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## MAR: Mars, *Mare*, and *Mater* in Raymond Radiguet's *Le Diable au corps*

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*Cet enfant s'appelait Messenger; je ne l'avais pas élu d'après son nom, mais, quand même, ce nom m'avait inspiré confiance.*

Narrateur, *Le Diable au corps*

A close textual reading of Radiguet's *Le Diable au corps* reveals a vast number of occurrences of the suite of letters MAR, far too vast to be coincidental or insignificant. As Richard Griffiths points out in his Introduction to his edition of *Diable*, "[in] this precise, concise novel nothing is there without a purpose" (xx); "[no] detail is superfluous" (xxiv). Clearly and appropriately, the most significant MAR is the one which forms part of Marthe's name; she bears within herself the themes of war and motherhood, death and life, and her womb functions as a great fecund sea. Mars, Marthe, and the Marne form a triad around which the entire novel is constructed, and the repetition of MAR is a constant reminder of the fact that the Narrator's story (i.e., the novel itself) exists because of the interplay among these three entities. *Diable* is built on the foundation of these three letters.

Erich Neumann's observation that "for woman there is an essential connection between childbearing and death" (232) has particular relevance in *Diable*. Some instances of the frequency of the appearance of MAR may be explained by the geographical location in which Radiguet chose to situate his novel: "E..., au bord de la Marne" (3) although one could argue that this was also one choice among many.<sup>1</sup> There was a good reason for choosing this locale, as the very word "Marne" evokes World War I; and the war—Mars—functions in *Diable* as a device to remove the husband from the scene and make way for the love affair between the narrator, henceforth referred to as N., and the adulterous Marthe.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, N.'s conquest of his mistress is almost always described in bellicose terms. The god Mars makes his presence felt not only in the larger context of the Great War but also in the relationship which exists between N. and his parents, whose disapproval of the *camaraderie mixte* at

his school renders this aspect of his life as *écolier* all the more exciting. As N.'s narration continues he comes to a realization of the War as *personnage*: "Je devais à la guerre mon bonheur naissant; j'en attendais l'apothéose. J'espérais qu'elle servirait ma haine [by killing Marthe's husband] comme un anonyme commet le crime à notre place" (65). In this respect, N.'s siblings, N. and Radiguet himself exemplify those French citizens described by Mary Jean Green in her essay "Visions of Death and Dissolution": "the dominant trend of the 1920s, in literature as in politics, was to deny the changes wrought by the war and to seek distraction in material pleasure or exotic adventure" (Hollier 852). The war is viewed throughout the novel as a disturbance of pleasurable routine or as a facilitator of adultery.

However, most instances of MAR may not be ascribed to geography or to the historical moment of the novel; it is precisely this aspect of MAR, in all its significations, which makes its frequent appearance so striking. For example, *mars* is the month of N.'s birth (35), and Marthe's baby, although born in January, was due in *mars* (97). N., having arranged to present Marthe with a copy of *Le Mot* and *Une Saison en enfer* on the Thursday following their meeting, determines to accomplish his mission on *mardi* instead. The following quotation combines this *mardi* with the element of force: "Dans cette impatience, Marthe verrait la preuve de mon amour. . . et si elle refuse de la voir, je saurais bien l'y *contraindre*" (19; italic mine). A month later, N. tells us: "Marthe m'ayant appris qu'elle déjeunait chez ses beaux-parents, je décidais de la *résoudre* à rester avec moi" (20; italic mine). Early in the story, an episode, a *fait divers* essentially which has no bearing on the plot and could have been eliminated, is related. Neighbors of N.'s family, the Maréchauds, had a maid who, in a *crise de folie*, had gone up on the roof and refused to descend. This occurred on the eve of the *Quatorze juillet*, a moment when Monsieur Maréchaud, a city councilman, had his house decked out for the fête. A crowd gathered to watch the maid prowl about the pitched roof as if it were a "pont de navire" (9). When firemen attempt a rescue the maid, "s'armant de tuiles," threw them at her would-be rescuers (9-10). Finally, "elle se jeta du toit, brisa la marquise dans sa chute, avec un fracas épouvantable, pour venir s'aplatir sur les marches de pierre" (11). N.'s father's immediate response is to take his son to the banks of the Marne, while *le père Maréchaud* contemplates his *marquise* and his *marches* all covered in blood. In addition to the frequent usage of MAR in this scene, the reader is struck by the juxtaposition of "le père" and "Maréchaud," which could be construed as the *père/mère est chaud*. Furthermore the sound produced by the name "Maréchaud" suggests the tide/sea and warmth. N.'s response is a comment on "la poésie des choses" (11), thus linking all of the above references involving MAR with creative activity. What

at first seems gratuitous and unessential in its externals proves to be tightly woven into the fabric of *Diable's* subtextual foundation.

Later in the novel N. relates an attempt by a town father, Monsieur Marin, to interfere in his affair with Marthe, an attempt which N. turns into a frustrating joke on the Marin couple, whose presence is felt and commented on throughout the story. In addition to the obvious significance of the name "Marin" in the context of this study, there is also an emphasis in this episode on milk and motherhood. The Marins, promising a splendid surprise for their guests, have invited "une quinzaine de notables... avec leurs femmes, chacune fondatrice d'une société d'allaitement maternel" or of some other public aid association (56). Madame Marin had previously gone to the mayor to request eight liters of milk and authorization to make cream. The promised surprise is audible evidence of the affair between N. and Marthe, whose noisy carryings-on had attracted the indignant attention of the Marins, who live below Marthe's lodgings. They had planned to plant their guests, including *le maire*, beneath Marthe's window at the opportune hour. Thanks to an indiscreet comrade, N. knows of this, and he and Marthe keep totally silent. N. and Marthe wage war against the Marins.

Water (*mare* or *mer*) as symbolic leitmotif and maternity (*mater* or *mère*) as theme are of primordial importance in *Diable*, and the two are tightly joined in the human archetypal vocabulary. "The ocean is experienced archetypally not only as a mother but also as the devouring primeval water who takes her children back into herself" (Neumann 257). Neumann further points out the practice of giving ships feminine names, thus stressing "the saving function of womanhood" (257). It is noteworthy that the instinct of aggression has its counterpart in the maternal instinct, and the "urge toward renewal and change manifests itself in the symbol of the divine child" (von Franz 244). Marthe's child is not divine, but the identity of his father is in question; the father *may* be the creator of the literary universe (i.e., N.) into which the child is born.<sup>3</sup> Marthe functions as "mother" of N. *qua* N., bringing him forth out of himself as progenitor of both the child and the novel (Neumann 62). She exists to become Mother as indicated by her two names: from Marthe Grangier (Marthe the barn or holder of grain), she becomes Marthe Lacombe (Marthe the ravine), the "womb of the earth" (Neumann 189).

The Marne makes its appearance at the beginning of the story along with N.'s *camarades* and the aforementioned *camaraderie mixte* condemned by his parents (3). As N.'s affair with Marthe increases in depth and complexity, the linking of Marthe and the Marne becomes more intense: "Pour me rendre jusque chez Marthe, je suivis la Marne" (37). The linking of Marthe, river and war is apropos: Nike, victory in battle, is a daughter of the river Styx. A great concentration of instances

of MAR—or the letters in reverse RAM—is found in N.’s description of his and Marthe’s idyllic sorties near and on the river: “nous nous promenions... le long de la Marne.... Marthe ramait... un coup de rame me cognant, me rappelait que cette promenade ne durerait pas toute la vie.... je me précipitais sur elle... pour qu’elle lâchat ses rames.... nous amarrions le canot.... J’aimais tant cette rive gauche de la Marne.... La rive droite est... consacrée aux maraîchers” (58-59). In a crisis of despair Marthe threatens N.: “Elle irait au bord de la Marne. Elle prendrait froid, puis mourrait” (88). Near the Marne N. learns that Marthe is deathly ill (96).

After the Marne is established as an essential element in *Diable*, we read of N.’s first love, a girl named Carmen, whose name contains an anagram of MAR (3). He writes her a letter whose delivery is entrusted to a boy named “Messenger” (4; see epigraph); the god Mars is thus joined early in the novel by Hermes/Mercury, who will play a substantial subliminal archetypal role in *Diable*. “Hermès” contains an anagram of *mer* and *mere*, phonetically identical, as does “Mercure.” We are accustomed to thinking of Hermes as the wearer of winged sandals, the messenger of the gods; but his attributes are much more complex and varied. According to Chevalier and Gheerbrant, he is also the god of intellectual perversion and malice, the patron of thieves and swindlers (3.19). He invented the lyre for his brother Apollo, then the flute, and is sometimes designated by a word from which *évangile* is derived, functioning as the go-between for heaven and the infernal regions (3.20). Caroline Stevens describes Hermes/Mercury as the “god of thieves and cheats,” but also the “guide of souls and the messenger of the gods, bringing us closer to their wisdom and power, closer to the Self.... Hermes/Mercurius is called by Jung the ‘*spiritus vegetativus*,’ pervading nature with a power both life-giving and destructive” (Stein, *Psyche* 2.19). In this respect, it is important to recall that narrating N. regards narrated N. with both distaste and a certain conceited admiration, that he is a cheat but also an artist, that he is both life-giving and destructive. He creates a literary masterpiece from the débris of what he has destroyed.

N.’s seduction of Marthe is intellectual exercise, erotic conquest and theft; he “steals” Marthe from her fiancé but also from his father, who introduces N. and Marthe. In fact Marthe’s counterpart in Radiguet’s life was his father’s mistress. The circumstances of N.’s and Marthe’s meeting are worth reviewing. N.’s father went on various outings with his sons, and it was during the course of one of these that they went to La Varenne to meet the Grangiers. N. had first become aware of the name when Marthe’s father had arranged for some of her paintings to be part of a charity exposition for a society of which N.’s mother was president.<sup>4</sup> It is unclear whether the meeting with the Grangiers has as its *raison d’être* an encounter with the parents or with Marthe. As Griffiths aptly remarks, it “is left to us to realize

the enormous effect which this man, and his behaviour, have had upon his son” (xxiv). Murray Stein relates the archetype Hermes to kleptomania, specifically theft from one akin to the thief, as Hermes stole from his brother Apollo (*In MidLife* 80). Eventually N. will believe there is a “guerre déclarée” between himself and his father (88). It is again left to the reader to discern if this “war” involves protection of N.’s “virtue” and the family’s reputation, or the father’s mid-life period and its attendant turmoil, including envy of his son’s youthful seductiveness and virile potency. Germaine Brée addresses the “generation gap” as one of the aftereffects of the war, “expressed by Raymond Radiguet... in his own peculiar way through his hero and alter ego” in *Diable* (37). In the end the armistice will break the hold of Mars, bring Jacques home, and deliver N. from the *mal de mer* his affair with Marthe has come to resemble for him.

Marthe’s maternity is arguably the defining event of *Diable*, but the most important relationship in the novel is between N. and his father. Griffiths mentions “the enormous effect which [N.’s father], and his behaviour, have had upon his son” (xxiv) in the context of narration by the author as opposed to narration by the narrator. I would argue that the opposite is also true: the father is engrossed in N.’s affair with Marthe. And this father/son relationship, both complicated and primordial, is outlined at the outset: the director of N.’s school, having intercepted the note destined for Carmen, calls him “Don Juan” as N. begs him to reveal none of his indiscretion to his parents. However, N. quickly begins to *want* his father to know: “je brûlais de lui raconter tout.... Sachant que mon père ne se fâcherait pas, j’étais, somme tout, ravi qu’il connût ma prouesse” (5). The œdipal contest has begun but it will have the added element of the father’s implicit or passive complicity. In fact, we may guess that this fictional father is depicted through the uncomprehending eyes of an adolescent son in a state commonly called mid-life change or even crisis. It is in mid-life turmoil that Murray Stein sees Hermes at work: “His myth speaks of the soul’s awakening and emergence” (Stein, *In MidLife* 4). N.’s father’s state of mind and emotions, his “soul’s awakening and emergence,” is a substratum for N.’s amorous adventures. William Veeder points out that Freud and recent psychoanalysts make a distinction between “the Œdipus as a fantasy projected by the son upon the innocent father and the Œdipus as a son’s correct perception about the father” (141). I believe that N.’s “perception” of his father’s involvement in his affair with Marthe is on the subconscious level, although the situation is muddled because of the two versions of N. in the novel, narrated and narrating. The father of N. is neither inactive nor without great influence on his son, as Nadia Odouard would have it (158). Quite the contrary is true, although the father’s influence is passive. The situation with N.’s father is complicated by

the fact that neither narrated N.—the story ends while he is still in his teens—nor Radiguet himself passed through adolescence to adulthood. C.G. Jung notes that “mythologizing” of parents is a common practice of children and often continues far into adulthood. It is given up at times with the greatest difficulty (Jung 117). So the reader’s perception of the father is filtered through N.’s mythologizing, which may have matched Radiguet’s own.

N.’s father’s ambivalence about, and narcissistic complicity in, his son’s adulterous liaison is worth looking at through Alfred Collins’ description of the father/son relationship:

Fathers and sons in the world of patrilineal imagination might be said both to share and to dispute a common self, one which is passed down the generations like an English family seat.... Like the house, a man’s self from this perspective is only partly his own; like the house, it will fall into ruin unless a son succeeds to its benefits and obligations. The psychic and interpersonal turmoil for fathers and sons in such a world... can be intense. The son may feel compelled to live a self not his own as his life drains into the decrepit veins of an old father. The father sees himself slowly losing what is most his own, as the son takes over his place and his vitality. Each may revolt against the mythologem of the patrilineal self, the son by rejecting the father and his self, the father by attempting to claim that self as his sole property or freehold and to treat the son as only an organ of himself, to be disposed of as needed to preserve and enhance himself. (Stein, *Psyche* 123)

This primordial element of revolt may explain why N.’s and Marthe’s affair begins as an intellectual exercise involving N.’s dominance of the female and why N.’s father is both fascinated and repelled by it. N. becomes a father as his father conquers Marthe—*mer* and *mère*—and retrieves his own potent virility through his son. Each male wishes to share in the self of the other.

N.’s first glimpse of Marthe finds her on the *marchepied* of the train bringing her to her family (30). “Sur la route, Marthe et moi marchions en tête. Mon père marchait derrière, entre les Grangier” (31). The eventually-fecund couple is already forming whereas the father remains in the background between two people who will function as obstacles to the union of N. and Marthe. Although N. tells us that he complimented Marthe on her water colors, his first quoted words are: “Vous ressemblez peu à madame votre mère” (31). N. is both happy and relieved for he finds Madame Grangier repellent. Marthe insists that she resembles her mother when the latter was younger. He tells the reader, “je priai Dieu de ne point voir Marthe quand elle aurait l’âge de sa mère” (31). The comment is extraordinary in light of the fact that N. knows at the moment of narration how the story will end—with Marthe’s death at a very young age and after giving birth to N.’s son—and yet does not hesitate to reveal this unattractive side of his person. He admits that,

once pregnant, Marthe is, alas, no longer his mistress but *une mère* (66). He wants to “profiter de Marthe avant que l’abimât sa maternité” (77). After Marthe’s belly begins to swell, N. feels like a vandal, having destroyed “la grâce de Marthe”; referring back to Marthe’s request that he mark her as his own, he asks, “Ne l’avais-je marquée de la pire façon?” (82).

At this point I would like to elaborate on my suggestion above that N.’s father is in his mid-life period and is living vicariously his son’s adventure. As mentioned above, N.’s father arranges his encounter with Marthe and in effect sets their affair in motion. All of this fits in neatly with Murray Stein’s description of mid-life and also with the theme of death that pervades *Diabole*. In reading the following citation from *In MidLife*, recall Marthe’s death, the death presence caused by Mars and the birth of N.’s father’s grandson:

It could be said with at least metaphorical truth that death itself actually occurs at midlife, as a person’s identity and conscious attitudes go through profound internal transformations and become reorganized around a new core of psychological contents and meanings. At deeper and more unconscious levels, the archetypal dominants underlying the pattern of conscious self-organization and identity are changing: an old person is passing away. And until the pit of death is entered, the process of internal transformation cannot move to its conclusion, for at midlife, too, a new person is being born. (108)

The father’s metaphorical death results in the birth of a child, his grandson.

N.’s father’s narcissism is replicated by N.’s own fascination with himself, as N. seems to realize. In *Diabole* just after revealing that strangers often took him and Marthe for siblings, N. states, “Sans doute, sommes-nous tous des Narcisse, aimant et détestant leur image, mais à qui toute autre est indifférente. C’est cet instinct de ressemblance qui nous mène dans la vie, nous criant ‘halte!’ devant un paysage, une femme, un poème” (64). In T.J. Kapacinskas and Judith A. Robert’s interpretation of “Rapunzel,” we read: “Narcissistic enchantment prepares one to fall in love. Through desire, part of one’s self ‘falls’ for the other and it is as if one is carried away as Kore by Hades, or Rapunzel by the prince. First we imagine, then see ourselves in others, projecting the soul outward, and then, through the process of reflection, we reclaim ourselves” (Stein, *Psyche* 2.72-73). D.H. Lawrence’s practice of fathoming his anima, the feminine component of the psyche of every man, through writing about female characters mirrors both Radiguet’s and N.’s activity. Radiguet wrote a novel whose protagonist/narrator writes an account of his encounter with, and intellectual/erotic conquest of, a woman. In doing so Radiguet/N. begins to plumb the depths of his own psyche, an activity which, for a man, involves serious work with the anima. The fictional N. goes on forever as do all characters in books, but

Radiguet dies long before his individuation process, barely begun, can come into serious bloom. Radiguet's issues with his mother surely figured in N.'s relationships with the women in *Diable*: his own mother, Marthe, her mother, Jacques' mother. All these women must be more or less deceived and manipulated so that N. may achieve his quest: fatherhood in a completely male universe. "Ne venais-je pas d'apprendre que Marthe était morte en m'appelant, et que mon fils aurait une existence raisonnable?" (102).

In his study of Arthur Rimbaud, who was deserted by his father soon after his birth, Wallace Fowlie notes that "the search for a father... is the discovery of himself as a spiritual being. Paternity is a mystical state, whereas maternity is essentially a physical state.... Hamlet, Stephen [Dedalus], and Rimbaud are three androgynous angels because each one is looking for a father (who doesn't exist) and because each one, having the temperament of an artist, is for himself his own wife.... It is impossible for these young heroes to play the rôle of seducer or lover" (15). N. has a father; he is not searching for him. But he is seeking the mystical state of fatherhood, which is a metaphor for his state as artist. The child narrated N. produces with Marthe, whose birth is followed by Marthe's death, is a symbol of the narrated work, from which Marthe also disappears in death. The result towards which N.'s adventure leads is a universe filled with males, fathers all—even Jacques, because he *believes* he is, may in fact be, and functions as, the father of the son born to Marthe—and to the creation of the narrative of this process. N. has achieved mystical fatherhood, both as wifeless, childless father—childless insofar as Jacques is the officially recognized father of the child that *may* be N.'s—and as artist.

It is important to recall that N. is both a character in the novel and the adult narrator whose voice the reader hears throughout the telling of the tale.<sup>5</sup> It is at times difficult to discern N.'s attitude towards his own adolescent self. Germaine Brée aptly describes the period in which *Diable* was written as a moment when "people were putting private joys and sorrows ahead of everything else. The era was characterized by a vague romanticism that thrived on people's absorption in themselves and indifference to others" (37). This is a particularly appropriate description of N. At times he seems to condemn, at others, to forgive, or plead the cause of, his younger narrated persona.<sup>6</sup> In this N.'s vacillation mirrors that of his father: "[Mon père] me laissait agir à ma guise. Puis, il en avait honte. Il menaçait, plus furieux contre lui que contre moi. Ensuite, la honte de s'être mis en colère le poussait à lâcher les brides" (84). Griffiths accurately points out that N. does not heed his own warnings (xxii). William Veeder has this to say regarding the two authors of every work, one, conscious, the other, unconscious: "[A] literary text is composed of at least *two* voices... both voices express what the artist intends on different levels to

say" (4). The two N.s in the novel replicate, so to speak, the two Radiguets who both wrote *Diable*. Radiguet's insight into the psychology of adolescent love could form the topic of an extensive study, so precocious was he in his development. Narrating N. has the perceptiveness of a man much older than Radiguet was at the time of redaction. One could argue that the emotional complexity of narrated N. is unrealistic, that a teenager could not have had such exquisitely subtle ability to parse the emotions of himself or of others.

As N. who narrates is ambivalent about narrated N., the father is both proud of and troubled by his son's sexual activities. Throughout the novel one reads of N.'s clumsy lies, which he knows his father does not believe but pretends to: "Avec une folle indulgence il fermait les yeux, à la seule condition que ni mes frères ni les domestiques ne l'apprirent" (58). "Je devinais ses faiblesses. J'en profitais" (83). The *faiblesses* in question concern N.'s father's relations with his wife and his sister. Dad is in a soup of uncertainty and self-doubt as far as all the women in his—and in his son's—life are concerned. He cannot admit that they were right in condemning N.'s and Marthe's relations; so he chides N. in private while defending him to his wife and his sister (83). The scene in which Marthe's death is announced to N. is telling in the extraordinary difference between N.'s father's reaction to this event and his mother's:

Un jour... mes frères revinrent de l'école en nous criant que Marthe était morte....

Tandis que je ne ressentais rien, le visage de mon père se décomposait. Il poussait mes frères. "Sortez... vous êtes fous..."...Parce que mon père pleurait, je sanglotais. Alors, ma mère me prit en mains. Les yeux secs, elle me soigna froidement, tendrement, comme s'il se fût agi d'une scarlatine. (100-101)

N. makes no comment about this, just states the facts. The mother's reaction to Marthe, to N.'s relationship with her and to the father's role in the whole affair does not seem to interest N. at all, and the reader is left to wonder what her state of mind and heart may be. However the contrast between the father's copious tears and mother's dry eyes is one of those "non-superfluous" elements in the novel mentioned by Griffiths and cited on my first page. This situation is repeated in the Lacombe ménage; Marthe's mother- and sister-in-law dislike and distrust her. "L'acharnement de son épouse et de sa fille forçait parfois à sortir de table M. Lacombe, brave homme, qui aimait Marthe" (85). When this occurs, mother and daughter exchange glances and cluck disapprovingly about women who "bewitch" men (85).

Water, real and metaphorical, is everywhere in *Diable* including the waves suggested in the image of the roller coaster (*montagne russe*). There is a real one in the

village where N. lives and the term is also used to describe love affairs. N.'s father's ambivalence towards his son's sexual activities is likened to waves: "Ces scènes se déchaînaient et se calmaient vite, comme les vagues" (58). Nadia Odouard recognizes that "[l]'eau chez Radiguet, c'est avant tout la mer, mystère cosmique, source d'évasion et d'inquiétude répondant à toutes les aspirations de l'homme.... la mer reste pour lui une éternelle source d'inspiration. C'est en effet au bord de l'eau que Radiguet... compose presque toute son œuvre" (220). However, in her lengthy list of "images liquides qui ne sont que des dérivées de l'eau primordiale" (222), she does not include, or take notice of, the letter suite MAR, despite her realization that Radiguet's ideas are transmitted by signs, "tantôt idéographiques, tantôt phonétiques" (225). Consider this statement by N.: "Je n'avais pas le pied marin pour la souffrance. Du reste, je ne crois pouvoir comparer mieux qu'au mal de mer ces vertiges du cœur et de l'âme. La vie sans Marthe, c'était une longue traversée.... aux premiers symptômes du mal de mer, on se moque d'atteindre le port et on souhaite mourir sur place" (94). N.'s parents, angered by the school director's complicity with their son's misbehavior, remove him from that school, but keep him home for two years judging him too young to travel to the lycée Henri-IV. He spends his time reading in his father's boat on the Marne, a river he considers his family's possession. This involves both defiance and childish timidity—and an anagram of MAR: "J'allais même dans le bateau de mon père, malgré sa défense; mais je ne ramais pas" (6).

An effect of Mars is the removal of *la mer* from the lives of N. and his siblings, the latter remaining nebulous nameless figures throughout the story. Trips to the seashore are a thing of the past—until the older children discover the possibilities offered by N.'s bicycle, namely, a trip to the sea, "une mer plus loin, plus jolie que d'habitude" (7). Mars first took away the sea, then returned it in the guise of an endless summer for children while young men were dying in the trenches. At one point her doctor will recommend *bains de mer* for the pregnant Marthe, *la mère dans la mer* (70). Tyrannical N. will forbid it because he does not want anyone else to see her body. The fact that *mer* and *mère* are homonyms in French is a gift to poets, as each one names a matrix: the sea, of all living creatures; and the mother, of all humans. Neumann sees the two as identical (257). "Cinderella herself is often called Mara, Maria, or Mariucella, all derived from the root *mare*, which means sea; and the sea, whose distilled essence is the salt of wisdom, is one of the perennial images of the soul" (Stein, *Psyche* 1.58). N. tells us: "je me trouvais... comme jeté à l'eau, en pleine nuit, sans savoir nager" (98). He has, in effect, been transported back to the womb. The child, like the poet, is closer to the ocean of life, of creativity than the adult, and this is underlined by N.'s exclamation: "[Mes frères] eussent brûlé

Paris pour partir plus vite. Ce qui terrifiait l'Europe [Mars] était devenu leur unique espoir" (7). For the children Mars leads to *la mer* and is therefore a positive good.

Another river which figures importantly in *Diable* is the Morbras, which carries "death" and "arm" in its name, and is evoked in association with N.'s meeting Marthe for the first time. The river and its banks are associated with water cress, mint, reputed to have healing properties (Matthews 148) and hawthorn, associated with Christ's crown of thorns and a symbol of caution and hope (Matthews 96). N. uses water symbolism throughout his *récit*. He cannot bring himself to wish *la mort* for Jacques, but realizes that his union with Marthe is *à la merci de la paix*. He muses: "Notre bonheur était un château de sable. Mais ici la marée [n'était] pas à heure fixe" (54). He later alludes once more to their affair as a *château de sable* (64). These words: *mort*, *merci*, *marée* appear in one tightly constructed paragraph devoted to Marthe. And in this context *la marée* is the end of Mars.

In addition to Hermes/Mercury, another mythic figure, Merlin, may be inserted into this discussion. He may be likened to N.'s baby because neither the latter nor Merlin knows for certain who his father is. But he may also be compared with N. because of his "ambiguous relationship to the feminine principle" (von Franz 30). Furthermore Merlin reveals his magical tricks to the devouring, bewitching Morgana beneath a hawthorn bush, thus becoming enthralled by her before his disappearance (von Franz 30). Since hawthorn, a member of the rose family, is specifically mentioned in *Diable*, it is useful to consider von Franz's description of its symbolism:

In ancient Greece it served as a decoration of the bride on her nuptial day; the altars of Hymen, the god of marriage, were lit by torches made of its wood. In the cemetery of the Abbey of Glastonbury was a famous hawthorn tree, which came from a staff that Joseph of Arimathea planted at Christmas.... The crown of thorns of Christ was said to be made of hawthorn.... In almost all European countries the hawthorn served to banish or exorcise witches.... This... seems to suggest that Morgana's spell is not to be understood negatively....

The negative element comes only in the fact that the couple disappears into the beyond, that is, into the unconscious. (31)

For Jung, Merlin's disappearance signifies the inability of most people to "live on close terms with the unconscious" (von Franz 31). In *Diable* Merlin remains; Morgana/Marthe disappears into the beyond.

It is not only hawthorn which evokes the "Merlin" legend. Of all the vegetation mentioned in *Diable*, roses are the most significant and plentiful. Early in the novel N. offers Marthe a bunch of red roses, bought, he specifies, from a *marchande de fleurs* (22). But he refuses to allow her to decorate the bedroom she will share with Jacques according to the latter's wishes: "Lui qui voulait une chambre rose" (23).

Perhaps N. wishes to deny this color to Jacques because N. also loves roses. In his discussions of their (impossible) affair, N. tells Marthe that he wants to live in a place where roses are cultivated; in his youth he had heard of the mysterious *train des roses* and once when he and Marthe took the last train from Paris home he smelled the odor from the *caisses qui embaument* (78). Jung reminds us that “rose plants... are a symbol of the female generative principles of love, youth, and spring. The rose can also represent a union of opposites with the mystical center at the heart.... the rose was a wholeness symbol of the Self, the balance between the conscious and the unconscious” (Stein, *Psyche* 2.83). But nowhere does N. suggest that he wishes permanent or “mystical” union with Marthe, balance, wholeness. Their affair is of a peculiar nature designed, it would seem, to turn N. into a father and then end in a most definitive fashion. Roses and hawthorn may thus be seen as ironic symbols of what poets extol but which N. eschews.

Marthe and N. both revel in disobedience, N., to his parents, especially his father, and Marthe, to her parents and her fiancé Jacques. Marthe’s revolt has Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du mal* at its core, a fact that delights N. The poem in question is “La Mort des amants,” which functions as a *mise en abyme*—Marthe’s death effectively destroys N. as her lover (32). N. concocts an elaborate lie about frequenting the Academy of Design in order to impress Marthe and then lies about his motives as he begs her not to tell his father for fear of being found out. All this activity makes him feel “tyrannique avec elle” (33). In the final scene of N.’s first encounter with Marthe, he is seated with her, her parents and his father at a café where he orders grenadine to drink rather than a genuine apéritif. Grenadine, one should recall, is derived from the pomegranate, an ancient and obvious fertility symbol. N. fears teasing from his father, who obliges but *à mots couverts* so as not to ridicule his son in front of a woman who he perhaps senses, and indeed may even subconsciously desire, will become his son’s mistress (34), another example of N.’s father’s complicity in his son’s eventual paternity.

The complicated and ambiguous involvement of both of N.’s parents in his *amours* is specified in the novel and his comments in this matter are worth quoting at length:

Mon père, d’ailleurs, était inconsciemment complice de mon premier amour. Il l’encourageait plutôt, ravi que ma précocité s’affirmât d’une façon ou d’une autre.... Il était content de me savoir aimé d’une brave fille. Il ne devait se cabrer que le jour où il eut la preuve que Marthe souhaitait le divorce.

Ma mère, elle, ne voyait pas notre liaison d’un aussi bon œil. Elle était jalouse. Elle regardait Marthe avec des yeux de rivale.... Elle reprochait certainement à mon

père de me l'avoir fait connaître, et de fermer les yeux. Mais, estimant que c'était à mon père d'agir, et mon père se taisant, elle gardait le silence. (47)

This citation expresses most clearly the situation of N. vis-à-vis his parents. His father had always feared N.'s falling into the snares of a "mauvaise femme" (47). Apparently an adulteress is fine as long as she does not seek to divorce her husband. N.'s mother is presented as jealous but weak, and irritated with her husband for having introduced N. and Marthe (47). N.'s friends desert him on orders of their parents, who will not tolerate a woman cheating on a husband who is also a soldier (47). The clear implication is that were Jacques a mailman or a bus driver all would be well. N. eventually wishes that his parents were not as *au courant* as he had at first desired (50). At the end of *Diable*, N. realizes that fatherhood has made him a better son and has moved him closer to his parents (100). This is the result towards which all action in the novel has moved.

Even without realizing or wishing it, N.'s father at times arranges his son's complicated life. N. usually goes to Marthe's place in the evening. While she is in Paris, he continues his evening promenades without much enthusiasm, realizing that this is a way of avoiding suspicion. He usually returns home just before the family arises, but during Marthe's absence he falls asleep in his father's boat on the Marne and is not available to fetch the doctor when his mother is taken ill during the night. His absence—for once thoroughly innocent—is now officially known and his father forbids him to leave the house after the evening meal. "[L]orsqu'il m'interdit de sortir après le dîner, je le remerciai à part moi *d'être encore mon complice et de me fournir une excuse* pour ne plus traîner seul dehors" (107; italics mine).

As there are two lovers so are there two sets of parents, each member of which finds his or her opposite in the parent of the same sex of the other couple. This is made clear soon after N. and Marthe begin their active courtship, and again MAR figures prominently in the scene. We learn that N. takes pleasure in biting his mistress' bare flesh, an activity prefigured in the name "Morbras" introduced just before N. meets Marthe for the first time. He wishes to mark her somehow, preferably with his initials, "pour que sa mère la soupçonnât d'avoir un amant" (33). Now it is Marthe's mother N. wishes to involve implicitly through her knowledge of their activity. Marthe agrees: "Oui, mords-moi, marque-moi, je voudrais que tout le monde sache" (33). N. will remember later in his story that Marthe had asked him to "mark" her; recall his aforementioned comment that her pregnancy was an emblem of the worst sort (82). Marthe's mother and N.'s father are the two parents whose acquiescence N. seeks to coerce, even if it is a very passive consent.

The triad Marthe/N./Madame Grangier is also charged with familial psychosexual ambiguity. So involved is Radiguet in Madame Grangier's role in this story,

he forgets his authorial point of view and endows N. with knowledge he could not and should not have, as when he tells his reader that Marthe's mother does not want to lose her to any man and is delighted that her daughter seems so indifferent to Jacques: "tout ce que Marthe ôtait à son mari, Mme Grangier se l'attribuait" (52). When she learns of the affair, she is certain that the child, whom she believes to be Jacques', will put an end to it and refrains from telling her husband "par crainte d'un éclat" (84). "Au fond, Mme Grangier admirait Marthe de tromper son mari, ce qu'elle-même n'avait jamais osé faire" (85). In fact, N. gets in the head of various characters throughout *Diable*.

Alfred Collins' discussion of father/son relationships in Indian folktales is pertinent in this area: "[They] suggest a role for the son as agent in the mid-life *father's* initiation, as well as being the recipient of the male parent's fatherly self-substance" (128). Furthermore Collins suggests why Marthe gives birth to a son and then dies: "fathers and sons—the masculine at adolescence and mid-life—are caught in similar crises of individuation and must sacrifice their childish tendency to regress back to Mother" (138). N. and, complicity, his father have turned N. into a father of yet another son and have removed—definitively—the Mother, Marthe, from the scene. N.'s mother is absent by reason of his failure to give her a face, a name, a persona. N.'s son, who bears his (unspecified) name, will live in a wholly masculine world with Jacques, who believes N.'s son is his. Despite his protests that he was "bien loin de l'orgueil paternel" and that he considered Marthe's pregnancy ridiculous (135), N. eventually becomes irritated that his paternity will remain unknown. His family's assumption that his son is Jacques' galls him. He hopes that his father will make good his threats to send compromising letters to Madame Grangier, then realizes that she would hide them from her husband (130). Apparently N. wishes both his father and Marthe's to know that he has turned the former's son into a father and the latter's daughter into a mother. It is known and recognized paternity per se that becomes *the* quest of this hero. And the quest for paternity provides N. with another creation: the book he has written about it. In this, he is reminiscent of Mary Shelley, who, according to Barbara Johnson, gave "birth to *herself* on paper" (8). As Hermes stole Apollo's cattle and, in exchange, gave him a lyre, the gift of poetry, so N. stole Jacques' wife and gave him a son; and to himself and to us, an exquisite poem. ✱

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> All citations from *Le Diable au corps* are from the Griffiths edition.

<sup>2</sup> In the film of Claude Autant-Lara, the narrator is called François, the name given the hero of Radiguet's *Le Bal du comte d'Orgel*. In the matter of the World War I setting, Richard Griffiths, citing Roland Dargelès, points out that *Diable* was considered by many as an unpatriotic novel "which ignored the heroism of the First World War." The "theme of the young man cuckolding the absent soldier [was] repellent" (viii).

<sup>3</sup> It is important to remember that *all* information in *Diable* comes to us from a narrator whose capacity to delude himself and others, if not lie outright, is limitless. For this reason, the paternity of Marthe's son must forever remain a mystery, a point reinforced by the fact that the novel ends with a question mark.

<sup>4</sup> Leonard Shlain in *The Alphabet versus the Goddess* argues that the written word—alphabetic thinking—militated against images and feminine activities, and produced patriarchal and misogynistic societies. In view of N.'s contempt for Marthe's paintings and his desire to dominate her, described—in writing, of course—in militaristic terms, *Diable* could serve to illustrate Shlain's thesis. It is furthermore noteworthy that N.'s condition and attitudes mirror those of Confucius who "identified the corruption of language as the single most pressing problem bedeviling society" and whom Shlain contrasts with Lao-tzu, proponent of feminine stillness. For Confucius, the most important familial relationship was that between father and son, the second most important, that between an older brother and his younger brothers. After his divorce he chose not to associate with women (191).

<sup>5</sup> Griffiths makes this distinction an integral part of his Introduction. For him there are three fictional characters involved: the hero (narrated N.); the narrator (narrating N.); and the author (referred to by various critics as Authorial Voice or Implied Author) (xiii). My argument does not involve the latter.

<sup>6</sup> I use the term in its Jungian sense: the public person we present to others, having the attributes we believe we *should* have.

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