autobiography, then, is characterized by an attempt by the author to recount the story of his or her life. This endeavour is the premise of Rousseau’s *Confessions* (1782–89), which is generally held to be a benchmark for the genre: ‘Je forme une entreprise qui n’eut jamais d’exemple, et dont l’exécution n’aura point d’imitateur. Je veux montrer à mes semblables un homme dans toute la vérité de la nature; et cet homme, ce sera moi’.³³⁹ Lejeune further argues that a text can only be classed as autobiography if its author, narrator, and protagonist bear the same name, and if this is indicated in the text.³⁴⁰ If the author’s name differs from that of the narrator or protagonist, the text is an autobiographical novel. Nominal identity is key to the creation of the ‘autobiographical pact’, which Lejeune describes as a sort of contract between author and reader, the implication of which is that the author agrees to write as truthfully as possible about his or her life. Autobiography, then, relies on an agreement between author and reader.

As will be discussed below, postmodern theory has, over the last forty years, destabilized the concepts of authorship, identity, and truth on which the Rousseauian model of autobiography and Lejeune’s definition are based. In fact, recent autobiographical writing shares postmodernism’s distrust of these concepts. In particular, the *nouvelles autobiographies*, as Jeanette den Toonder shows, underscore the fragmented and multiple state of the self and embrace the fallibility of human memory that makes truthful self-reconstruction impossible.³⁴¹ For Toonder, distinguishing between autobiography and the autobiographical novel based on nominal identity thus fails to address the problems that the very notion of identity raises.³⁴² On the other hand, Lejeune’s definition offers a useful critical framework for the examination of autobiography and the autobiographical novel. More generally, to work on genre is inevitably to work with some sort of definition. For the purposes of this discussion, which aims not to determine the precise criteria of a genre but to explore the use of genre and the gender–genre relationship, I maintain Lejeune’s distinction between autobiography

³³⁸ Philippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte autobiographique*, new edn (Paris: Seuil, 1996 [1975]), p. 14.

³³⁹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, ‘Les Confessions de J.-J. Rousseau’ (1782–89), in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Michel Launay, 3 vols (Paris: Seuil, 1967–71), I, p. 121.

³⁴⁰ Lejeune, p. 15.

³⁴¹ Jeanette M. L. den Toonder, “*Qui est-je?*” *L’écriture autobiographique des nouveaux romanciers* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1999), pp. 8–9.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

and the autobiographical novel: unlike the autobiographical novel, autobiography requires that the author, narrator, and protagonist share a common name. My concurrent treatment of these genres does not, then, aim to challenge the distinction between them but, rather, to examine how the texts' forms reflect postmodern theoretical positions on identity and selfhood and, in turn, how this influences their treatment of lesbianism and mothering. I begin by applying Lejeune's definition of autobiography and the autobiographical novel to my texts. I then demonstrate how, at the levels of form and genre, the texts problematize and go beyond an attempt to write the self. By portraying selfhood as fragmented, the texts resist the patriarchal view of women, and of lesbians and mothers in particular, as fixed and universal categories. While I therefore show how the texts transgress the traditional limits of self-writing, I ultimately argue that this transgression is in keeping with much postmodern French autobiographical writing in which identity and selfhood are increasingly problematized and which frequently oversteps the boundaries of genre just as it transgresses the norms of gender.

Following Lejeune's definition, the works of François, Dumont, and Bénard can be regarded as autobiographical novels, since in all three cases the author is represented by a protagonist who does not share her name. Moreover, all three texts are marked as autobiographical novels: although, like in Doubrovsky's *Fils*, the word "roman" appears on the front cover of *Les Bonheurs*, François states in the preface that the text is an autobiographical novel. The texts by Dumont and Bénard are referred to respectively as 'un livre autobiographique' and 'une fiction autobiographique' on their back covers. In *La Vie dure*, the connection between author and protagonist is strongly implied by the near-homonymy of their names—Paula Dumont and Pascale Delmont respectively. They also share a number of biographical characteristics, as the author's brief biographical statement makes clear: Dumont and Pascale are similar in age; they both live in Montpellier; they are both teachers; they both identify as lesbian; and they are both members of gay and lesbian rights groups. Bénard's *Prince Charmante* has the words "témoignage et document" on the front cover, which convey the largely referential nature of the text. According to Lejeune's definition, Célier's and Blanc's texts are autobiographies, since in both cases the narrator-protagonist has the same name as the author. In *Maman, Mamour*, when commenting on how Géraldine refers to her and her partner, Célier writes: "'Maman" pour Dominique, "Mamour" pour moi, Brigitte' (MM 20). By naming herself as the narrator, Célier indicates that this is her own story and establishes the autobiographical pact between herself and the reader. In *Elles eurent*

beaucoup d'enfants, Blanc does this rather more creatively: the peritext is a drawing by one of her daughters depicting her family and the family's pets; each figure is labelled with her name and year of birth. The drawing's title, 'Une famille formidable: Le casting', confirms that it is on this family, the author's, that the text will focus. Blanc seals the autobiographical pact by describing the family on what would be the opening page of the text's first edition, for example: 'Myriam, 1,73 m, trente-huit ans, brune foncée aux yeux brun foncé avec un sourire que sa femme trouve craquant' (HFH 51). Blanc further reinforces the establishment of nominal identity between author, narrator, and protagonist when she says: 'Par mesure de visibilité [...], les prénoms n'ont pas été changés' (HFH 51).

In a study of French autobiography from Rousseau to Perec, Sheringham writes: 'Autobiography is a self-centred business. Although I shall emphasize the diversity of autobiographical desires, the wish to fathom the self [...] is always present to some degree'.³⁴³ This desire has almost always translated into first-person narration. Lejeune remarks that although autobiography does not preclude the use of the first, second, or third person singular, the connection between author and protagonist that is fundamental to autobiography is most often marked by the use of "I".³⁴⁴ To women autobiographers, however, the first person seems to come less easily than it does to their male counterparts. In a study of Francophone women's autobiography, Natalie Edwards claims that 'writing "I" has traditionally been problematic for any individual outside the dominant group'.³⁴⁵ Until the rise of women autobiographers in the 1980s, writing autobiography required success in the male-dominated public sphere.³⁴⁶ Compared with men's public exploits, female domestic lives were deemed uninteresting and unworthy of autobiographical representation. Women autobiographers' problematic relationship with "I" exemplifies the male bias of subjectivity more broadly. In *J'aime à toi* (1992), Luce Irigaray presents the results of an experiment that illustrate the exclusion of the feminine from the linguistic subject position.³⁴⁷ Irigaray asked participants to form sentences with several series of words and found that both men and women avoided using *elle(s)* in the subject position, even when given words with a supposedly female bias. In tune with much feminist and

³⁴³ Michael Sheringham, *French Autobiography: Devices and Desires: Rousseau to Perec* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. vii.

³⁴⁴ Lejeune, pp. 15–17.

³⁴⁵ Natalie Edwards, *Shifting Subjects: Plural Subjectivity in Contemporary Francophone Women's Autobiography* (Newark, Del.: University of Delaware Press, 2011), p. 12.

³⁴⁶ On the rise of women's autobiography in France, see Sheringham, 'Changing the Script'.

³⁴⁷ Luce Irigaray, *J'aime à toi: Esquisse d'une félicité dans l'histoire* (Paris: Grasset, 1992), pp. 117–19.

postmodern theory, Irigaray contents in *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* that the subject, particularly the female subject, should be understood as multiple. Comparably, Rosi Braidotti argues in *Nomadic Subjects* (1994) for an understanding of subjectivity as a 'process of becoming nomad'—that is, as a 'dynamic and changing entity'.³⁴⁸ For Braidotti:

[T]here is a noticeable gap between how we live—in emancipated or postfeminist, multiethnic globalized societies, with advanced technologies and high-speed telecommunication, allegedly free borders, and increased border controls and security measures—and how we represent to ourselves this lived existence in theoretical terms and discourses.³⁴⁹

Braidotti's suggestion, then, is that emancipation and globalization foster a roaming, nomadic subject. The influence of feminist and postmodern thinking permeates both critical positions on self-writing and the writing itself. As Edwards notes, autobiographical texts by women frequently 'display a self that resists the traditional notion of an individual, unitary self at the heart of autobiography and instead inscribes subjectivity as in some measure non-unitary'.³⁵⁰ Elizabeth Jones makes the similar point that '[t]aking into account the nature of postmodernism, it is perhaps unsurprising that the notion of a single, lucid subject producing a "copie conforme" of his or her life story in transparent language has become highly problematic in recent decades'.³⁵¹

Given the genre's apparently self-evident ties to the first person, it is unsurprising that both the autobiographies and the autobiographical novels considered here are written, at least partly, in the first person. The "I" in the autobiographies of Célier and Blanc and in Dumont's autobiographical novel is relatively stable, at least in the sense that "I" is used to refer to one person and one person only, the author-protagonist. In contrast with these three texts, the autobiographical novels of François and Bénard reflect late twentieth-century intellectual developments, and the trend in many French women's autobiographical texts, that underscore the difficulties of writing "I". Strikingly, François takes the liberty of writing an autobiographical novel, predominantly in the first person, from a point of view other than that of the character representing her. *Les Bonheurs* is narrated from the perspectives of Anne, the author's textual alter ego, and Sarah, Anne's lover. Part I of the text is recounted entirely in the first person, initially from Sarah's point

³⁴⁸ Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, 2nd edn (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011 [1994]), p. 5.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

³⁵⁰ Edwards, *Shifting Subjects*, p. 13.

³⁵¹ Jones, p. 94.

of view but then, in the form of a diary that Sarah discovers and reads, from Anne's point of view. Following this italicized extract, Sarah is reinstated as "I". In Part II, the first-person narrative is abruptly replaced by the use of the third person and is recounted from Anne's point of view. Part III then switches back to the first person and to Sarah's point of view. In *Prince Charmante*, Zélie is referred to both in the first person and, in extracts written in italics, in the third person. From the chapter entitled 'Alice', however, the italicized extracts persist, but Zélie is referred to entirely in the first person. That meeting Alice coincides with such a dramatic formal and linguistic shift is no doubt a testament to the importance of this figure in the protagonist's life and in the development of the plot. The shift between Zélie the protagonist and the omniscient narrator who has the benefit of hindsight suggests that identity is a negotiation between past, present, and future rather than a journey towards a finite goal. Like the use of letters in *Les Amies d'Héloïse*, in both *Les Bonheurs* and *Prince Charmante* the switching between different perspectives creates a chorus of female voices that challenges patriarchal representations of women as a homogeneous group.

While these authors' experimentation with the use of the first person is significant, it is a common feature of French women's life writing. Indeed, Edwards makes a comparable observation about Marguerite Duras's autobiographical novel, *L'Amant* (1984):

In this partly autobiographical text, Duras switches the narrative voice unexpectedly from the first to the third person and back again with no explanation or justification of her transposition. The two voices thus present different versions of a self and move the autobiographer between the positions of subject and object of her text: both speaking ("I") and spoken of ("she").³⁵²

The author's status as both object and subject of her text questions the supposed unity of the self and defies the realist tradition of a single, omniscient narrator. Edwards's analysis of *L'Amant* might easily be applied to *Les Bonheurs* and *Prince Charmante*. Although experimentation with the use of the first person is not unheard of, then, the progressiveness of François's text is not to be underestimated. Indeed, it was published over a decade before *L'Amant*, which is regarded as one of the foundational texts of women's life writing in France, and therefore prefigures Duras's experimentation with the first person.³⁵³ By playing with the use of the first person, the subject is, as the above

³⁵² Edwards, *Shifting Subjects*, p. 15.

³⁵³ Sheringham identifies Duras's *L'Amant* as one of four foundational texts of women's autobiographies, along with Annie Ernaux's *La Place* (1983), Natalie Sarraute's *Enfance* (1983), and Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, la fantasia* (1985); see Sheringham, 'Changing the Script', p. 185.

quotation suggests, rendered a highly unstable entity in the autobiographical novels of François and Bénard. *Les Bonheurs* expresses this instability most explicitly when Sarah reflects: ‘Nous sommes deux, nous sommes nous, nous sommes Anne et Sarah, mais c’est un spectacle auquel nous n’assistons pas. Nous sommes Je’ (B 206). This brief quotation resonates strongly with Toonder’s reference to the role of the other in autobiography: ‘Le je n’est pas indivisible; la vraie image de soi ne peut être connue qu’à travers l’autre’.³⁵⁴ Yet, the suggestion that the self can be known is problematic and, moreover, patriarchal. The patriarchal perspective on women defines them as a single, fixed entity, most notably in the form of the mother. Furthermore, as Toonder herself suggests, postmodern thinking on subjectivity challenges the very idea that one can truly know oneself. If, as Jones puts it, ‘identity is increasingly argued to be a shifting and fragmentary phenomenon, best characterised as an always-incomplete process rather than a finished outcome’, one can only wonder how it is possible to have a complete knowledge of something that is constantly shifting.³⁵⁵ Instead, writing about the self is not so much an attempt at self-knowing as it is a process of self-construction.³⁵⁶

It is more pertinent, then, to underscore Toonder’s reference to the relationship between self and other in autobiographical texts. Sheringham argues that to write the self ‘the autobiographer must first encounter alterity: other texts, other ideas, other people’.³⁵⁷ Otherness manifests itself in autobiography through the disparity between past and present; when an autobiographer writes about his or her past self, the self being described is different from that of the writing author. This leads to a second point: the self as a textual construct—a self constructed through the structuring of the text and in language.³⁵⁸ It should be emphasized that Sheringham’s focus is on autobiography, rather than on the autobiographical novel. Nonetheless, this point pertains to the works of François and Bénard. François seems to be trying to construct her textual self by writing about her relationship with, and from the point of view of, her lover. Bénard, on the other hand, juxtaposes her textual alter ego, Zélie, with a textual narrator. Both authors, then, can be said to reconstruct themselves in relation to an “other”. The presence of this other, dramatized by François’s and Bénard’s experimentation with the use of the first person, compels the reader to wonder whose voice he or she is listening to. This ambiguity is also

³⁵⁴ Toonder, p. 9.

³⁵⁵ Jones, p. 38.

³⁵⁶ Sheringham, *French Autobiography*, p. 8.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. vii.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. viii.

observed by Philippe Gasparini in his study of the autobiographical novel and autofiction:

Les textes dont il sera question ici se présentent à la fois comme des romans et comme des fragments d'autobiographie. Leur lecteur est appelé à se demander: "Est-il je?", autrement dit: "Est-ce l'auteur qui raconte sa vie or un personnage fictif?"³⁵⁹

Indeed, it is not always immediately apparent in *Les Bonheurs* whose perspective François is writing from. A striking example that illustrates Gasparini's reference to the sometimes unclear distinction between author and protagonist occurs at the beginning of the extract from Anne's diary: "'J'ai appelé les mots comme le berger rassemble son troupeau. Comme le berger, j'ai usé de sons bizarres, d'onomatopées sans signification immédiate mais pour moi d'une infaillible efficacité. Les mots sont venus'" (B 46). Although these are supposedly the character's words, they could in fact be said to summarize the author's written style. François's text, as will be discussed shortly, is ambiguous, dense, and marked by a love for linguistic experimentalism and metaphor.

The ambiguity of *Les Bonheurs* is deepened by François's use of the pronouns "tu" and "toi" to refer, at various points throughout the narrative, to Anne, Sarah, Michel, Jean, and Anne's children. By referring to both Anne and Jean as "tu", Sarah is able to almost come and go between her lovers. For example, towards the end of a particularly explicit sex scene between Sarah and Jean, here referred to as "tu", the second person abruptly begins to refer to Anne, and Sarah establishes a connection between her two lovers: 'C'est justement parce que j'aimais caresser Jean et faire l'amour avec lui que je savais cette nuit comment je t'aimais toi, comment j'étais requise entièrement par notre amour' (B 44–45). The same scene presents a second, more striking example of this play with "tu":

Tu étais à nouveau en moi, je te contenais, je bougeais autour de tes mouvements, tu gémissais et j'aimais ton désir de moi, ce désir que tu pouvais contenter à mesure car tu me savais maintenant à portée de toi. Tu m'avais à peine parlé d'Anne en me revoyant ce soir, mais aurais-je voulu parler? Sans doute l'avais-tu senti. Non, il valait mieux nous aimer, être ensemble dans cette chambre que nous étions seuls à connaître. J'étais au plus profond du plaisir quand je t'ai sentie m'embrasser partout, me tenir, me toucher. Oui, un jour nous serions heureuses ensemble, nous nous donnerions ce que Jean me donnait mais augmenté de nous. (B 44)

The abrupt transition from "tu"-Jean to "tu"-Anne is marked by the feminine inflections on the verb "sentie" and the adjective "heureuses". The key to the meaning of François's text thus lies in the gendering of the French language. In *Les Bonheurs*, then, lesbianism is both reflected by and inscribed in linguistic play. Indeed, one need only think of the

³⁵⁹ Philippe Gasparini, *Est-il je? Roman autobiographique et autofiction* (Paris: Seuil, 2004), p. 9.

potential headache in translating this linguistically subtle but semantically sizeable shift into a grammatically ungendered language like English in order to understand the importance of language for François's text and, more broadly, the relationship between language and sexuality, between literary forms and literary themes. By switching easily between "tu"-masculine and "tu"-feminine, the hetero-homo binary is portrayed as permeable and unstable through bisexuality, thus establishing a striking parallel with the text's reorganization of sexuality around affectivity rather than gender, as was examined in Chapter Two. Although less radical than in *Les Bonheurs*, linguistic play is an important feature of Bénard's text, most obviously in the title. In *Prince Charmante*, the switching between the first and third persons at the beginning of the novel arguably provides the author with the opportunity to reflect on her own life. More specifically, it possibly serves to disassociate the author from her own heterosexist attitudes personified by her "pre-lesbian" autobiographical alter ego. François's and Bénard's texts, then, emphasize the ambiguity of voice, and the multitude of different voices, in self-writing.

The juxtaposition of first- and third-person autobiographical narrative would seem to fragment *Prince Charmante*, yet in practice the sections flow into each other in a seemingly random but smooth way. Moreover, the text remains linear in chronology and coherent in structure due to the conventional division of the text into chapters. Indeed, *Prince Charmante* is a traditional example of self-writing in that it begins with a description of the protagonist's early life. In this sense, Bénard's text, although an autobiographical novel, bears some resemblance to the canonical autobiographies of Rousseau, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Simone de Beauvoir. By contrast, *Les Bonheurs* is divided only into three parts, has no chapters, and the narrative is split, with no obvious logic or pattern, into extracts of varying length. Moreover, the amount of space between the extracts is so random that this cannot be attributed to typographical necessity. Rather, François seems to want to create a fragmented text. This structural fragmentation reflects and resonates with the fragmentary nature of the self put forward in the text and with the representation of queer, unstable sexuality analysed thoroughly in Chapter Two.

The fragmentation of *Les Bonheurs* also recalls feminist theoretical developments that emerged in France around the time of its publication—namely, Hélène Cixous's theory of *écriture féminine*. In part, *écriture féminine* aimed to redress men's control of the representation of female experience, which persisted until well into the twentieth century.

In 'Le Rire de la Méduse', Cixous notes that writing is reserved for 'great men'.³⁶⁰ She argues that male-authored writing about being a woman lacks authenticity and either obscures women or reproduces patriarchal representations of women.³⁶¹ Cixous encourages women to write and to theorize femininity positively through a celebration of the female body and sexuality. Central to her theory of *écriture féminine* is the disruption of linguistic phallogentrism. In 'Le Rire de la Méduse', this translates into a rejection of the linearity of phallogentric language through syntactic overflow. On a symbolic level, *écriture féminine* sought to disrupt men's ownership of language through the creation of a linguistic system organized around the feminine. For practitioners of *écriture féminine*, the answer to women's exclusion from phallogentric language was to distort its logic and linearity, thereby inventing an alternative symbolic order. As such, Cixous's prose is deliberately circular: 'Nous, les précoces, nous les refoulées de la culture, les belles bouches barrées de bâillons, pollen, haleines coupées, nous les labyrinthes, les échelles, les espaces foulés; les volées, — nous sommes "noires" et nous sommes belles'.³⁶² Cixous's reference to 'bouches barrées de bâillons' states women's marginalized position in patriarchal and phallogentric cultures. Each clause, seemingly disconnected from the previous one, flows into the next. The repetition of "nous" underlines Cixous's desire to write from a female perspective. She reaffirms her scorn for phallogentrism in her claim that women are black and beautiful, which might be read as a positive take on Freud's conceptualization of female sexuality as a dark continent. *Écriture féminine* is not without its critics: as we noted in Chapter One, Monique Wittig, among others, perceives *écriture féminine* to be an unproductive return to biological essentialism due to its invocation of the female body as represented by patriarchy. Although *écriture féminine* is as much about language as it is about the female body, the reservations of Wittig and others are difficult to ignore. In practice, *écriture féminine* has never attained widespread critical or popular approval, perhaps because its dense prose is difficult to comprehend. Although only a few writers, such as Jean Genet, James Joyce, and Cixous herself, have produced *écriture féminine* in the way envisioned by its principal advocate, Cixous and her contemporaries drew attention to women's exclusion from literary circles, demonstrating that writing creates a space for the inscription of a transformation of existing cultural and social power structures. While they were by no means the first to do this, their push for

³⁶⁰ Cixous, p. 40.

³⁶¹ Ibid., p. 42.

³⁶² Ibid., p. 41.

an *écriture féminine* coincided with an increase in the quantity of women's writing during the most militant period of second-wave French feminism.

In common with Cixous's theory of *écriture féminine*, *Les Bonheurs* experiments with imagery and language to the extent that, at times, the meaning is opaque, as in the following passage in which Sarah, in a flashback, describes her and Anne's burgeoning relationship:

La nuit et les étoiles, je les ai vues par toi. Ce n'est pas original, tous les amants se donnent le monde. Mais notre amour non nommé était une giroflée sauvage accrochée entre deux pierres anonymes. Il ne savait que l'espace étroit de ses racines, mais à lui seul il était plus important que l'édifice en son entier.
(B 20)

Here, the text alludes to the taboo on lesbianism within the cultural and social contexts of the text—that is, in this particular extract, the late 1940s or early 1950s, when the age of consent in France was twenty-one for homosexual relations compared with fifteen for heterosexual relations. The phrase 'amour non nommé' clearly refers to the silence on lesbianism, and the 'espace étroit de ses racines' evokes its lack of a place in this heterosexist and homophobic world. Despite this, the text valorizes lesbianism through clever imagery and metaphor: Anne and Sarah's love is described as a wild flower—that is, as something beautiful and natural—yet positioned between two hard and imposing stones, which symbolize the obstacles to lesbian love presented in the novel and discussed in Chapter Two—religion and phallogentrism—or, alternatively, Michel and Jean. François thus deploys the normative alignment of women with nature and of men with strength only to inscribe antipatriarchal lesbian love. The linguistic experimentation contained in the passage quoted above is equally evident in the sex scene mentioned earlier: 'J'aimais ton sexe glissant de ma faim, tu te caressais en moi, tu caressais de ta main mon clitoris et ensemble nous étions heureux et dès notre souffle redevenu égal nous repartions, nous étions déjà repartis vers un autre plaisir' (B 43). Although patently a description of penetration, the first clause of this quotation further exemplifies the text's linguistic experimentalism. It is, moreover, unclear towards what other pleasure the characters go before engaging in another sexual act. The allusion to penetration suggests that *Les Bonheurs* is not only an exploration of lesbian sexuality but female eroticism more broadly. Because of its overt concern with language and female sexuality and subjectivity, *Les Bonheurs* could, in many ways, be said to be an example of *écriture féminine*. In fact, François might be added to the list of writers who practised this form of writing before Cixous coined the term in her 1975 tract. The ambiguity in *Les Bonheurs*,

as in ‘Le Rire de la Méduse’, engenders an open-ended mode of representation that fosters multiple interpretations. For Cixous, this functions to resist patriarchal codes of femininity and circumvent the recodification of female norms. Indeed, Cixous refuses to define *écriture féminine*: ‘Impossible de définir une pratique féminine de l’écriture, d’une impossibilité qui se maintiendra car on ne pourra jamais théoriser cette pratique, l’enfermer, la coder, ce qui ne signifie pas qu’elle n’existe pas’.³⁶³ Comparably, the ambiguity of *Les Bonheurs* works to open up lesbian desire and love and to resist its recodification in what, in Cixous’s terms, would be the language of phallogentrism. Indeed, Cixous claims that female sexuality cannot be represented in such a language. *Écriture féminine*, she argues, ‘excédera toujours le discours que régit le système phallogentrique; elle a et aura lieu ailleurs que dans les territoires subordonnés à la domination philosophique-théorique’.³⁶⁴ Taking the connection between François’s and Cixous’s texts further, then, it might be argued that François suggests that lesbianism, as a female-centred sexuality, cannot be represented in normative, phallogentric language.

Céliier’s *Maman, Mamour* and Blanc’s *Elles eurent beaucoup d’enfants* display few signs of the linguistic experimentalism and the always-incomplete form of subjectivity that are so prominent in *Les Bonheurs* and, to a lesser extent, *Prince Charmante*. Indeed, as was mentioned earlier, the “I” is stable in these texts, at least in the sense that it always refers to the author-protagonist. However, the difficulty of writing the self is, although quite subtle, still present. Unlike conventional autobiography, which typically begins with the birth of the author-protagonist and follows a linear structure charting his or her life, neither Céliier nor Blanc writes chronologically. Blanc openly acknowledges her commitment to a non-chronological structure: ‘Certains passages sont récents, d’autres beaucoup moins, et l’ordre temporel des événements n’est pas toujours respecté [...]. Voyez ces pages comme un journal qui prendrait des libertés avec la chronologie’ (HFH 51). Arguably, the authors’ decision to dispense with the conventional chronological structure of autobiography follows the tenet of postmodern thinking that underscores the always-unfinished nature of identity and subjectivity. For Céliier and Blanc, it would seem, adopting a chronological structure is not the most effective way in which to inscribe their experience of lesbian mothering. Furthermore, Blanc self-declares the inevitable partiality of her autobiography: ‘[S]i tous les faits qui figurent dans ces pages sont véridiques, je ne vous dis pas tout, loin s’en faut’ (HFH 52). The non-linear structure of

³⁶³ Ibid., p. 45.

³⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 45.

these texts works to problematize the idea that self-construction is a finite process.

This structure might, then, be attributed to the authors' implicit recognition of the merits of postmodern thinking. It also resonates with their self-declared didactic aim: to educate the reader about same-sex parenting. By presenting the authors' experiences thematically, rather than chronologically, the texts shift attention away from the process of individual self-construction in order to emphasize how these experiences might be useful to readers. In *Maman, Mamour*, Célier states her hope that, by reading her book, the reader feels 'un peu moins de perplexité et un peu plus de sympathie' for the minority of families like her own (MM 15). Similarly, Blanc writes in *Elles eurent beaucoup d'enfants*: 'Comme un peu de pédagogie ne nuit pas, ce livre se veut [...] une sorte de manuel de l'homoparentalité heureuse, à destination tout particulièrement de nos amis les hétéros' (HFH 52). The writers' choice of literary form implies a need to address the ignorance surrounding gay and lesbian parenting. Célier alludes to the link between ignorance and prejudice: 'Le plus souvent, ceux qui [s'inquiètent de l'homoparentalité] n'ont pas l'occasion de rencontrer ceux dont ils parlent, encore moins de solliciter leur témoignage' (MM 13). By teaching the reader, Célier and Blanc seek to address the prejudices against gay and lesbian parents and to gather support for changes to their legal status at a crucial moment in recent French history—namely, the period between the creation of the PaCS and the introduction of equal marriage, when gay and lesbian parents lacked legal protection. Célier's self-declared didactic purpose is supported by her first chapter, which describes the various configurations of gay and lesbian families. Her second chapter discusses society's attitudes towards infertility, pointing out the double standard whereby sympathy is given to heterosexuals unable to have children while childlessness is the correct moral decision for homosexual couples and for those with hereditary conditions. Because of its rigorous analysis of heteronormative discourses, *Maman, Mamour* might even be said to border on scholarship. Blanc, on the other hand, gives lengthy descriptions of the artificial insemination procedure that led to the conception of her and her partner's children. Like Célier, she critically examines heteronormative discourses that oppose gay and lesbian parenting, yet she does so as much through biting sarcasm as she does through rational argument. On the issue of cloning, for example, she writes: 'On voudrait bien nous coller à ce fantasme-là, à nous autres lesbiennes irresponsables qui avons toujours rêvé d'éradiquer le mâle de la planète!' (HFH 85). Here, Blanc's sarcasm expresses the absurdity of the heteronormative fear that lesbian couples choosing to have children desire to eradicate men and to make

their procreative function obsolete.

The didactic purpose of Célier's and Blanc's texts is juxtaposed with poignant extracts from the authors' personal experiences. The inclusion of these extracts suggests a need to offer "proof" to a sceptical French heterosexual readership and to other aspiring gay and lesbian couples that gay and lesbian parenting can "work". Blanc describes a miscarriage that she had prior to becoming pregnant with Augustine in a section that, unsurprisingly, abandons the light-hearted, ironic tone of most of the text. This section serves to tackle the taboo on miscarriage and other non-idealized experiences of pregnancy. Given the ideological and legal obstacles that gays and lesbians have always to overcome in their journey to parenthood, tackling this taboo in a lesbian-parent context is extremely powerful. Another section, entitled 'Suis-je vraiment une femme?', briefly recounts the author's initial disquiet around but eventual indifference to the normative disassociation of lesbianism and femininity. In *Maman, Mamour*, Célier exemplifies her overview of the various configurations of gay and lesbian families by referring to couples whom she knows. Another chapter poignantly informs the reader that Christian recognized Géraldine as his daughter just days before his premature, AIDS-induced death. Another notable and highly personal feature of *Maman, Mamour* is the inclusion of extracts from another text, entitled *Chères parents*, written by Célier and given to Géraldine on her twentieth birthday. The text is described humbly as 'quelques dizaines de pages' in which the author recounts the story of her daughter's life (MM 14). The grammatically unconventional title of this text is inspired by the header of a letter written by an eight-year-old Géraldine when she was on a school trip. Célier explains that it was partly her daughter's reaction to this text that encouraged her to write *Maman, Mamour*. The inclusion of these extracts demonstrates, as we saw in Part I of this chapter, the importance of the intertext in the inscription of alternative identities. In addition, it means that, in a way, the reader of *Maman, Mamour* is in fact reading two texts—an intertext composed initially for personal use, and the other written for public consumption. The extracts from *Maman, Mamour*'s intertext often touch on the same thematic concern being discussed in the main body. The intertext thus serves as a window onto the author's own experiences, which she uses to contextualize and substantiate the points raised in the main body.

By combining didactic and personal narrative, Célier and Blanc participate in an already established trend in French women's writing that uses personal experience as a basis for narratives of mothering. In particular, their texts have much in common with an

array of autobiographies published in the second decade of the twenty-first century that deal with being a mother in challenging or non-normative circumstances. For example, Martine Silberstein's *Ma princesse est atteinte de leucodystrophie* (2010) describes a mother–daughter relationship in the context of the daughter's neurological illness.³⁶⁵ Despite its grave subject-matter, Silberstein claims to want to demonstrate her family's love of life as well as the obvious challenges presented by her daughter's illness. In addition, a number of women's autobiographies dealing with their authors' experiences of mothering via assisted reproductive technologies have emerged in the last few years: Mireille Margarito's *Une vie à t'espérer* (2014); Amandine Forgali's two-volume *Un GPS pour la cigogne* (2011/2013); Karine Degunst's *Félicitations, c'est une FIV!* (2015); and Sandrine Derohr's *PMA pour mon ange* (2015).³⁶⁶ These authors are using writing as the medium through which to tackle a taboo: infertility. Taken collectively, the publication of these texts and those of Célier and Blanc illustrates the emergence of a branch of women's writing that represents paths to mothering that conflict with the dominant, idealized image of motherhood and, interestingly, that autobiography is playing a leading role in doing this. The texts of Célier and Blanc could be said to fulfil not just the didactic purpose of informing a heteronormative French readership about gay and lesbian parenting but the authors' need to affirm their own marginal existence. Although Célier and Blanc hastily foreclose the generalizability of their experiences, the texts necessarily give some indication of how lesbian mothers come to and experience parenting. The texts' generic hybridity—the mélange of the didactic and the personal—allows the authors to create a space for their own experiences while addressing the broader matter of the cultural, legal, and political obstacles facing gay and lesbian parents in France. This hybridity legitimizes individual experience as something of literary worth and emphasizes that, to borrow an oft-cited adage of second-wave feminism, the personal is political.

Although significant, the hybridity of Célier's and Blanc's texts is in keeping with much French autobiography. Edwards, for example, refers to autobiography as an 'elastic' genre.³⁶⁷ Similarly, Sheringham makes the point that autobiography is a genre

³⁶⁵ Martine Silberstein, *Ma princesse est atteinte de leucodystrophie: Témoignage d'une mère à sa fille* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2010).

³⁶⁶ Karine Degunst, *Félicitations, c'est une FIV! Le parcours drôle et vrai d'une PMA heureuse* (Paris: Pixl, 2015); Sandrine Derohr, *PMA pour mon ange* (Nantes: Amalthée, 2015); Amandine Forgali, *Un GPS pour la cigogne*, 2 vols (Paris: Terriciae/Forgali, 2011–13); Mireille Margarito, *Une vie à t'espérer: Mon combat pour être mère* (Paris: Michalon, 2014).

³⁶⁷ Edwards, *Shifting Subjects*, p. 19.

characterized by hybridity:

While innovation is clearly possible in autobiography, a generically hybrid status makes it difficult to sustain the view that the practitioner is bound by fixed rules or the view that he or she has invented new ones, despite the fact that the parameters and limitations of autobiography are, in practice, real enough. What makes the spectre of genre so difficult to dispel for the autobiographer is its indefiniteness.³⁶⁸

Although autobiography can, as was discussed at the beginning of this section, be broadly defined, the multitude of ways in which writers can write the self makes it hard to argue that autobiographies subvert the norms of their genre. The hybridity of Céliér's and Blanc's autobiographies should not, then, be seen as a radical attack on the norms of the genre but, rather, as something to be expected.

This section has examined the writers' use of the autobiographical genre to portray non-normative sexualities and families. In line with postmodern thinking and with many French women's autobiographical writing, the texts represent selfhood as fragmented and non-unitary, thus problematizing the genre's traditional interest in writing the self. This representation of selfhood resists patriarchal constructions of women as a single, homogeneous group. In particular, *Les Bonheurs* follows trends in feminist theory that developed at the time of the text's publication and that foreground the need to subvert phallogentric language. In *Elles eurent beaucoup d'enfants* and *Maman, Maman, Maman*, the blend of self-centred and didactic narrative illustrates the authors' concern with both personal experience and the politics of gay and lesbian parenting in contemporary France. These autobiographies are part of a wider French literary landscape in which personal experience is used as a framework for writing about mothering. While the texts thus go beyond the traditional limits of self-writing, this transgression is in keeping with contemporary women's autobiographical writing in France.

Conclusion

The discussion in this chapter testifies to the variety of literary forms that narratives of lesbianism and lesbian mothering are taking in contemporary France. This chapter has sought to interrogate the relationship between the texts' progressive portrayal of gender, sexuality, and the family and their use of their chosen literary form. In the main, the texts' themes are more transgressive than their forms. While the texts do not seriously call into question the limits of accepted generic categories, two of the ten texts—François's *Les*

³⁶⁸ Sheringham, *French Autobiography*, pp. 16–17.

Bonheurs and Monferrand's *Les Amies d'Héloïse*—stand out for their use of linguistic experimentation (François) and of the epistolary form (Monferrand). François engages with debates among feminist theorists on the need to create a feminine language to subvert everyday patriarchal and phallogentric language and thus create a space for women's sexuality. François's love of linguistic play and metaphor at times renders the meaning of the text ambiguous; but it is this ambiguity that allows for the multiplicity that is central to Cixous's and Irigaray's valorization of the feminine and prevents the reader from fixing female sexuality into standardized codes. Monferrand appropriates the epistolary form—a traditionally feminine genre—and aligns her novel with a renowned, predominantly male literary élite in order to make female and lesbian identities count.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to reveal how French literary representations reflect the dynamics and forms of lesbian mothering, and contribute to political debates on gay and lesbian parenting and to the redefining of mothering and the family in contemporary France. The texts studied in this thesis portray family structures that challenge the heteronormative definition of mothering as a biogenetic role intrinsically linked to heterosexuality, and give voice to the identities and realities represented by the characters: lesbians who are or desire to be parents.

Chapter One established the original contribution that this thesis would make to the fields of French literary criticism and gender studies. Although gay and lesbian parenting is an established research field in the social sciences, critics have barely begun to examine how it is being presented in literature. While lesbianism and mothering have frequently been objects of literary criticism, they have, with few exceptions, been treated separately. It is hoped that this thesis, in bringing these two themes together, has added to the collective knowledge of how literary productions are subverting norms of gender, sexuality, and the family, and of how these norms are intertwined, both in literature and beyond.

The structure of Chapters Two, Three, and Four aimed to underline how the texts examined in this thesis reflect the real-life evolution of mothering and contribute to broadening the normative definition of mothering as a biogenetic and heterosexual role. Thus, Chapter Two focused on representations of lesbians who become mothers through a heterosexual union in the texts by François, Monferrand, Mallet, and Dumont. These texts suggest or, in François's and Monferrand's cases, anticipate the emergence of families headed by gay and lesbian couples in the twenty-first century by placing the mother-characters' lovers in a kind of quasi-stepparent role. Although this is largely unacknowledged by the characters, the steps that these texts take towards the expansion of family forms in the twenty-first century is undeniably significant. Moreover, the texts resist norms of motherhood—namely, the notion of motherhood as a single-minded identity and the supposed flawlessness of maternal love—that potentially impinge on all mothers, irrespective of their sexuality. In this way, these texts point to the common

ground shared by heterosexual and lesbian mothers.

Unlike those covered in Chapter Two, the texts by Girard, Cinq-Fraix, Célier, Blanc, and Bénard analysed in Chapter Three foreground families founded and headed by two women, and thus challenge not only the equation of mothering with heterosexuality but also the dominant understanding of mothering as a biogenetic role. These texts suggest, rather, that mothering is a performative function and identity—that is to say, mothering and maternal identity are constructed through acts of caregiving. In doing so, they demonstrate how the meaning of motherhood is being interrogated in contemporary France and call for a definition open to maternal experiences that transcend the heterosexual nuclear family. Furthermore, the texts explicitly intervene in political and theoretical debates on gay and lesbian parenting, calling for marriage and adoption rights to be extended to homosexual couples, as well as the opening of reproductive technologies to lesbian and single women.

Chapter Four attempted to illustrate how lesbian mothering has implications beyond the mother-characters themselves, focusing on the texts by Girard, Cinq-Fraix, Célier, Mallet, and Blanc. Through their portrayal of grandparents in lesbian families and gay and lesbian parenting associations, these texts suggest that mothering is performed not only by those who identify as parents but by members of the extended family and, more radically still, by wider society. When women become mothers, they compel their own parents to position themselves in relation to their grandchildren. The existence of gay and lesbian parenting associations testifies to the impact that gay and lesbian couples' desire to become parents is having on wider society. The references within the text to this impact raised questions about the impact of the texts themselves on society. While these texts have yet to attract mass attention, the discussion in this chapter revealed that they are, without doubt, contributing to the revision of negative discourses of, and creating more visibility for, gay and lesbian parenting.

Chapter Five sought to bring together the ten texts covered in this thesis through a discussion of the relationship between the texts' forms and themes. This chapter demonstrated the range of literary forms through which lesbian mothering is being represented by contemporary French writers. Although the texts' themes are generally more transgressive than their forms, there are two exceptions: François's *Les Bonheurs* reflects and contributes to debates within postmodern and feminist literary theory on the relationship between literary form and literary theme that were playing out at the time of the text's publication; by appropriating the traditionally feminine epistolary form,

Monferrand positions *Les Amies d'Héloïse* within a renowned French literary canon. If the link between literary form and literary theme is to be accepted, the relative conventionality of the forms of the other texts perhaps suggests an attempt on the part of the authors to normalize lesbianism and lesbian mothering.

This study is, then, the first to offer an in-depth look at representations of lesbian mothering in French literature. In addition, it brings several lesbian-themed texts to academic attention for the first time, thus building on existing studies of French lesbian writing. This thesis is, however, part of an established research field interested in how women's writing challenges received ideas about mothering. From a socio-historical perspective, this thesis demonstrates, and is itself inscribed in, the continuing deconstruction of gender and sexual norms that, as was discussed in the Introduction, has marked the previous two centuries.

Directions for Future Research

It is hoped that this thesis will act as a springboard for future explorations of lesbian mothering in French literature and be of use to researchers working on other modes of cultural production or in other cultural contexts. There exists, then, the possibility of fostering cross-cultural and interdisciplinary research on representations of lesbian mothering exploring, for instance, the relationship between state policies on same-sex parenting and how this is represented culturally.

It is likely that this thesis will need to be extended in the future. Despite its focus on literature from the contemporary period, the currently small number of texts featuring lesbian mothers is growing and is likely to continue to do so as lesbian mothers become more numerous and visible thanks to the adoption of gay- and lesbian-friendly policies. In particular, the gap between lesbian mothers who have children in a previous heterosexual union, who currently represent the majority of lesbian mothers, and lesbian mothers who plan to have children with another woman is likely to decrease. This hypothetical demographic shift may well be reflected in literature. A second possible evolution in this branch of literature is the emergence of lesbian-parented children as authors of and as characters in the narratives. In the texts covered in this thesis, only Mallet's *Le Choix de la reine* and Monferrand's *Les Enfants d'Héloïse* feature children having more than a minor role. As real-life lesbian-parented children grow up, we are likely to see in literature a shift from the lesbian-parented child as object of discourse to the child as speaking subject. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that literary

representations of gay fathering are, at present, almost inexistent in France—a reflection of the smaller number of gay fathers relative to lesbian mothers on a demographic level, but also of the normative alignment of parenting with womanhood. It is hoped, and even anticipated, that portrayals of gay fathering will emerge, allowing studies not just of lesbian mothering but of same-sex parenting more broadly. This study has, then, focused on a branch of literature that is still in its infancy and will therefore need to be returned to as the branch diversifies and expands.

This thesis might also pave the way for a broader study of lesbian writing in France. Existing studies of lesbian writing in France, such as Jennifer Waelti-Walters's *Damned Women* and Lucille Cairns's *Lesbian Desire*, remain valuable for their exposure of a previously obfuscated French lesbian genre. Yet, because they are limited to the period leading up to the millennium, an up-to-date study of French lesbian writing that accounts for the recent legislative changes to the status of same-sex relationships is needed. With the introduction of civil partnerships in 1999 and the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2013, France took the notable step of enshrining homosexual relationships in law. We might ask how literary representations of lesbian desire, experience, and identity have evolved in tandem with recent changes to the legal rights of same-sex couples. If mothering, as this thesis has demonstrated, is an emerging theme in twenty-first-century lesbian writing in France, it is worth revealing the other contemporary issues and trends in this literary field.

In focusing on mothering, this thesis has revealed some of the ways in which literature is engaging with current cultural, political, social, and theoretical debates on the place of sexual minorities in contemporary France. Although the texts dealt with here expose the challenges facing lesbian mothers today, they also give cause to be optimistic about the future of same-sex parents and their children.

Bibliography

- Abrams, Nancy, *The Other Mother: A Lesbian's Fight for her Daughter* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999)
- Altman, Denis, *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation* (New York: New York University Press, 1993 [1971])
- Badinter, Élisabeth, *L'Amour en plus: Histoire de l'amour maternel, XVII^e–XX^e siècle* (Paris: Flammarion, 1980)
- Bardou, Florian, 'Serait-il possible d'abroger le mariage pour tous comme le souhaite Marine Le Pen?', *Libération*, 27 April 2017 <http://www.liberation.fr/elections-presidentielle-legislatives-2017/2017/04/27/serait-il-possible-d-abroger-le-mariage-pour-tous-comme-le-souhaite-marine-le-pen_1565572> [accessed 31 May 2017]
- Barthes, Roland, 'La Mort de l'Auteur' (1968), in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Éric Marty, 5 vols (Paris: Seuil, 1993–2002), II (1994), pp. 491–95
- , *Le Plaisir du texte* (Paris: Seuil, 1973)
- Beauvoir, Simone de, *Le Deuxième Sexe: L'Expérience vécue*, Folio Essais, 38 (Paris: Gallimard, 1976 [1949])
- Bénard, Claire, *Prince Charmante: Que fait-on quand on tombe amoureuse d'une femme?* (Paris: La Boîte à Pandore, [2013])
- Béraud, Céline, 'Un front commun des religions contre le mariage pour tous?', *Contemporary French Civilization*, 39 (2014), 335–49
- Blanc, Myriam, *Elles eurent beaucoup d'enfants... Et se marièrent: Histoire d'une famille homoparentale*, new edn (Marseille: Le bec en l'air, 2012 [2005])
- Bos, Henny M. W., *Parenting in Planned Lesbian Families* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2004)
- Bos, Henny M. W. and Frank van Balen, 'Children in Planned Lesbian Families: Stigmatisation, Psychological Adjustment and Protective Factors', *Culture, Health & Sexuality: An International Journal for Research, Invention and Care*, 10 (2008), 221–36
- Boswell, John, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago:

- University of Chicago Press, 1980)
- , ‘Revolutions, Universals, and Sexual Categories’, in *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, ed. by Martin B. Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey (London: Meridian, 1990), pp. 17–36
- Braidotti, Rosi, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, 2nd edn (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011 [1994])
- Brassart, Alain, ‘Une visibilité discrète: Les lesbiennes dans le cinéma français des années 1990 à nos jours’, in *Cinematic Queerness: Gay and Lesbian Hypervisibility in Contemporary Francophone Feature Films*, ed. by Florian Grandena and Cristina Johnston (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011), pp. 43–62
- Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge Classics, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2007 [1990])
- , ‘Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?’, *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 13 (2002), 14–44
- Cadoret, Anne, *Des parents comme les autres: Homosexualité et parenté* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2002)
- Cairns, Lucille, ‘Dissidence sexuelle, conservatisme social? La Mise en écriture du lesbianisme chez Hélène de Monferrand’, in *Nouvelles écrivaines: Nouvelles voix?*, ed. by Natalie Morello and Catherine Rodgers (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), pp. 215–32
- , ‘Gazon maudit: French National and Sexual Identities’, *French Cultural Studies*, 9 (1998), 225–37
- , *Lesbian Desire in Post-1968 French Literature* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 2002)
- , *Marie Cardinal: Motherhood and Creativity* (Glasgow: University of Glasgow Press, 1992)
- Cameron, Paul, ‘Children of Homosexuals and Transsexuals More Apt to Be Homosexual’, *Journal of Biosocial Science*, 38 (2006), 413–18
- Campbell, Elizabeth, ‘Re-visions, Re-flections, Re-creations: Epistolarity in Novels by Contemporary Women’, *Twentieth Century Literature*, 41 (1995), 332–48
- Céliier, Brigitte, *Maman, Mamour, ses deux mamans: Grandir dans une famille homoparentale* (Paris: Anne Carrière, 2008)
- Cherlin, Andrew J. and Frank F. Furstenberg, *The New American Grandparent: A Place in the Family, a Life Apart* (New York: Basic Books, 1986)
- Chodorow, Nancy, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978)

- Cinq-Fraix, Laurence, *Family Pride* (Paris: Philippe Rey, 2006)
- Cixous, Hélène, 'Le Rire de la Méduse', *L'Arc*, 61 (1975), 39–54
- Cohen, Margaret, 'In Lieu of a Chapter on Some French Women Realist Novelists', in *Spectacles of Realism: Gender, Body, Genre*, ed. by Margaret Cohen and Christopher Prendergast (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), pp. 90–119
- , 'Women and Fiction in the Nineteenth Century', in *The Cambridge Companion to the French Novel from 1800 to the Present*, ed. by Timothy Unwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 54–72
- Dally, Ann, *Inventing Motherhood: The Consequences of an Ideal* (London: Burnett, 1982)
- Davis, James D., Jr., *Beautiful War: Uncommon Violence, Praxis, and Aesthetics in the Novels of Monique Wittig* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010)
- Degunst, Karine, *Félicitations, c'est une FIV! Le parcours drôle et vrai d'une PMA heureuse* (Paris: Pixl, 2015)
- Delphy, Christine, 'Proto-féminisme et anti-féminisme', *Les Temps modernes*, 30 (1975), 1469–1500
- Derohr, Sandrine, *PMA pour mon ange* (Nantes: Amalthée, 2015)
- Derrida, Jacques, 'La Loi du genre/The Law of Genre', *Glyph*, 7 (1980), 176–232
- Descoutures, Virginie, *Les Mères lesbiennes* (Paris: PUF, 2010)
- Dorzée, Hugues and Jean-Pierre Borloo, 'Deux "goudoues" et un couffin', *Le Soir*, 30 May 2005, p. 7
- Doubrovsky, Serge, 'Autobiographie/Vérité/Psychanalyse', *L'esprit créateur*, 20 (1980), 87–97
- , *Fils*, Folio, 3554 (Paris: Galilée, 1977)
- Downing, Jordan B. and Abbie E. Goldberg, 'Lesbian Mothers' Constructions of the Division of Paid and Unpaid Labor', *Feminism and Psychology*, 21 (2011), 100–20
- Dubrow, Heather, *Genre* (London: Methuen, 1982)
- Duff, David, 'Introduction', in *Modern Genre Theory*, ed. by David Duff (London: Longman, 2000), pp. 1–24
- Dumont, Paula, *La Vie dure: Éducation sentimentale d'une lesbienne* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2010)
- Dunifon, Rachel, 'The Influence of Grandparents on the Lives of Children and Adolescents', *Child Development Perspectives*, 7 (2013), 55–60
- Duponcelle, Michel and Myriam Blanc, 'Myriam Blanc: "et elles eurent beaucoup d'enfants..."', *TQ Magazine*, 237, September 2005, pp. 30–31

- Eagleton, Mary (ed.), *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996 [1986])
- Eck, Hélène, 'Les Françaises sous Vichy: Femmes du désastre – citoyennes par le désastre', in *Histoire des femmes*, ed. by Thébaud, pp. 287–323
- Edwards, Natalie, 'Babykillers: Véronique Olmi and Laurence Tardieu on Motherhood', in *Women's Writing in Twenty-First-Century France: Life as Literature*, ed. by Amaleena Damlé and Gill Rye (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), pp. 98–110
- , *Shifting Subjects: Plural Subjectivity in Contemporary Francophone Women's Autobiography* (Newark, Del.: University of Delaware Press, 2011)
- , *Voicing Voluntary Childlessness: Narratives of Non-Mothering in French* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2016)
- "Emma", 'Fallait demander', 9 May 2017 <<https://emmaclit.com/2017/05/09/repartition-des-taches-hommes-femmes/>> [accessed 20 June 2017]
- Engelking, Tama Lea, 'Renée Vivien and The Ladies of the Lake', *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 30 (2002), 363–80
- Fabre, Clarisse and Éric Fassin, *Liberté, égalité, sexualités: Actualité politique des questions sexuelles* (Paris: Belfond, 2003)
- Fassin, Éric, 'The Politics of PACS in a Transatlantic Mirror: Same-Sex Unions and Sexual Difference in France Today', *Sites: The Journal of Twentieth-Century/Contemporary French Studies revue d'études français*, 4 (2000), 55–64
- , 'Same-Sex Marriage, Nation, and Race: French Political Logics and Rhetorics', *Contemporary French Civilization*, 39 (2014), 281–301
- , 'Usage de la science et science des usages: À propos des familles homoparentales', *L'Homme*, 154/155 (2000), 391–407
- Fell, Alison S., *Liberty, Equality, Maternity in Beauvoir, Leduc and Ernaux* (Oxford: Legenda, 2003)
- Fillod, Odile, 'L'invention de la "théorie du genre": Le mariage blanc du Vatican et de la science', *Contemporary French Civilization*, 39 (2014), 321–33
- Finch, Janet and Jennifer Mason, *Negotiating Family Responsibilities* (London: Tavistock/Routledge, 1993)
- Firestone, Shulamith, *The Dialectic of Sex* (London: Cape, 1971 [1970])
- Fisher, Dominique D., 'A propos du "Rachildisme" ou Rachilde et les lesbiennes', *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 31 (2003), 297–310
- Forgali, Amandine, *Un GPS pour la cigogne*, 2 vols (Paris: Terriciae/Forgali, 2011–13)

- Foucault, Michel, *Histoire de la sexualité: La Volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gaillmard, 1976)
- Fraisse, Geneviève and Michelle Perrot (eds), *Histoire des femmes en Occident: Le XIX^e siècle* (Paris: Perrin, 2002 [1991])
- François, Jocelyne, *Les Bonheurs* ([n.p.]: Lacombe, 1982 [1970])
- Freud, Sigmund, 'Female Sexuality' (1931), in *Freud on Women: A Reader*, ed. by Elisabeth Young-Bruehl (London: Hogarth, 1990), pp. 321–41
- , 'Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes', in *Freud on Women*, ed. by Young-Bruehl, pp. 304–14
- , 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality' (1905), in *Freud on Women*, ed. by Young-Bruehl, pp. 89–145
- Friedan, Betty, *The Feminine Mystique* (London: Norton, 2001 [1963])
- Frosh, Stephen, *The Politics of Psychoanalysis: An Introduction to Freudian and Post-Freudian Theory*, 2nd edn (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999 [1987])
- Fulcher, Megan, Erin L. Sutfin, and Charlotte J. Patterson, 'Individual Differences in Gender Development: Associations with Parental Sexual Orientation, Attitudes, and Division of Labor', *Sex Roles*, 58 (2008), 330–41
- Fulcher, Megan, Raymond W. Chan, Barbara Raboy, and Charlotte J. Patterson, 'Contact with Grandparents among Children Conceived via Donor Insemination by Lesbian and Heterosexual Mothers', *Parenting*, 2 (2002), 61–76
- Fuss, Diana, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature & Difference* (London: Routledge, 1989)
- Garnier, Éric, *L'Homoparentalité en France: La Bataille des nouvelles familles* (Vincennes: Thierry Marchaisse, 2012)
- Gasparini, Philippe, *Est-il je? Roman autobiographique et autofiction* (Paris: Seuil, 2004)
- Gibson, Margaret F., 'Introduction: Queering Motherhood in Narrative, Theory, and the Everyday', in *Queering Motherhood: Narrative and Theoretical Perspectives*, ed. by Margaret F. Gibson (Bradford, ON: Demeter, 2014), pp. 1–23
- Girard, Éliane, *Mais qui va garder le chat?* (Paris: JC Lattès, 2005)
- Goldsmith, Elizabeth C., 'Introduction', in *Writing the Female Voice: Essays on Epistolary Literature*, ed. by Elizabeth C. Goldsmith (London: Pinter, 1989), pp. vii–xiii
- Greer, Germaine, *Sex and Destiny: The Politics of Human Fertility* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1984)
- Gross, Martine, 'Être grand-parent dans un contexte homoparental en France: Chassez le biologique par la porte, il revient par la fenêtre', *Recherches féministes*, 22 (2009), 69–

- , *Parent ou homo: Faut-il choisir? Idées reçues sur l'homoparentalité* (Paris: Le Cavalier Bleu, 2013)
- , *Qu'est-ce que l'homoparentalité?* (Paris: Payot & Rivages, 2012)
- , 'Visibilités homoparentales', in *New Queer Images: Representations of Homosexualities in Contemporary Francophone Visual Cultures*, ed. by Florian Grandena and Cristina Johnston (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011), pp. 117–38
- Hall, Stuart, 'Introduction', in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. by Stuart Hall (London: Sage/The Open University, 1997), pp. 1–11
- Halprin, David M., *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love* (London: Routledge, 1990)
- Hanscombe, Gillian and Jackie Forster, *Rocking the Cradle: Lesbian Mothers: A Challenge in Family Living* (London: Owen, 1981)
- Herbrand, Cathy, 'Les rendre grands-parents: L'Enjeu des relations intergénérationnelles au sein de coparentalités gaies et lesbiennes en Belgique', in *Homosexualité et parenté*, ed. by Jérôme Courduriès and Agnès Fine (Paris: Armand Colin, 2014), pp. 175–88
- Herrera, Cristina, "'The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About': Rejection, Redemption, and the Lesbian Daughter in Carla Trujillo's *What Night Brings*", *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 39 (2009), 18–36
- Hicks, Stephen, *Lesbian, Gay, and Queer Parenting: Families, Intimacies, Genealogies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011)
- Hirsch, Marianne, *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989)
- Holmes, Diana, 'The Comfortable Reader: Romantic Bestsellers and Critical Disdain', *French Cultural Studies*, 21 (2010), 287–96
- , *French Women's Writing, 1848–1994* (London: Athlone, 1996)
- , *Romance and Readership in Twentieth-Century France: Love Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006)
- Hughes, Alex, *Violette Leduc: Mothers, Lovers, and Language* (London: W.S. Maney/MHRA, 1994)
- Irigaray, Luce, *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Minuit, 1977)
- , *Le Corps-à-corps avec la mère* (Montreal: La Pleine Lune, 1981)
- , *Et l'une ne bouge pas sans l'autre* (Paris: Minuit, 1979)
- , *J'aime à toi: Esquisse d'une félicité dans l'histoire* (Paris: Grasset, 1992)

- , ‘Petite annonce: Égales ou différentes?’ (1990), in *Je, tu, nous: Pour une culture de la différence* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), pp. 9–15
- , ‘Pourquoi définir des droits sexués?’ (1988), in *Je, tu, nous*, pp. 101–15
- Jenkins, Claire, *Home Movies: The American Family in Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015)
- Jensen, Katherine A., ‘Male Models of Feminine Epistolarity; or, How to Write Like a Woman in Seventeenth-Century France’, in *Writing the Female Voice: Essays on Epistolary Literature*, ed. by Elizabeth C. Goldsmith (London: Pinter, 1989), pp. 25–45
- Johnston, Cristina, *French Minority Cinema* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010)
- Jones, Ann Rosalind, ‘Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of “L’Ecriture Feminine”’, *Feminist Studies*, 7 (1981), 247–63
- Jones, Elizabeth H., *Spaces of Belonging: Home, Culture and Identity in 20th-Century French Autobiography* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007)
- Jordan, Shirley-Ann, ‘Figuring Out the Family: Family as Everyday Practice in Contemporary French Women’s Writing’, in *Affaires de familles: The Family in Contemporary French Culture and Theory*, ed. by Marie-Claire Barnet and Edward Welch (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), pp. 39–58
- Juhasz, Suzanne, ‘Lesbian Romance Fiction and the Plotting of Desire: Narrative Theory, Lesbian Identity, and Reading Practice’, *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, 17 (1998), 65–82
- Julien, Danielle, Marie-France Bureau, and Annie Leblond de Brumath, ‘Grand-parentalité et homoparentalité au Québec: Nouvelles dispositions législatives et proximité des liens en fonction de la composition familiale’, in *Grands-parents et grands-parentalités*, ed. by Benoît Schneider, Marie-Claude Mietkiewicz, and Sylvain Bouyer (Ramonville Sainte-Agne: Érès, 2005), pp. 199–217
- Käppeli, Anne-Marie, ‘Scènes féministes’, in *Histoire des femmes*, ed. by Fraisse and Perrot, pp. 575–613
- Klein, Melanie, ‘Early Stages of the Oedipus Conflict’ (1928), in *‘Love, Guilt and Reparation’ and Other Works, 1921–1945* (London: Vintage, 1998 [1975]), pp. 186–98
- Knibiehler, Yvonne and Catherine Fouquet, *L’Histoire des mères du moyen-âge à nos jours* (Paris: Montalba, 1980)
- Kornhaber, Arthur and Kenneth L. Woodward, *Grandparents/Grandchildren: The Vital Connection* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1985)
- Kristeva, Julia, ‘Stabat Mater’ (1977), in *Histoires d’amour* (Paris: Denoël, 1983), pp. 225–

- Kurdek, Lawrence A., 'The Allocation of Household Labor by Partners in Gay and Lesbian Couples', *Journal of Family Issues*, 28 (2007), 132–48
- Lacan, Jacques, 'La Signification du phallus' (1958), in *Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), pp. 685–95
- Lacoste-Metty, Véronique, 'Une très longue manche de fiançailles', *La Montagne*, 7 July 2013, p. 6
- Lacroix, Xavier, "'Une mesure discriminatoire pour l'enfant'", 7 January 2013 <<http://www.eglise.catholique.fr/actualites/dossiers/dossiers-2013/le-mariage-pour-tous/359669-une-mesure-discriminatoire-pour-lenfant/>> [accessed 2 February 2017]
- Lawler, Steph, 'Stories and the Social World', in *Research Methods for Cultural Studies*, ed. by Michael Pickering (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), pp. 32–49
- Lechaufeur, Nadine, 'Maternité, famille, état', in *Histoire des femmes*, ed. by Thébaud, pp. 555–80
- Leclair, Agnès, 'Le mariage pour tous, sujet de divergences entre François Fillon et Alain Juppé', *Le Figaro*, 23 November 2016 <<http://www.lefigaro.fr/elections/presidentielles/primaires-droite/2016/11/23/35004-20161123ARTFIG00352-le-mariage-pour-tous-sujet-de-frictions-entre-francois-fillon-et-alain-juppe.php>> [accessed 31 May 2017]
- Lejeune, Philippe, *Le Pacte autobiographique*, new edn (Paris: Seuil, 1996 [1975])
- Lerner, Sasha and Ada Sinacore, 'Lesbian Mother–Heterosexual Daughter Relationships: Toward a Postmodern Feminist Analysis', *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, 8 (2012), 446–64
- Lloyd, Moya, *Beyond Identity Politics: Feminism, Power & Politics* (London: SAGE, 2005)
- Lyonette, Clare and Rosemary Crompton, 'Sharing the Load? Partners' Relative Earnings and the Division of Domestic Labour', *Work, Emploment and Society*, 29 (2015), 23–40
- MacArthur, Elizabeth J., *Extravagant Narratives: Closure and Dynamics in the Epistolary Form* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990)
- Mallaval, Catherine, 'Adoption pour tous: les juges récalcitrants prennent une claque', *Libération*, 16 April 2015 <http://next.liberation.fr/vous/2015/04/16/adoption-pour-tous-les-juges-recalcitrants-prennent-une-claque_1243918> [accessed 23 September 2016]
- , 'PMA, Procréation médicalement arbitraire...', *Libération*, 1 July 2015 <http://www.liberation.fr/societe/2015/07/01/pma-procreation-medicalement-arbitraire_1341021> [accessed 23 September 2016]

- Mallet, Axelle, *Le Choix de la reine* (Paris: KTM, 2009)
- Margarito, Mireille, *Une vie à t'espérer: Mon combat pour être mère* (Paris: Michalon, 2014)
- Marks, Elaine, 'Lesbian Intertextuality', in *Homosexualities and French Literature: Cultural Contexts/Critical Texts*, ed. by George Stambolian and Elaine Marks (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), pp. 353–77
- Mayeur, Françoise, 'L'Éducation des filles: Le Modèle laïque', in *Histoire des femmes*, ed. by Fraisse and Perrot, pp. 281–301
- Miller, Amie Klemptauer, *She Looks Just Like You: A Memoir of (Nonbiological Lesbian) Motherhood* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2010)
- Moi, Toril, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2002 [1985])
- Monferrand, Hélène de, *Les Amies d'Héloïse*, Le Livre de Poche, 7316 (Paris: Fallois, 1990)
 —, *Les Enfants d'Héloïse* (Paris: La Cerisaie, 2002 [1997])
- Nordqvist, Petra, "'I've Redeemed Myself by Being a 1950s 'Housewife'": Parent–Grantparent Relationships in the Context of Lesbian Childbirth', *Journal of Family Issues*, 36 (2015), 480–500
- Oakley, Ann, *From Here to Maternity: Becoming a Mother* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986 [1979])
 —, *Housewife* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976 [1974])
 —, *The Sociology of Housework* (London: Martin Robertson, 1974)
- O'Reilly, Andrea (ed.), *Feminist Mothering* (Albany: SUNY, 2008)
 — (ed.), *From Motherhood to Mothering: The Legacy of Adrienne Rich's 'Of Woman Born'* (Ithaca: SUNY, 2004)
 —, 'Introduction', in *Feminist Mothering*, ed. by O'Reilly, pp. 1–22
 — (ed.), *Mother Outlaws: Theories and Practices of Empowered Mothering* (Toronto: Women's Press, 2004)
 —, 'Mothering against Motherhood and the Possibility of Empowered Mothering for Mothers and their Children', in *From Motherhood to Mothering*, ed. by O'Reilly, pp. 159–74
 — (ed.), *Twenty-First-Century Motherhood: Experience, Identity, Policy, Agency* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010)
- Park, Shelly M., *Mothering Queerly, Queering Motherhood: Resisting Monomaternalism in Adoptive, Lesbian, Blended, and Polygamous Families* (Albany: SUNY, 2013)

- Parker, Rozsika, *Torn in Two: The Experience of Maternal Ambivalence* (London: Virago, 1995)
- Pasco, Allan H., *Inner Workings of the Novel: Studying a Genre* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010)
- Patterson, Charlotte J., 'Children of Lesbian and Gay Parents', *Child Development*, 63 (1992), 1025–42
- Patterson, Charlotte J., Erin L. Sutfin, and Megan Fulcher, 'Division of Labor among Lesbian and Heterosexual Parenting Couples: Correlates of Specialized versus Shared Patterns', *Journal of Adult Development*, 11 (2004), 179–89
- Patterson, Yolanda Astarita, *Simone de Beauvoir and the Demystification of Motherhood* (Ann Arbor, MI: U.M.I. Research, 1989)
- Payne, Robert, 'Lesbianism and Maternal Ambivalence in Hélène de Monferrand's *Les amies d'Héloïse* (1990) and *Les enfants d'Héloïse* (1997)', *Revue critique de fiction française contemporaine*, 12 (2016), 120–29
- Pfeffer, Naomi, 'Artificial Insemination, In-Vitro Fertilization and the Stigma of Infertility', in *Reproductive Technologies: Gender, Motherhood and Medicine*, ed. by Michelle Stanworth (Cambridge: Polity Press/Blackwell, 1987), pp. 81–97
- Prince-Hughes, Dawn, *Expecting Teryk: An Exceptional Path to Parenthood* (Athens: Swallow Press/Ohio University Press, 2005)
- Rich, Adrienne, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 5 (1980), 631–60
- , *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, 2nd edn (London: Norton, 1986 [1976])
- Robcis, Camille, 'How the Symbolic Became French: Kinship and Republicanism in the PACS Debates', *Discourse*, 26 (2004), 110–35
- , *The Law of Kinship: Anthropology, Psychoanalysis, and the Family in France* (London: Cornell University Press, 2013)
- Robinson, Christopher, *Scandal in the Ink: Male and Female Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century French Literature* (London: Cassell, 1995)
- Roof, Judith, *Come As You Are: Sexuality and Narrative* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996)
- Roudinesco, Élisabeth, *La Famille en désordre* (Paris: Fayard, 2002)
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, 'Les Confessions de J.-J. Rousseau' (1782–89), in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Michel Launay, 3 vols (Paris: Seuil, 1967–71)

- Ryan-Flood, Róisín, *Lesbian Motherhood: Gender, Families and Sexual Citizenship* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009)
- Rye, Gill, 'Lost and Found: Mother–Daughter Relations in Paule Constant's Fiction', in *Women's Writing in Contemporary France*, ed. by Rye and Worton, pp. 65–76
- , 'Marginal Identities and New Kinship Paradigms: Surrogate Motherhood in Contemporary Women's Writing in France', in *Experiment and Experience: Women's Writing in France, 2000–2010*, ed. by Gill Rye and Amaleena Damlé (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013), pp. 109–24
- , *Narratives of Mothering: Women's Writing in Contemporary France* (Newark, Del.: University of Delaware Press, 2009)
- , 'New Representations and Politics of Procreation: Surrogate Motherhood, Artificial Insemination and Human Cloning in Contemporary Women's Writing in France', in *Women, Genre and Circumstance: Essays in Memory of Elizabeth Fallaize*, ed. by Margaret Atack, Diana Holmes, Diana Knight, and Judith Still (Oxford: Legenda, 2012), pp. 109–21
- , *Reading for Change: Interactions between Text and Identity in Contemporary French Women's Writing (Baroche, Cixous, Constant)* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2001)
- , 'Registering Trauma: The Body in Childbirth in Contemporary French Women's Writing', *Nottingham French Studies*, 45 (2006), 92–104
- Rye, Gill and Michael Worton (eds), *Women's Writing in Contemporary France: New Writers, New Literatures in the 1990s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002)
- Saigal, Monique, *L'Écriture: Lien de fille à mère chez Jeanne Hyvrard, Chantal Chawaf, et Annie Ernaux* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000)
- Saussure, Ferdinand de, *Cours de linguistique générale*, 3rd edn (Paris: Payot, 1949 [1916])
- Schaeffer, Jean-Marie, *Qu'est-ce qu'un genre littéraire?* (Paris: Seuil, 1989)
- Schor, Naomi, 'This Essentialism Which Is Not One: Coming to Grips with Irigaray' (1989), in *Engaging with Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought*, ed. by Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor, and Margaret Whitford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 57–78
- Schultz, Gretchen, 'La Rage du plaisir et la rage de la douleur: Lesbian Pleasure and Suffering in Fin-de-Siècle French Literature and Sexology', in *Pleasure and Pain in Nineteenth-Century French Literature and Culture*, ed. by David Evans and Kate Griffiths (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), pp. 175–86
- Schumm, Walter, 'Children of Homosexuals More Apt to Be Homosexuals? A Reply to

- Morrison and to Cameron Based on an Examination of Multiple Sources of Data', *Journal of Biosocial Science*, 42 (2010), 721–42
- Schwarzer, Alice and Simone de Beauvoir, 'Le Deuxième Sexe: Trente ans après' (1976), in *Simone de Beauvoir aujourd'hui: Six entretiens* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1984), pp. 71–85
- Scott, Joan W., 'La Travailleuse', trans. by Geneviève Faure, in *Histoire des femmes*, ed. by Fraisse and Perrot, pp. 479–511
- Shaktini, Namascar, 'Displacing the Phallic Subject: Wittig's Lesbian Writing', *Signs*, 8 (1982), 29–44
- , 'Monique Wittig's New Language', *Pacific Coast Philology*, 24 (1989), 83–93
- Sheringham, Michael, 'Changing the Script: Women Writers and the Rise of Autobiography', in *A History of Women's Writing in France*, ed. by Sonya Stephens (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 185–203
- , *French Autobiography: Devices and Desires: Rousseau to Perec* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993)
- Shoaf, Rachel E., 'Two Mothers and Their Child: A Look at the Uncertain Status of Nonbiological Lesbian Mothers Under Contemporary Law', *William and Mary Journal of Women and the Law*, 12 (2005), 267–95
- Silberstein, Martine, *Ma princesse est atteinte de leucodystrophie: Témoignage d'une mère à sa fille* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2010)
- Sohn, Anne-Marie, 'Entre deux guerres: Les Rôles féminins en France et en Angleterre', in *Histoire des femmes*, ed. by Thébaud, pp. 165–95
- Sowerwine, Charles, 'Woman's Brain, Man's Brain: Feminism and Anthropology in Late Nineteenth-Century France', *Women's History Review*, 12 (2003), 289–308
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, Routledge Classics (London: Routledge, 2006 [1987])
- Stacey, Judith and Timothy Biblarz, '(How) Does the Sexual Orientation of Children Matter?', *American Sociological Review*, 66 (2001), 159–83
- Stanworth, Michelle, 'Reproductive Technologies and the Deconstruction of Motherhood', in *Reproductive Technologies: Gender, Motherhood and Medicine*, ed. by Michelle Stanworth (Cambridge: Polity Press/Blackwell, 1987), pp. 10–35
- Strathern, Marilyn, *Reproducing the Future: Essays on Anthropology, Kinship and the New Reproductive Technologies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992)
- Sullivan, Maureen, *The Family of Woman: Lesbian Mothers, their Children, and the*

- Undoing of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004)
- Sutfin, Erin L., Megan Fulcher, Ryan P. Bowles, and Charlotte J. Patterson, 'How Lesbian and Heterosexual Parents Convey Attitudes about Gender to their Children: The Role of Gendered Environments', *Sex Roles*, 58 (2008), 501–13
- Tervonen, Taina and Brigitte Célier, 'Maman, Mamour, ses deux mamans: Interview de Brigitte Célier', 30 June 2008 <http://www.univers-1.com/maman_mamour_ses_deux_mamans_interview_brigitte_celier.html> [accessed 31 March 2017]
- Thébaud, Françoise, 'La Grande Guerre: Le Triomphe de la division sexuelle', in *Histoire des femmes*, ed. by Thébaud, pp. 85–144
- (ed.), *Histoire des femmes en Occident: Le XX^e siècle* (Paris: Perrin, 2002 [1992])
- Thompson, Becky W., *Mothering without a Compass: White Mother's Love, Black Son's Courage* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000)
- Tôn, Emilie, 'La "charge mentale", le syndrome des femmes épuisées "d'avoir à penser à tout"', *L'Express*, 10 May 2017 <http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/societe/la-charge-mentale-le-syndrome-des-femmes-epuisees-d-avoir-a-penser-a-tout_1906874.html> [accessed 20 June 2017]
- Toonder, Jeanette M. L. den, "*Qui est-je?*" *L'écriture autobiographique des nouveaux romanciers* (Paris: Peter Lang, 1999)
- Unwin, Timothy, 'On the Novel and the Writing of Literary History', in *The Cambridge Companion to the French Novel from 1800 to the Present*, ed. by Timothy Unwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 1–15
- Waelti-Walters, Jennifer, *Damned Women: Lesbians in French Novels, 1796–1996* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000)
- Wainright, Jennifer L. and Charlotte J. Patterson, 'Peer Relations among Adolescents with Female Same-Sex Parents', *Developmental Psychology*, 44 (2008), 117–26
- Walkowitz, Judith, 'Sexualités dangereuses', trans. by Geneviève Faure, in *Histoire des femmes*, ed. by Fraisse and Perrot, pp. 439–78
- Webster, Roger, *Studying Literary Theory: An Introduction* (London: Arnold, 1990)
- Weeks, Jeffrey, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present*, 2nd edn (London: Quartet Books, 1990 [1977])
- Winnicott, D. W., 'Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena' (1951), in *Collected Papers: Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis* (London: Tavistock, 1958), pp. 229–42
- Wittig, Monique, 'The Category of Sex' (1976/1982), in *'The Straight Mind' and Other*

- Essays* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp. 1–8
- , ‘The Mark of Gender’ (1985), in *The Straight Mind*, pp. 76–89
- , ‘The Point of View: Universal or Particular?’ (1980), in *The Straight Mind*, pp. 59–67
- , ‘The Straight Mind’ (1980), in *The Straight Mind*, pp. 21–32
- Yeatman, Lucy, ‘Lesbian Co-Parents: Still Not Real Mothers’, *Family Law*, 43 (2013), 1581–87
- <https://www.apgl.fr/article/item/503-30-ans-apgl-dates> [accessed 21 April 2016]
- <http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/tableau.asp?reg_id=0&ref_id=amfd3> [accessed 27 October 2016]
- <http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/tableau.asp?reg_id=0&ref_id=NATnon02231> [accessed 27 October 2016]
- <<http://www.marianne.net/video-elisabeth-badinter-defend-les-parents-homos-face-sainte-famille-naturelle-100248208.html>> [accessed 4 February 2017]
- <<http://www.lamanifpourtous.fr/qui-sommes-nous/notre-message/>> [accessed 30 May 2017]
- <<https://en-marche.fr/emmanuel-macron/le-programme/familles-et-societe>> [accessed 31 May 2017]