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## L'Ange et les Pervers: Lucie Delarue-Mardrus' Ambivalent Poetic Identity

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## **"L'ANGE ET LES PERVERS": LUCIE DELARUE-MARDRUS'S AMBIVALENT POETIC IDENTITY**

From the time Lucie Delarue-Mardrus (1880-1945) began writing, verse came to her as a more natural form of expression than prose, and though she eventually became a prolific author whose works ran the gamut of literary genres, she felt above all born to be a poet. She accepted her destiny with curious passivity and not a little anxiety "comme une chose fatale et dont je n'etais pas responsable. Je puis meme dire qu'une espece d'angoisse me venait, si timide et sans defense, d'avoir ete choisie pour etre ce poete."(n1) The role she felt destined to fill seems to have given her more pain than personal satisfaction, and yet she was understandably disappointed when readers appreciated her novels more than her poems, because, as she explained to a close friend, "je ne suds qu'un poete. Je le suds comme les fees vent fees. Ma vie dans les plus petite details est poesie"(n2) Delarue-Mardrus's memoirs, written when she was in her fifties, reinforce the importance of poetry in her life: "c'etait dans mes vers que je donnais vraiment mon ame. Car ma poesie seule m'explique et me justifie. Wile est toute mon histoire" (P 93).

Many aspects of Lucie Delarue-Mardrus's "histoire," and especially her primary identification with the figure of the poet from a young age, raise questions about the poetic identity she attempted to shape for herself as she grew to become a professional woman writer in early twentieth-century France. How do Delarue-Mardrus's poems represent her poetic self, and what does her poetic identity imply about the difficulties a woman writer faces when she aspires to express (or repress) a feminine self in a genre overwhelmingly practiced by men with very few women models? Lucie Delarue-Mardrus's writing reveals a split or ambivalent persona as she waivers between identifying the poet as "angelic"--intellectual, sexless, and objective, qualities reflecting a notion of the poet that traditionally values poetic distance, and "perverted"--sensual, personal, and feeling oriented, qualities usually associated with a feminine poetic voice.(n3) The angel or virgin persona which is especially prevalent in Lucie's early poetry, is eventually displaced, but not replaced, by a more female-identified speaker which reflects the poet's growing feminist consciousness. The "perversion" of Lucie's poetic persona was influenced in part by her involvement with the famous saloniere, Natalie Clifford Barney, who not only introduced the young poet to the woman-centered community known as "Paris-Lesbos," but also awakened her to the feminine side of her double nature which she began to express more openly in her work. Delarue-Mardrus's relationship with Bamey inspired a collection of love poems, and nearly thirty years later, a novel suggestively titled *L'Ange et les pervers* (1930). The

angel/pervert dichotomy developed in this semiautobiographical novel expresses in a fundamental way the ambivalent poetic identity that marks much of Delarue-Mardrus's writing. Read in the context of her poems, memoirs and *L'Ange et les pervers*, the two basic masks through which Lucie Delarue-Mardrus wrote offer important insights into the genre-gender conflict that modern feminist critics describe as a double bind--the disunity a woman poet feels in a society that defines the roles of poet and woman in mutually exclusive terms.(n4) In particular, the tormented persona of the isolated and sexless angel that Lucie Delarue-Mardrus frequently adopted, exposes the dilemma of a woman poet who is unable to fully integrate a female sense of identity into her writing.

The particular situation of the woman poet is finally being considered by feminist critics whose ongoing inquiry into the relationship between gender and genre was at first focused on women novelists.(n5) Although Lucie Delarue-Mardrus was a popular and admired writer in her own day, she has thus far not figured in this debate for several reasons. Her work is out of print, and with the exception of a few poems, none of it has been translated into English. Despite her claim to be only a poet, the importance of her poetry has often been overshadowed by the many other literary genres she practiced as well as by her colorful life. Lucie Delarue-Mardrus produced over thirty novels, three plays, a beauty book, several travelogues, hundreds of articles and two historical biographies in addition to twelve volumes of poetry during her prolific career which began at the turn of the century and ended with her death in 1945.(n6) The few poems of hers which are regularly included in French anthologies, celebrate her native Normandy, and French readers today know her primarily as a regional poet. Recently, however, more attention has been given to Lucie Delarue-Mardrus's feminist writing.(n7) While it is important to introduce readers to the significant and neglected feminist dimensions of her work, the complexity of Delarue-Mardrus's vast oeuvre and the ambivalent, often contradictory images of the woman writer it contains, keeps us from simplifying and overromanticizing her career. A portrait of this artist as a Belle Epoque woman of letters does not neatly fit into a chic art nouveau frame.

And yet, a bit of romanticizing is difficult to avoid, especially since Lucie's career as a professional writer began with her marriage to the Egyptian physician and poet Joseph-Charles Mardrus, famous for his French translation of *A Thousand and One Arabian Nights*. This marriage, her relationship with her family, and involvement with Barney's circle relate to my discussion in that they all contributed to Lucie Delarue-Mardrus's developing sense of her self as a poet. J-C Mardrus asked for Lucie's hand in marriage three days after hearing her recite her poems at a mutual friend's salon. She described their first meeting as "un coup de foudre intellectual," and emphasized that it was the poet, and not the woman, with whom Mardrus fell in love: "J'etais pour lui, suds restee avant tout et peut-etre seulement: Le Poete" (*Memoires*, p. 145). The nature of their relationship eventually allowed her the freedom to become intimately involved with women like Natalie Barney, but it also encouraged her to cultivate the sexually ambiguous role of *Le Poete*.

Like another fin-de-siecle writing couple, Willy and Colette, Lucie's publicity-minded husband promoted his wife's reputation as a Belle Epoque femme de lettres by using his literary connections to get her work published, and by having numerous photos taken of her in various modes of attire that capitalized on her "ambiguous charms."(n8) For their wedding photo, Mardrus had his new bride dress in a tomboyish cycling outfit, and then ornamented her with

precious jewels from the East. The perverse innocence of this photo corresponds to the popular postcards of Colette as Claudine. Other parallels include Colette's harsh apprenticeship under Willy who locked her in her room to write; Mardrus reportedly did the same for Lucie so she could write free from distractions. Colette and Lucie Delarue-Mardrus were both involved in lesbian relationships, and when their respective first marriages broke up, they each went on to pursue careers as writers on their own, becoming two of the few women from this generation to actually make a living from writing. Despite these similarities, Colette remarried twice while Lucie preferred to remain single. Her decision to retain her hyphenated married name after her divorce suggests an ambivalence about her identity that contrasts with the single name Colette adopted as she separated herself from Willy's control.

For a woman from Lucie's background, brought up to be a proper bourgeois wife and mother, becoming a professional writer was a difficult undertaking. According to the account she gives in *Mes Memoires*, poetry was a constant source of agitation for Lucie, a "dutiful daughter" of a middle-class Catholic family who was raised with values similar to those rejected by another dutiful daughter some thirty years later, Simone de Beauvoir. Like Beauvoir, Lucie perceived that writing belonged to the world of her father, and significantly, she used the back sides of the law briefs he discarded for her own work: "Et c'est sur cette meme marque de papier, n'imaginant pas de me servir d'un autre format, que j'ai continue toute ma vie a ecrire mes poemes, mes romans et mes contes--d'une ecriture identique a celle de mon pere d'ailleurs" (*Memoires*, p. 59).

Although she conformed her handwriting to match her father's, the very act of writing was subversive in that it placed her in a position of disobedience vis-a-vis societal expectations. Lucie describes being overwhelmed by feelings of guilt when she sat down to compose her first lines of verse: ". . . baclant devoirs et lecons, je me depechais d'ecrire des vers. C'etait en quelque sorte une forme de paresse, done un remoras de plus. En outre, les jugeant fort mauvais, il ne m'en rendait nul plaisir. Et pourtant je continuais, clandestine et coupable" (p. 58). If she believed that poetry was her true vocation, why would she feel so guilty? Instead of doing what a "good girl" was expected to do (i.e. her homework), she was writing poems, a traditionally masculine activity, and when she later reveals that many of her first poems were inspired by her passionate feelings for an older woman, it becomes clear that she was being doubly "perverse" by expressing a point of view traditionally excluded from poetry.<sup>(n9)</sup> Furthermore, she judged her verses to be "fort mauvais," suggesting that they failed to live up to either her own expectations, or standards established by the male-dominated poetic canon she studied at school. Destiny decreed she would be a poet, but Lucie's guilty feelings and secrecy imply that on some level she felt responsible for pursuing an activity that she would later call "mon plus coupable peche" (*Memoires*, p. 145).

At first Lucie did not dare show her poems to anyone, not even her five older sisters. Until the publication of her first volume of poems, she kept her family almost entirely in the dark about her aspirations to be a poet as if writing were a shameful act of self-indulgence. When Lucie received thirty francs for her first published article, she was scandalized and quickly spent the money before her father found out. Not much later she was writing for *La Fronde* when she realized that the editors of the journal sympathized with Dreyfus: "Connaissant les opinions des hommes de ma famille, je fus saisie d'effroi comme si j'etais tombee en enfer. 'Que papa ne sache pas ca!'" (*Memoires*, p. 97). She was not quite prepared for an open act of rebellion.

When she was twenty, Lucie Delarue built up the courage to show her poems to the poet Francois Coppee. Their meeting proved to be a turning point in her career, not because he encouraged her, but because he advised the young poet to take up sewing or housekeeping instead of writing verses. Lucie's reaction was to immerse herself in an in-depth study of French prosody, the results of which are evident in the carefully crafted verses she produced. Throughout her many volumes of poetry, she experimented with a variety of fixed forms, and she was the only woman of her generation to write a formal "Art poetique" in which she stresses respect for the rules of prosody, discipline, and the importance of being "un bon ouvrier / Le metier / Etant l'autre aile du poete."(n10)

A good literary daughter who paid her respects to her poetic forefathers, Lucie Delarue-Mardrus's concern for poetic form earned approval from contemporary critics. Paul Leroy was among those who admired the formal aspects of her work which he labeled "masculine." According to Leroy, "elle a toujours essaye de discipliner de mater les inclinations litteraires et sentimentales de son sexe.... Si sa sensibilite tourmentee est toute d'impulsion feminine, sa courageuse observation est comme virile."(n11)

The struggle between "masculine" control and "se sensibilite tourmentee feminine" which Leroy describes, corresponds to the separate realms of thinking and feeling that Lucie Delarue-Mardrus personified as "l'ange et les pervers" in her novel by that name, but this division is already evident in her earliest collection of poems published in 1901 as *Occident*.(n12) *Occident* constitutes her "virginal" collection because Lucie wrote these poems between the ages of thirteen and twenty, before she met her future husband. J-C Mardrus helped publish the volume, a debt she acknowledges in the dedication, but Lucie's inscription also calls attention to the virginal inspiration of the collection:

Cette ame qui dans la virginite d'hier ainsi parla et chanta loin des paroles et des chants humains, je la dedie toute avec ses poemes . . . a celui-la qui pour le futur l'a situee dans la vie, Le Docteur J. C. Mardrus, Mon Mari, L.D.-M. (1)

The poet parallels her virginity with a naive unworldliness that separated her from normal human activities. Although Mardrus was able to situate her work "dans la vie" by having it published, something Lucie hesitated to do on her own, the inspiration for her poems, and the concept of herself as a poet which they reveal, depend on separation from the world. By treating Lucie as an artist whose talent needed to be nurtured, J-C Mardrus acted as a buffer between his wife and the world. She was afraid that becoming a "properly socialized" woman would mean giving up the control she believed was essential to writing poetry.(n13) This fear helps explain why she equated maternity with servitude, and also why she sometimes wrote through an isolated persona who rejected the world as well as her sexuality. Delarue-Mardrus's virgin persona is a variation of the sexless angel we will encounter in *L'Ange et les pervers*.

Throughout *Occident*, Lucie Delarue-Mardrus relates virginity to independence which she generally describes as freedom from irrational passions, and more specifically, freedom from sexual desires and the dreaded consequence of pregnancy to which she was personally very opposed. In "Salut" (*Occident*, pp. 45-46), for example, she imagines herself clinging to the precarious safety of a small boat while she stares into the depths of her "perverse twin," the sea.

The sea represents her unexplored sexuality, and while she fears her eventual capsize, she is fascinated by the rich "tresors ignores" hidden in the depths of the water. "La voix de la mer," from the same collection, also describes the poet's struggle to remain lucid and detached from her sexuality. The poem opens with the poet working alone at her desk, dressed in austere monk-like robes. Through an open window, she hears the voice of the sea which she describes as her *soeur de tourment*--powerful, violent, and yet containing in her "ma faiblesse de femme." Although she eventually abandons her books to answer the sea's call, the poet resists the sensuality she associates with the feminine, and insists on remaining chaste:

Ah! chante, chante-moi tes rythmes violents!  
Chasse tout ce qu'en moi je hais et j'abomine,  
Ces rêves de baisers ou l'âme s'effémine,  
Ces tendresses qui font les esprits indolents!

Ah! cingle, frappe, mords de ta seine rudesse  
L'adulte chair qui songe à de la volupté  
Car je me veux pudique en ma virginite,  
Moi, ta folle, orgueilleuse et sombre poétesse. (pp. 55-56)

The poet is still hesitant to explore her sexuality, but she nevertheless recognizes it as a powerful source of inspiration, and in later poems associates the sea directly with Sappho's poetry: "Je crois que cette mer m'apprend les chants perdus / De la lyre saphique encor vivante en elle...." (n14) It is not surprising that in *Nos Secrètes amours* (1951), the collection of love poems inspired by Natalie Barney, Lucie addresses her lover as "amante marine," and relies primarily on sea imagery to describe their love making.

On the formal level, the regular verses of *Occident* are nothing out of the ordinary except that the poet has avoided the heavy-handed descriptions associated with the feminine lyricism of poets such as Anna de Noailles, who also debuted in 1901 with the publication of *Le Cœur innombrable*. In Delarue-Mardrus's early poems, she demonstrates a talent for creating dramatic rhythms, using strong action verbs, and unusual word combinations which Charles Maurras attributes to the influence of the Symbolists. In his influential essay "Le Romantisme féminin" (1903), (n15) Maurras admires this poet "évidemment douée de l'imagination du langage" (p. 194), but in a tone reminiscent of *Copée's* patronizing advice, he argues that Delarue-Mardrus's "folies purees" are tempered "par ce petit instinct de la pureté et de l'ordre, qui est toujours vivant dans les cœurs délicats et qui doit correspondre chez une écolière-poète à l'instinct de propreté chez la ménagère" (p. 188). He attributes her "tidy" verses to instinct rather than a conscious artistic effort, but in a note referring to Delarue-Mardrus's third volume *Horizons*, Maurras points out that her purity of expression is being corrupted by the bad influence of other "Feminine Romantics" (Gerard d'Houville, Renée Vivien and Anna de Noailles) who "sont en train de se gâter et de se pervertir l'un l'autre" (p. 195). To illustrate this perversion, Maurras refers to one of Delarue-Mardrus's antimaternity poems, but he is too prudish to quote the lines from "Refus" which shocked his contemporaries by their reference to menstruation: "--Et, parmi mes coussins pleins d'ombre, je m'enivre / De ma stérilité qui saigne lentement." (n16)

Given Maurras's right-wing ideology and his association with the nationalist group *Action Française*, his use of "pervertir" has significant implications. From the Old French verb meaning to turn the wrong way, "pervertir" could apply to any mode of writing that deviated from the

dominant ideology Maurras promoted. He is an extreme example, but he was not alone. Other critics also perceived the literary activities of women such as Delarue-Mardrus as threatening because writing prevented them from fulfilling their proper and natural roles of wife and mother.(n17)

More "perverted" poems were to follow as Delarue-Mardrus's poetic self became more consciously identified as female, and increasingly contrasted with the characteristics traditionally labeled as "masculine" such as reason and objective distance. In "Le cri des femmes dans la nuit" from *Par Vents et marées* (1910), she opposes woman's passionate animal-like nature with man's rationality and finds him not only lacking as a lover, but also fearful of woman's powerful sensuality:

Vous avez bien voulu que nous fussions des meres,  
Vous, les maitres, vous les plus forts,  
Meres, oui, mais non pas amantes tout entieres,  
Parce que vous craignez le cri de notre corps.

Vous etes tout, logique et science et raison,  
Mais vous n'etes pas nos vrais males  
Vous etes trop humains pour nous trop animales:  
La bete feminine aime en toute saison.(n18)

In her final stanza she compares women to the sea, and taking one last jab at man's inadequacies, she concludes "Et toute la ferveur de vos petites ames / Ne satisfera point l'océan de leur chair!" (pp. 77-79). These stanzas help illustrate why, despite her concern for formal control and discipline, Lucie Delarue-Mardrus earned a reputation as "la poetesse la plus enflammée de ce temps." In a 1929 essay on feminine lyricism, Jean Heritier describes Delarue-Mardrus as a "bacchante libérée de toute contrainte, (qui) par la sincérité sans voiles dont elle exprime la frénésie de l'amour physique, a mis à nu le plus intime et le plus véridique de la nature féminine."(n19)

Heritier is inaccurate in describing Delarue-Mardrus as "libérée de toute contrainte." Although there are some extremely passionate and feminist elements in her work, the virgin or the angel is never far behind the "bacchante." Perhaps the only poems she composed "sans voiles" were the love poems written to Natalie Barney and inspired by what she calls "un instinct longuement préparé de faire la sensualité rejoindre la poésie ou la poésie rejoindre la sensualité, jonction qui ne s'est jamais tout à fait accomplie" (*Mémoires*, p. 145). Lucie's inability to sustain the junction between poetry and sensuality corresponds to the unsuccessful integration of the "angelic" and "perverted" sides of her double nature which she describes in *L'Ange et les pervers*.(n20)

Lucie Delarue-Mardrus wrote the novel when she was an established and successful fifty-year-old writer, and it constitutes a mature reflection on that key period in her emotional and professional development thirty years earlier when she first encountered Natalie Clifford Barney and her "Paris-Lesbos" circle. The two women met around 1901 and became lovers for a short time between 1902-03, but more important, they remained close lifelong friends. Lucie and her husband were regular guests at Barney's left-bank Parisian salon which she hosted for over fifty years and where receptions were routinely held to honor the publication of each of Lucie's new books. When Barney established an *Académie des Femmes* as a forum for the exchange of

literary ideas between French and Anglophone women writers, Lucie Delarue-Mardrus became the first president. Although Barney was also a writer, she preferred to spend her considerable energy on her friends. Her life, she said, was her greatest literary accomplishment, and she criticized those writers "qui font vivre leurs vers de la beauté qu'ils volent à la vie. Mais importe-t-il que leurs vers vivent s'ils n'ont su être poètes dans la vie?"(n21) Through her example and supportive friendship, Barney attempted to help women like Lucie Delarue-Mardrus become "poètes dans la vie." This is more or less the role she plays in *L'Ange et les pervers*.(n22)

The unpublished letters Lucie wrote to Natalie Barney over the course of many years reveal a depth of feeling and a sense of gratitude (both personal and professional) that is decidedly understated in this novel as well as her memoirs, both of which gloss over the sexual nature of their early liaison:

J'ai longuement, dans *L'Ange et les pervers*, analysé décrit et Natalie et la vie à laquelle elle m'initia, vie où il ne fut que beaucoup plus tard que je finis par ne plus jouer que le rôle insexué de l'ange. Du reste Natalie, au bout de peu de temps, était devenue simplement l'amie de cœur, la sœur, le fidèle et pur compagnon donc, depuis plus de trente ans, j'estime si hautement la fierté, la loyauté, la grandeur, nonobstant ses défauts insupportables et ses vices, qui, sans la littérature qu'elle y met, n'existeraient probablement pas. (Mémoires, pp. 144-45).

This description, with its emphasis on Barney's loyal friendship (and not sexual conquest), corresponds closely to her portrait in *L'Ange et les pervers* where she is easily recognized as Laurette Wells, the principal "pervers" of the title. The angel's role belongs to Marion de Valdeclare, the protagonist and author's alter ego whose sexual identity is as ambiguous as her name. Raised and educated as a boy, she discovers that she is actually a girl at puberty, but the thought of being sexually female revolts her. Marion prefers to think of herself as "un œuf clair," and compares her lack of sexual identity with an angel, a characteristic that is essential to understanding the angel personae who appear in many of Delarue-Mardrus's poems: "La vie n'a pas de sens pour lui (Marion) que dans ce rôle de neutre au milieu de la bataille des appétites. Amer amusement! Trop long exil, parmi les humains, d'un archange désespéré qui ne croit pas au ciel" (p. 106). Since Marion has been socialized as a male child and not a girl, she is not bothered by the domestic "Angel in the House," that selfless paragon of Victorian female virtue that Virginia Woolf describes having to kill before she can write.(n23) Marion is also a writer, but her situation is an intriguing reversal of Woolf's--she is solitary, intellectual and already equipped with a room of her own. Ironically, her challenge is to revive the "perverted" qualities of her repressed femininity represented by Laurette Wells. Like Barney, Laurette is a warm, generous, and devoted friend who is much more at home with her sexuality than Marion. Although Marion claims to love no one, Laurette earns her respect because she is "une vraie révoltée et toujours prête à rebeller les autres" (p. 23).

The asexual Marion considers herself pure in comparison to the perverse sensuality of Laurette, but her angel status is more accurately that of a fallen angel--she is on this earth, but not of this earth, a false man who is not quite a real woman. Her identity crisis results from an ongoing struggle of opposites within her. She prefers to think of herself as "neutre" rather than sexually male, and yet Marion feels she has a "masculine" mind trapped in a female body. She has become a successful "homme de lettres" by cultivating intellect, objectivity and discipline, the

same "masculine" qualities extolled by Delarue-Mardrus in her *art poetique*.<sup>(n23)</sup> Marion feels fortunate to have been born "a l'epoque de la confusion des sexes" (p. 48), but instead of integrating her masculine and feminine sides, she maintains two separate identities, rents two separate apartments and cultivates two distinct sets of friends. One set is made up primarily of homosexual men who know her as Mario, a talented writer who works as a "negre"; that is, "he" sells "his" work to better-known authors who claim it as their own. The other set corresponds to Barney's circle of lesbian friends who know her as Miss Hervin.

Marion is a serious writer, but her split identity severely limits where and what she writes. She has divided her world into the separate domains of thinking and feeling which correspond to her masculine and feminine identities. Writing clearly falls into the "masculine" realm of thinking, and she must retire to the stark quarters of her *garconniere* in order to write the plays, poems, and historical treatises for which she gets no recognition. In her more comfortable feminine quarters, writing is strictly avoided. Marion reserves her time there for such "womanly" activities as flower arranging, creating shopping lists and recreative reading: "La pas de vrais livres, pas de papiers entasses, pas de table engageante. Le secretaire fragile du salon n'etait bon que pour ecrire une ou deux lettres" (p. 63). Although Marion is able to earn a comfortable living as a ghost writer, the literature she produces remains anonymous, inauthentic and disconnected from her sterile and solitary life. Marion thinks of herself as "Un passant perdu, . . . anonyme, insexue, sans biographic, sans but" (p. 86), and speculates that if only someone loved her, "je me sentirais indispensable pour un coeur battant, et alors je serais a mes propres yeux un etre precieux" (pp. 65-66).

Laurette Wells provides Marion her opportunity to connect with others when they plot to save Aimee Lagres's reputation and marriage by giving her illegitimate son Pierre to a peasant family to raise. At first Marion finds Aimee's predicament "plus amusant que de fire un roman" (p. 71), and compares it to "une belle piece que je leur ai fait jouer sans l'ecrire" (p. 106). As she becomes emotionally entangled with little Pierre's fate, Marion begins keeping a personal journal as she moves in the direction of connecting her personal emotional life with her writing; the strict division between thinking and feeling seems to be breaking down. When she realizes that the child is being mistreated by his foster mother, Marion can no longer maintain her "objective" literary perspective: "Il ne s'agit plus maintenant, pensa-t-elle, de faire l'intermediare dans le roman equivoque de trots desoevrees, mais bien de la vie d'un malheureux petit humain" (p. 143). Marion is so moved that she decides to adopt the little boy, and thus permanently adopts the identity of woman and mother.

Thanks to her maternal instincts, Marion becomes a fully socialized complete woman, or does she? Given the author's feelings about maternity, this denouement seems absurd. Both she and Natalie Barney were convinced that women would never be free as long as they lived in fear of pregnancy. Besides her aversion to childbirth, Lucie Delarue-Mardrus felt that the roles of mother and poet were incompatible. In the volume of poems Lucie dedicated to the memory of her mother, she writes how she can never be as "douce et bonne" as her mother because " . . . je ne suds qu'un poete / Ma tete / M'empeche, toujours en emoi / D'etre toi."<sup>(n24)</sup> With this attitude in mind, we can see that *L'ange et les pervers* is less about motherhood than about breaking down the division between the domains of thinking and feeling associated with the separate roles of poet and woman.

When Marion feels loved and needed by others, she is able to make considerable progress toward becoming more feeling and relationship-oriented, qualities associated with a female sense of identity, but a closer examination of the ending, and especially what it implies about Marion's writing, suggests that no true integration of her "masculine" and "feminine" identities is possible. So far, Marion has pursued her literary career only in the guise of a man. When she assures Laurette that she earns a good enough living to support a child, it is clear that she intends to continue writing, but Marion's plans for raising her adopted son reveal that instead of successfully integrating the roles of woman (mother) and writer, of breaking down the opposition between feeling and intellect that she has maintained for so long, Marion arranges a transfer. She has inherited the country estate where she has spent her false boyhood, and it is there she imagines raising her little boy: "Installer une enfance heureuse de vrai petit garçon dans ces paysages de mon enfance a mod, queue revanche! . . . J'aurai une nurse anglaise pour mon petit. Les nursery rhymes, c'est de la graine de poesie qui leve pendant tout le reste de la vie" (p. 156). It appears that Marion wants to turn her son into the male writer she thought she was, or perhaps the "masculine" poet that Lucie Delarue-Mardrus considered herself to be. The country estate and English governess, both details from the author's own childhood, reinforce the notion that Pierre, like Marion, is just another version of her self, forever destined to be double. Lucie was very much a tomboy when she was a child, and she describes le petit Pierre as a feminine little boy, "un gentil gars . . . et doux comme une fille," (p. 156). Marriage is still out of the question for Marion who declares herself more than qualified to be a single parent for Pierre because she will be "son pere et sa mere en une seule personne . . . J'ai done raison d'etre deux" (p. 156).

The final scene in *L'ange et les pervers* reinforces this unresolved duality as Marion hugs her son "un peu trop virilement . . . Courbee sur sa proie, Mlle de Valdeclare enseigna, fremissante, en s'efforcant d'adoucir son organe sombre dans la mue eternelle" (p. 158). Marion's "organe," an interesting choice for what is presumably her masculine head, is still opposed to her feminine heart, and she must temporarily subdue it to become a loving mother. Mue also suggests that the change may only be temporary. From the Latin *mutare*: to change, *mue* denotes transformation as well as molting, the periodic loss and regrowth of feathers or skin. Far from being transformed into a selfless and nurturing model mother, Marion is "courbee sur sa proie" like a hungry bird of prey. Although she has donned feminine apparel and taken on a traditionally feminine role, we can still recognize Marion not as a woman, but as an angel who is destined to grow back her wings. She has fallen to earth, but her double nature prevents her from becoming as comfortable with her feminine identity as her role model Laurette/Natalie.

The persistence of the angel figure in Lucie Delarue-Mardrus's poetry suggests that it may function as a "negative" or even sadistic muse, helping the poet produce art by repressing the feminine side of her double nature. In "Pour les autres," for example, the poet simultaneously needs and spurns the angel:

Ma Muse m'a prete son envergure d'ange  
Et je sens frissonner mes epaules de femme  
Pour des envols si hauts qu'ils emportent mon ame  
A jamais loin du monde ou clame la louange. (*Occident*, p. 117)

The angel's flight is more frustrating than pleasurable, and the poet blames her Angel-muse for placing in her "la plainte inassouvie" of a lover who looks for "plus que l'amant humain et que la

vie." She describes herself as "une qui hait la terre" and who weeps, "les bras tordus par le douse eternal" (p. 118). In another poem, her Muse is transformed into a "Grand ange des ailes qui rode dans la vie." Earth-bound, this angel is also "inassouvi" because it yearns to escape the burden of "Mon impuissante chair humaine." But the angel persona is equally burdensome for the poet who asks herself "Comment te laisser en arriere / . . . / Comment t'assassiner, monstrueuse chimere / Puisque tu m'empeches de vivre?" (Occident, p. 137).

Yet another poem, from a later collection, reveals Lucie Delarue-Mardrus's continued problematic identification with the angel. "La Rencontre d'automne" (Souffles et tempete, 1918), describes an encounter between the mature woman poet and her former virginal self whom she recognizes "A l'envergure de ses ailes." (n25) Her younger sister has flown from this world "Car le monde est bassesse et [l'amour pauvrete]" to find a solitary happiness "sans humains" (p. 6). She scolds her older more complaisant sister ("Je suds vierge et tu n'es que femme"), and compares her own virginal intensity to the grown woman poet's uninspired calm. Delarue-Mardrus continues to imagine herself as double, and expresses nostalgic yearning for a side of herself that she has never really given up.

Like the fallen angel Marion, Lucie Delarue-Mardrus's ambivalent poetic identity left her hovering in a no-man's land between heaven and earth, between the extremes represented by the angel/virgin and the pervert. The opposing roles of woman and poet divided her within herself. Natalie Clifford Barney had helped orchestrate the angel's fall, and although she continued to offer her friend emotional support and a positive example, she only succeeded in having Lucie temporarily "join sensuality with poetry." Barney paid tribute to that short-lived joining of poetry and sensuality by publishing the love poems Lucie had written to her. She waited until several years after the poet's death, and then, in 1951, she had them printed without the author's name under the title *Nos secretes amours*. That same year she also financed the publication of yet another collection by Delarue-Mardrus, *Choix de poemes*, which opens with a short poem titled "Estuaire." Lucie Delarue-Mardrus's hometown of Honfleur in Normandy is situated on the estuary where the sweet waters of the Seine mingle with the salty sea, a source of inspiration for the poet, and a symbol of her inner conflict. It was "here, she writes, "que j'ai senti naitre et grandir cet ange / Qui, jusques a ma mort, tourmentera mes os." The torment she describes in "Estuaire" is an integral part of her complex identity: "Quelque chose, en mon ame a tout jamais perplexe, / A find d'etre fleuve et n'est pas encore men" (n26) It is likely that Natalie Barney personally selected and organized the poems for *Choix de poemes* in which "Estuaire" appears. Her decision to place this poem first reveals how well she understood her friend's dilemma because the image of the poet as neither river nor sea (mar/mere) captures the ambivalence at the core of Lucie Delarue-Mardrus's poetic identity, and sums up the complex "histoire" of a woman poet that she tells in her poems.

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A version of this essay was presented at the Eighteenth Annual Twentieth-Century Literature Conference at the University of Louisville in February, 1990. Special thanks to Cynthia Running-Johnson and Christopher Bennett for their helpful suggestions.

(n1.) Lucie Delarue-Mardrus, *Mes Memoires* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938), p. 93.

(n2.) Myriam Harry, *Mon amie Lucie Delarue-Mardrus* (Paris: Ariane, 1946), p. 185.

(n3.) The separation of the poet from the speaker of the poem is essential to the definition of poetic persona. However, as Marilyn Farwell, among others, has argued, underlying this concept is an emphasis on distance as the core of art and poetic structure "that reflects and values the objectivity cultivated by the male role" (p. 147). She bases her discussion of male and female poetic voices on the same distinctions used in object-relation theories developed by psychologists such as Carol Gilligan. The male tendency, according to Farwell, is "to separate himself from reality and people and to objectify them," whereas the woman's tendency is to speak from personal experience, and to "develop relationship, communication, and identification as poetic devices" (pp. 143, 150). See her "Feminist Criticism and the Concept of Poetic Persona," *Bucknell Review: Women, Literature and Criticism* 24 (Spring 1978): 139-56. A detailed application of this theory to Lucie Delarue-Mardrus's poetic personae is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is easy to see how her angle/pervert dichotomy corresponds to the distinction Farwell makes.

(n4.) Suzanne Juhasz first used the term "double-bind" (coined by Geoffrey Bateson in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 1972) to refer to the conflict women poets feel in a society that defines the roles of woman and poet as mutually exclusive. See her introduction to *Naked and Fiery Forms, Modern American Poetry by Women: A New Tradition* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1976).

(n5.) In Margaret Homans's influential study *Women Writers and Poetic Identity* (Princeton University Press, 1980), she argues that the special situation of the woman poet requires a theory of its own. According to Homans, "this critical blindness to women writers and to the difference between poetry and prose, demonstrates that the same conditions that originally restricted most women writers to the novel skill obtain" (p. 7). Domna Stanton points out in her introduction to *The Defiant Muse: French Feminist Poems from the Middle Ages to the Present* (New York: Feminist Press, 1986) that although the critical agenda for the 1980s proposed by Homans and others "features the specificity of women's poetic practices," the women poets getting all the attention are nineteenth- and twentieth-century British and American women poets (p. xvi). Two of the French women poets whose poems have been discussed in the genre-gender debate are Louise Labé and Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, neither of whom is included in Stanton's anthology. See for example, Ann Rosalind Jones, "Surprising Fame: Renaissance Gender Ideologies and Women's Lyric" in *Poetics of Gender*, ed. Nancy K. Miller (Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 74-95, and her "Assimilation with a Difference: Renaissance Women Poets and Literary Influence," *Yale French Studies* 62 (1981): 135-53; Michael Danahy, "Marceline Desbordes-Valmore and the Engendered Canon," *Yale French Studies* 75 (1988): 129-47.

(n6.) Most of Lucie Delarue-Mardrus's novels deal with the lives of simple Norman folks, and they appealed to a wide readership. Her most popular novel, *L'Ex-Voto* (1922), was made into a movie. The Académie Française recognized Delarue-Mardrus's literary accomplishments by attempting to award her its annual prize for poetry in 1939, an honor which she refused. She detested awards and also refused the Légion d'honneur three times! However, Delarue-Mardrus was proud to accept the Prix Renée Vivien which an all-woman jury awarded only to women writers.

(n7.) Three of Delarue-Mardrus's woman-centered poems, including a love poem to Natalie Barney and an antimaternity poem are included in the bilingual anthology *The Defiant Muse*, pp. 165-69 (see note 5). Jennifer Waelti-Walters discusses several of Delarue-Mardrus's novels in her *Feminist Novelists of the Belle Epoque* (University of Indiana Press, 1990). Delarue-Mardrus wrote numerous love poems to Barney between 1902-03, but never intended them to be published. Five years after Lucie's death, Barney had 24 of these poems privately printed without the author's name under the title *Nos secretes amours* (Paris: Les Isles, 1951). Barney borrowed the title, which comes from a line in the first poem of the collection, for her own autobiography which was never published. The manuscript of the autobiography as well as the letters Lucie wrote to Natalie between 1903 and 1942 are part of the Barney legacy housed at the Bibliotheque Jacques Doucet in Paris. Readers interested in this extensive collection should consult the catalogue prepared by Francois Chapon, Nicole Prevot and Richard Sieburth, *Autour de Natalie Clifford Barney* (Universite de Paris, Bibliotheque Litteraire Jacques Doucet, 1976).

(n8.) In *La chaine des dames* (Paris: Cres, 1924), Gabrielle Reval offers us a glimpse of these photos. She describes meeting Lucie Delarue-Mardrus: "chez elle, environnee de ses photographies, en sirene avec des poissons d'or et d'argent qui scintillent autour d'elle, en figure de proue, immobile a la barre du bateau qui l'emporte; en musulmane, traversant le desert sur le dos du mehari; en jeune garçon botte et chapeaute qui a le charme ambigu de chevalier . . .; en cowboy, sur le cheval que l'intrepide nomme par amitie Coeur Volant." Note the contrast between Lucie as "sirene" (femme fatale) and the androgynous figure on horseback. These images, similar to the bejeweled cyclist wedding photo, play up the poet's "ambiguous charm." Lucie was not a cross-dresser, but because she was physically very active, she sometimes dressed as a man for practical reasons, not dramatic effects.

(n9.) Some of the women mentioned in Lucie Delarue-Mardrus's memoirs who inspired her youthful love poems are the actress Sarah Bernhardt, a friend of the family named Imperia, and a nun who was one of her teachers.

(n10.) *Les Sept Douleurs d'octobre* (Paris: J. Ferenczi et fils, 1930), pp. 155-56. Note that this collection appeared the same year as *L'Ange et les pervers* (see note 20).

(n11.) Paul Leroy, *Colette et Lucie Delarue-Mardrus: Femmes d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Editions Maugard, 1936), p. 169.

(n12.) *Occident* (Paris: Fasquelle, 1904).

(n13.) Many of the anecdotes circulating around Paris during the period of their marriage support my suggestion that Mardrus acted as a buffer for his wife. Natalie Barney, for example, tells of Mardrus's proposal that she bear a child for them since Lucie's career kept her too busy to raise a family: "Que je portasse son enfant a la place de sa femme, a qui son oeuvre litteraire n'en laissait pas le temps, lui semblait la chose la plus naturelle du monde. Mais ma nature encore une fois s'opposa et, malgre mon oisivete et l'honneur qu'il me faisait, je dus refuser" *Aventures de l'esprit* (Paris, 1929; rpt. Paris: Persona, 1982), p. 99. Both Barney and Renee Vivien wrote poems protesting Lucie's marriage. Barney's "A une fiancee" appeared in her *Quelques Portraits-sonnets de femmes* (Paris: Societe d'Editions litteraires, 1900), p. 47, and Vivien published "Je

pleure sur toi . . ." in *A L'heure des mains jointes* (1906, rpt. in *Poemes de Renee Vivien*, New York: Arno Press, 1975). In this poem addressed to the young bride, Vivien echoes Lucie's fear of losing her independence along with her virginity:

"Abdique ton royaume et sods la faible epouse . . . /N'ecoute plus la voix de la mer, . . . / Car le soir et la mer te parleraient encor / De ta virginite glorieuse et perdue" (p. 80). The Mardrus couple also appears in Vivien's autobiographical novel about her love affair with Barney, *Une Femme m'apparut* (Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1904).

(n14.) *La Figure de la prove* (Paris: Fasquelle, 1908), p. 27.

(n15.) Charles Maurras, "Le Romantisme feminin" in *L'Avenir de [l']intelligence* (1903; Paris: Flammarion, 1927), pp. 115-234. For a feminist critique of Maurras's essay and especially the connection between nationalism and his interpretation of fin-de-siecle women poets, see Elaine Marks "'Sapho 1900': Imaginary Renee Vivien's and the Rear of the Belle Epoque," *Yale French Studies* 75 (1988): 175-89.

(n16.) *Horizons* (Paris: Fasquelle, 1904), pp. 176-77.

(n17.) Paul Flat was among those critics who also perceived women writers as a threat to society. In *Nos femmes de lettres* (Paris: Perrin et Cie, 1909) he writes: "La femme litteraire est un monstre parce qu'elle est anti-naturelle" (p. 218). Jean Larnac comes to the same conclusion in *L'Histoire de la litterature feminine en France* (Paris: Kra, 1929). During the birth scene in her novel *Marie fille-mere*, Delarue-Mardrus puts similar words into the mouth of the attending physician: "La femme qui n'enfante pas n'est qu'un bel ecrin vice; elle est une maniere de monstre" (p. 157). For a discussion of this novel, see Jennifer Waelti-Walters, note 7.

(n18.) *Par vents et marees* (Paris: Fasquelle, 1910), pp. 77-79.

(n19.) Jean Heritier, "Le Lyrisme feminin," *Essais de critique contemporaine* (Paris: Sansot, 1923), p. 206.

(n20.) *L'Ange et les pervers* (Paris: J. Ferenczi et Fils, 1930). All quotations are from the 1934 edition of *L'Ange* illustrated by Emilien Dufour and published by Ferenczi as part of "Le Livre Moderne Illustre" series.

(n21.) "Nos secretes amours ou l'amant feminin (memoirs)," Ms. Natalie Clifford Barney Collection (Bibliotheque Jacques Doucet, Paris), p. 293.

(n22.) *L'Ange et les pervers* is only one of many works of fiction in which Natalie Barney is a main character. Renee Vivien portrayed her as Vally and Lorely in *Une femme m'apparut* (1904, 1905); she was the model for Valery Seymore in Radclyffe Hall's *Well of Loneliness* (1928); Djuna Barnes calls her Dame Evangaline Musset in *Ladies Almanack* (1929); and she is Florence Temple-Bradford or "Flossie" in Liane de Pougy's *Idylle saphique* (1901). Barney's almost mythic presence in the works of early twentieth-century fiction by expatriot and French women suggests the extent of her influence on the Parisian literary scene, not only as a salon

hostess, but also as a positive female role model. Shari Benstock situates Barney in the context of Paris-Lesbos in *Women of the Left Bank: Paris 1900-1940* (University of Texas Press, 1986).

(n23.) See Woolf's essay "Professions for Women" in *Virginia Woolf: Women and Writing*, ed. and intro. Michele Barrett (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, 1979), pp. 57-63. For a related discussion of the angel figure, see Nina Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon. The Life of a Victorian Myth* (Harvard University Press, 1982), esp. pp. 64-88.

(n24.) *A Maman* (Paris: Fasquelle, 1920), pp. 75-76. Delarue-Mardrus's novel, *Marie, fille-mère* (Paris: Fasquelle, 1906) is a graphic account of a woman victimized by her maternal role as well as by her sensuality. Waelti-Walters includes this and several other of Delarue-Mardrus's novels in her discussion of motherhood at the turn of the century (see note 7). Her reading of *L'Ange et les pervers* differs greatly from mine in that she sees Marion as representing the working mother: "The modern working woman before 1914 may be regarded as unnatural by the people around her, but working does not make her unfit for her natural and traditional role which, indeed, she fulfills better than do 'normal' 'feminine' women" (p. 28). My major objection to Waelti-Walters's interpretation is that she does not take into consideration the problematic nature of Marion's work-she is an author-and thus misses the subtle ending which I feel shows Marion to be ill-suited for the role of mother.

(n25.) *Souffles et tempêtes* (Paris: Fasquelle, 1918), pp. 4-7.

(n26.) *Choix de poèmes* (Paris: A. Lemerre, 1951). "Estuaire" was originally published in *Souffles et tempêtes*, p. 94.